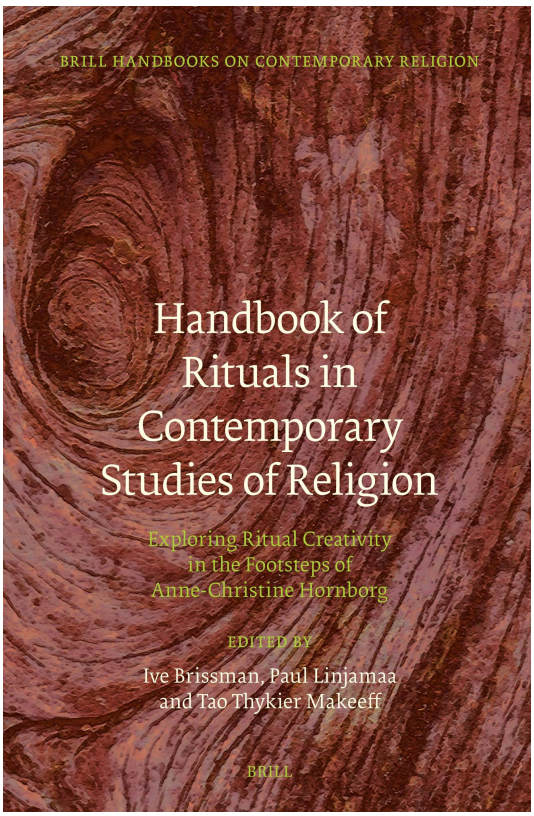
Handbook of Rituals in Contemporary Studies of Religion

Exploring Ritual Creativity in the Footsteps of Anne-christine Hornborg (Brill Handbooks on Contemporary Religion, 22)

Ive Brissman, Paul Linjamaa, and Tao Thykier Makeeff



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Anne-Christine Hornborg – Friend and Colleague

> When I was master of Fogelvik, I was indeed both happy and rich. But when made king of the Swedish land, I was a poor and unhappy man.

This short poem is attributed to the fifteenth century king Karl Knutsson Bonde, who apparently never forgot his happy youth as a seaside farmer and owner of Fågelvik Manor in the beautiful archipelago of Tjust.

It is Anne-Christine Hornborg's great fortune that although she also was a seaside farmer, she was not fated to be drawn away from her beloved farm like her former royal neighbour. Indeed, throughout her life she has enjoyed many memorable times as both a happily married farmer living by the sea in Yxnevik (not far from Fågelvik) and as a committed academic deeply involved in important environmental, educational, and societal issues. The fresh sea breezes and dark fertile soil of her homeland enriched Anne-Christine's life, leading to a lifelong commitment to the environment and a profound interest in indigenous peoples' perceptions of nature.

I first met Anne-Christine Hornborg at Lund University, when she was an undergraduate and I was a doctoral candidate. Years later, after we both had become professors in the religion department, her primary focus was on anthropological perspectives and mine was on philological and historical issues. Anne-Christine was a skilled and popular pedagogue and a highly successful researcher, always open to new ideas and interdisciplinary perspectives. She had the ability to deal with difficult contemporaneous problems and the knowledge to identify their origins and relate them to the broader intellectual concerns of modern culture.

I hold dear an unforgettable memory of a weekend spent with Anne-Christine and her family at their home in Yxnevik. It was a lovely summer's day in July 2014. After a delightful meal, enriched by pleasant meaningful conversation, I sat with Anne-Christine, her husband Alf, and their two children Christoffer and Sara on the wooden deck of their home, overlooking the sea. Sitting there in that moment I realised how the two diverse aspects of Anne-Christine's life had complemented each other to create a meaningful, well-rounded existence.

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Introduction: Ritual Creativity[1]

This book brings together leading international scholars of religion from a variety of disciplines with the aim of casting light on the topic of ritual studies within contemporary studies of religion. The contemporary studies of religion consist of an array of interconnected fields and the present volume explores the role played by rituals in the following emergent areas: new spiritualities and ecology, religion and embodiment, and indigenous religions. In addition, the volume offers a selection of regional perspectives on ritual studies from African Christianity and Islam which includes contemporary negotiations of identity and coloniality. The collected volume offers a combination of significant theoretical and methodological discussions as well as previously understudied topics in the contemporary studies of religion.

The book addresses readers from a wide range of disciplines. It will be of interest to and relevance for both students and researchers within the larger fields of ritual and religious studies, as well as anthropology and environmental humanities. The volume is not only a broad exploration of the importance of ritual in the contemporary studies of religion but also a way to honour a fellow scholar whose academic pursuits during her thirty-year career illustrate the interconnectedness and value of cross-pollination between several disciplines.

The work of Professor Anne-Christine Hornborg embodies the innovative and fruitful ways in which ritual perspectives can be applied to a broader context within the contemporary study of religions. In 2001 Professor Hornborg published the well-received study *A Landscape of Left-Overs* (2001) based on fieldwork among Nova Scotia's first nation Mi'kmaq. Since then, Professor Hornborg has published many important contributions in ritual studies based on her other fieldwork in locations such as Tonga and Peru. These insights have been disseminated in a number of ways within the study of contemporary religion, demonstrating the persistence of ritual and religion in our own secular and consumerist societies. The chapters in the present volume are all inspired by the work of Professor Hornborg, in particular, the methodological and theoretical contributions she has offered throughout her long career. Some chapters revisit the contexts in which Professor Hornborg carried out long periods of fieldwork.

This book takes as its point of departure the great potential which we, the editors and contributors, believe is found in interdisciplinary approaches, and to which Professor Hornborg's career is a testament. Professor Hornborg's contributions to the study

of rituals showcases the importance of ritual perspectives for the relatively young field of the study of contemporary religions. Similarly, her career reflects the development and broadened area of application which the subject of ritual studies has gone through. At the outset, ritual studies grew out of the field of anthropology. In many ways it was a tool used and applied to make sense of "other" cultures, most notably those of indigenous peoples. Today, the shoe is very much on the other foot, and Professor Hornborg is one of those important scholars who put it there, by using the insights she gained from diligent and rigorous study of the "other" to in effect cast light on the hidden power relations in the implicit polarisation of academic othering, and the potential found in also pointing the gaze inwards, rather than only outwards.

Since Catherine Bell's new paradigm in ritual studies turned attention to the social construction of rituals (Bell 1997) many scholars have developed this approach to rituals and ritualisation. One of them is Professor Hornborg, who in a number of works brought ritual studies further. Rather than being just a pattern of repetition in accord with liturgy or tradition, it is more often the case that rituals, or rather those who do rituals and ritualisation, demonstrate high degrees of creativity.

Shifting the analytical question from how rituals are performed to how they are constructed turns our attention from tradition and repetition to creativity and innovation. In her work on the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia, Canada, Hornborg offers an illuminating example of ritual creativity where ritual is related to environmental activism and struggle. Here the Mi'kmaq performed their powwow ritual on the mountain they tried to save from mining companies, and their rituals became a way to mediate a sacred meaning in a secular struggle. Their ritual creativity was an inspired response to the needs of the contemporary world and drew from folk tradition, but in innovative and creative ways that combined existing elements into new rituals. In her research Hornborg addresses this ritual creativity and ingenuity with the introduction of the term 'interrituality' which she defines as "borrowing minor ritual acts or elements including objects found in other rituals" (Hornborg 2017: 17). Hornborg elaborates on how such minor ritual acts become important building blocks in new rituals. As Hornborg notes, doing the "rite thing" is not just to do the right thing: improvisation and innovations prove that rituals are flexible for the need of a certain occasion.

Just as Professor Hornborg was inspired by Bell and other great scholars of ritual (some of whom have been kind enough to contribute to the present volume), we, the editors, have found great inspiration in Professor Hornborg's work, as well as in her scholarly support and guidance. Similarly, it is our hope that the present volume will inspire others to continue to develop the study of rituals in new creative ways. The overall aim of this handbook is to show the significance of employing eclectic methodologies, innovative theoretical perspectives, and constantly seeking out fresh types of data. We hope that the texts contained in this handbook will be of use in this respect, to both scholars and students from a wide range of backgrounds. By offering new examples of ritual innovation, and illustrating a wide variety of scholarly ingenuity when it comes to finding new fields for exploring creativity in rituals and

ritualisations, it is our aspiration that more researchers will be inspired by Hornborg's work, and that they will take ritual studies into new exciting areas. By providing a chamber of resonance for a multiplicity of voices – just as Professor Hornborg has done as a teacher, supervisor, and scholar – this handbook is designed to help others discover voices of their own. Our ambition is to reach beyond performative perspectives, and approach ritual creativity, in a more flexible way, characterised by sensitivity toward the special cases studied. Therefore, rather than seeing performance as repetition we will pay attention to improvisation and play.

How can we understand such a complex phenomenon as ritual? One way to approach ritual is to see it as a shapeshifter, much like music. The following quote is sometimes attributed to the musician Duke Ellington: "the music situation today has reached the point where it isn't necessary for categories. I think what people hear in music is either agreeable to the ear or not. And if this is so, if music is agreeable to my ear, why does it have to have a category? It either sounds good or it doesn't."[1] Ellington points out an important aspect of the problem of defining and categorising elusive, and often emotionally vested cultural practices: our understanding of them, and hence our attempts to separate them into categories, is based on idiosyncratic perceptions. In this sense, ritual is like music. Not only the definition of genres of music, or of which music is "good" or not, changes, but the very definition of what constitutes music changes from person to person and from decade to decade. This becomes even more evident at the fringes, and while most people alive today might agree, that the Beatles played music, not all would use the word "music" to describe the sounds produced by Karlheinz Stockhausen, the metal band Cannibal Corpse, or the rapper Hopsin. It is also important to remember that although the idiosyncratic sensibilities of the few may become those of the many, this is also subject to change over time. When the Beatles first broke through, they were described by one critic as "so appallingly unmusical, so dogmatically insensitive to the magic of the art that they qualify as crowned heads of anti-music" (Buckley 1964).

Like music, what is referred to as rituals and ritualised behaviour is part of a mode of human (and non-human) practice that is in constant flux. It is polysemous, creative, ever changing, developing in relation to contextual needs. However, it is also the subject of theoretical sensibilities and battles over definition, which are affected by the gaze scholars cast on potential data, as well as the nets they cast to collect these data. In turn, the selection of data also affects the outcome of debates over definitions and theoretical approaches. Although we do not aim to put an end to the idea of 'schools of thought', we believe that it is important to keep in mind that if one is too invested in a specific school of thought or a system of analysis, the risk is that the data is not given a voice of its own. It is our aspiration that this book will invite both scholars and

[1] Duke Ellington explains his principle of "Beyond Category." The quote is taken from an interview, the exact origins of which are unclear; `https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qSd9zLtktso`. Accessed 23/02/2023.

students to look with fresh eyes at ways of defining, analysing, and in general talking and writing about the phenomena and behaviours we call rituals and ritualisations, which may have attained some degree of canonicity, and that they will approach them in new, creative, and curious ways.

Rituals and ritualisations are not just something out there or back then but something here and now as well. We believe that the earlier scholarly attraction to systemic or even mechanistic perspectives in which rituals follow rules and produce meaning is suitably complemented by more organic and less ordered perspectives. To say that this implicates a shift from a Harmonic to an Eridian perspective would perhaps be overstating the case. However, we believe that the time is ripe for a more organic approach to the study of rituals and ritualisations, as well as to the study of their social, historical, and biological contexts. We suggest a shift from the genitive to the accusative: The idea that rituals and ritualisations contain or produce meaning places these as the loci of action, instead of focussing on the humans (or other animals) who do rituals or ritualisations. Rather, we suggest, that meaning is vested in rituals and ritualisation, or interpreted from these, in a wide variety of unpredictable ways. Rituals are malleable and polysemous. Claude Debussy supposedly described music as the space between the notes. It might be fruitful to think of rituals and ritualisations in similar ways.

Outline and Content

The present volume consists of seventeen chapters divided into four parts. As stated above, the objective is to contribute to and further new perspectives in ritual studies in the context of the contemporary study of religions.

The four different parts cover explorations into *indigenous religions* – a field which changed the study of rituals and demonstrated its importance for not only religious studies, but for anthropology and ethnography; *ecology and new spiritualities*, a relatively young but quickly expanding field which showcases the continued importance of ritual perspectives; *the bodily aspect of rituals*, explorations which all take their departure from the idea that rituals are like humans, and humans are like rituals – embodied; the fourth and final part of the book presents case studies from the two religions which statistically viewed have the most adherents globally, Islam and Christianity. Nevertheless, the four studies presented in Part 4 approach these 'world' religions from very different perspectives and contexts, demonstrating the dynamic nature of religions and the limitations of vast categories, through regional in-depth studies.

Part 1: Ritual and Indigenous Religions

Part 1 brings together several of the leading scholars in ritual studies and explores the topic of indigenous religions. The study of ritual is intimately connected with explorations of the contexts of indigenous peoples. In one way, the field of ritual studies can be said to have grown out of early studies of the religion of indigenous peoples. Seminal works in the bourgeoning field of anthropology of religion placed the importance of rituals at the fore. Pioneers like Bronislaw Malinowski and E.E. Evans-Pritchard – who emphasised the importance of fieldwork – paved the way for a new generation of scholars who would develop the field of ritual studies, such as Victor Turner and Ronald Grimes, the latter of whom is showcased in the present volume. The more distant and unknown the people, the more the rituals seem to stand out as a way into new worlds of meaning making.

Ritual studies developed during a time when indigenous religions were still termed as primitive or tribal religion. As such, the religions of indigenous peoples were framed as less developed or unsophisticated examples of religious phenomena, in contrast with Abrahamitic religions and the other two 'world religions', Buddhism and Hinduism. Much has been done in the field of religious studies since these categorisations were employed without much reflection. As Graham Harvey – featured in the present volume – has clarified, these paradigms reflect westernised structures based on Protestant enlightenment ideas (Harvey 2000: 1–19).

The first part of the present study covers the explorations of ritual aspects of several indigenous peoples, expanding on different relations to place and landscape; animism and ancestral religion; colonial perspectives, as well as issues relating to relocation and the relation between identity and land. These are all central themes that have become guiding in the study of indigeneity. In the first chapter of Part 1, "Earthen Spirituality or Cultural Genocide?," Bron Taylor explores the way Native American spirituality has been appropriated by radical environmentalists. He identifies the way in which aspects of the appropriation of Native American spirituality threaten to contribute to the decline of Native American cultural integrity and survival, particularly regarding smaller Native nations. However, appropriation does have its advantages, giving Native Americans opportunities to exercise their agency and opening up avenues for fruitful cross-pollination between cultures.

In the second chapter, "The Return of Mi'kmaq to Living Tradition," Graham Harvey revisits the anthropological scene first explored by Anne-Christine Hornborg in her study *Mi'kmaq Landscapes: From Animism to Sacred Ecology* (2008). Harvey discusses several key aspects of indigenous traditions to which Hornborg brought attention in her study and elaborates on the importance of approaching both animism and Mi'kmaq identities as relational concepts, or as he puts it, "everyday matters of negotiation."

In the third chapter, "Cosmologies of the Earth and Ether," Michael Jackson continues exploring the spirituality and sociality of the Mi'kmaq, adding noteworthy parallel readings by comparing the Mi'kmaq with the Warlpiri and Māori peoples. Beginning

with a summary of Professor Hornborg's insights into Mi'kmaq spirituality, Jackson proceeds to explores the parallel scenes through a very personal account and – despite noting how difficult it is to avoid the implicit biases of the Judeo-Christian heritage in cross-cultural analyses – he finds striking similarities in the way community and family translates into the religious, moral, and tribal identities of these peoples.

The fourth chapter, "Subsumed Rituals," is authored by Mikael Rothstein and begins the exploration which is the topic of several other chapters in this volume: the ritual perspectives of divination. Rothstein investigates the intrinsic implications of divination among the Eastern Penan of Malaysian Borneo, and their relation to objects imbued with power. He introduces the notion of 'subsumed ritual', a form of ritual that approaches the domain of divination and relation to powerful objects not by identifying these practices as different – displacing time, place, or identity as rituals often are thought to do – but rather as practices that are integrated in the everyday life, rituals that gain their power precisely because they are unquestionable parts of life, just as eating and sleeping are.

In chapter five we invite the readers to reacquaint themselves with Ronald Grimes' classic essay "Where is Here?" Here Grimes explores the dynamics of the human relation to place and land. In a very personal account, he discusses the fact that his own home, and the land on which it stands, have belonged to other peoples, peoples that did not necessarily give them up freely. Through Grimes' account we encounter insightful reflections on what it means to be a 'neighbour', the human relation to land, landscape, and their importance for identity, as well as actions of displacement and the practice of 'bad rituals'.

Part 2: Ritual, Ecology, and New Spiritualities

In the second part of the book, entitled "Ritual, Ecology, and New Spiritualities," the explorations in ritual studies pay attention to two themes: new spiritualties and environmentalism. The distinction between religion and spirituality has been the subject of considerable scholarly discussion. Nonetheless, for many practitioners of new spirituality the difference between religion and spirituality is real and cannot be escaped by an alternative definition of religion. The anthropologist of religion Anne-Christine Hornborg notes that the sentence "I'm spiritual, not religious" has become a key expression of a new form of globalised religion, that focuses on a specific notion of spirituality signifying a universal human essence located deep inside everyone. Hornborg concludes: "The message is: Spirituality unites us into a single humanity, while religion, with its dogma and rituals, separates us" (Hornborg 2011: 249). Many scholars have contributed to the understanding of new forms of spirituality. Paul Heelas's analysis of religions in the modern world concludes that spirituality appears to be flourishing (Heelas 2005). Rather than a trajectory where the religious is giving way to the secular; the religious is giving way to the spiritual. Heelas finds a key characteristic, which has come to be

associated with spirituality: "Spirituality has to do with the personal, that which is interior or immanent" (Heelas 2005: 414). Therefore, contemporary spirituality may more precisely be termed "spirituality of life" (Heelas 2005: 414). According to Heelas, new spiritualities radicalise the expressive aspects of modernity; both affirming modern values and reacting against them. Although spiritualities are shaped by their time, they likewise encourage resistance and alternatives. Like Heelas, Christopher Partridge finds a contemporary situation where religion appears to be on the decline, but where spiritualities, conversely, seem to be alive and kicking. Partridge investigates the alternative spiritual milieu in the contemporary western world, where an increasing number of Westerners are in various ways discovering and articulating spiritual meaning in their lives. New ways of believing are not intricately tied to public institutions or buildings, but they are still socially significant (Partridge 2005: 3). Alternative spiritualities are found outside institutions and are entwined with popular culture and urban myths (Partridge 2005: 2). Again, this relates to how sources of inspiration that are often considered non-religious are an incentive for spiritual reflection, which is set in the intersection between spirituality and the environmental movement.

It should be noted that the interest in alternative spiritualities is not a new phenomenon. Non-traditional re-enchantment has been a long time coming, particularly in the past forty years, Partridge concludes. Partridge sees alternative spiritualties as distinct from new age spirituality. Other scholars, such as Steven J. Sutcliffe and Ingvild Sælid Gilhus, have offered perspectives on New Age which is "among the most disputed category in the study of religion" (Sutcliffe and Gilhus 2013: 2). Rather than considering New Age as demonstrating atypical forms of religion, Sutcliffe and Gilhus argue for the need of "a model of a religion that comprise new age phenomena" and "to develop a general model of religion, with a terminology to match" (Sutcliff and Gilhus 2013: 2). The contributions by Olav Hammer and Johan Nilsson in the present volume provide perspectives on new spiritualities with special attention to divination, and that of Ståhle focuses on new spiritualities in a contemporary secular context.

The theme of religion and ecology has attracted increasing attention in recent times in the shadow of the climate crisis. In 1967, Lynn White Jr's article "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" set the agenda for the discussion of religion and ecology for decades to come. White, a scholar of medieval history, claimed that "especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen" (White 1967: 1205). However, he found an alternative Christian approach in Saint Francis of Assisi. Today the ecological crisis has deepened, and scholars read the article in a new light (Worster 2017; Hamlin and Lodge 2006). Research in the emerging field of religion and ecology addresses the question: How do religious traditions respond to the challenges of the ecological crisis? Both representatives of religious traditions and scholars of religion have responded to the challenges of the ecological crisis and climate change. Parallel to religious traditions going through transformation in relation to ecology, research on these changes becomes increasingly relevant (Jenkins, Tucker and Grim 2017). The anthropologist of religion Bron Taylor labels claims

that the world's religions are becoming more environmentally friendly as "The Greening of Religion Hypothesis" (Taylor 2016: 268). Taylor distinguishes between green religion and dark green religion. In simple terms, green religion can be characterised as anthropocentric, and dark green religion as eco- or biocentric (Taylor 2010: 10). Roger Gottlieb points out how environmentalism challenges religions and how new spiritualties are often characterised by radical innovation, including the creation of new liturgies and rituals (Bauman et al. 2011: 115). Given this creative character it is perhaps reasonable to avoid defining spirituality too strictly, since this phenomenon is somewhat of a shapeshifter too. Hence, the theoretical discourse on spirituality sheds light on a complex phenomenon and relates to both ecology and ritual creativity.

In her study on Mi'kmaq people in Canadian Nova Scotia (2008) the anthropologist of religion Anne-Christine Hornborg shows how ritual studies, new spiritualties, ecology and environmentalism come together. The Mi'kmaq people undertook an environmentalist struggle against authorities planning to start a mining project on their sacred land. The Mi'kmaq endeavoured to stop the mining project, and to do so they performed a traditional pow-wow drumming ritual at the proposed mining sites. Hornborg argues that references to sacred land in environmentalist struggle adds "spiritual reasons to the more secular arguments that the environmental groups put forward" (Hornborg 2008: 280). References to the sacredness of places and spaces, such as mountains or forest, rather than environmental arguments are harder to reject for authorities, who "were not used to discuss spiritual values side by side with plans for a secular industrial project" (Hornborg 2008: 280). These issues are reoccurring themes in several chapters that bind Parts 1 and 2 of the present book together.

Part 2 elaborates on the discussion of new spiritualties and the relationship between spiritualties and ecology. It also contributes to discussions on ritual creativity through various examples. The contributors – Olav Hammer, Johan Nilsson, Ive Brissman, and Göran Ståhle – offer several cases from the field which bring fresh perspectives on ritual creativity and contribute to theoretical discussions on ritualisation. The section stars Olav Hammer who – in his chapter "Financial Astrology" – approaches divination as a form of ritualisation. Hammer studies how forms of divination – and specifically astrology – are useful for those who wish to predict the rise and fall of the stock market. The main question that informs this study is how rituals of celestial divination, grounded in symbolism that has its origins in a premodern era, have been transformed into methods for such a quintessential element of modern capitalist society as predicting the fluctuations of stock prices. Hammer offers a criticism of the recent history of financial astrology and places it in the context of historical records. He provides a thumbnail sketch of astrological symbolism and surveys how astrological symbols have been applied to the world of investing. Finally, he poses the question of how financial astrology functions compared to more conventional methods of market forecasting. Hammer's contribution offers new and exciting perspectives on the relevance of ritual studies in areas which at a first glace might be viewed as topics detached from the field of studying rituals in religious studies.

Ritualisation and divination is also a theme in Johan Nilsson's article "Manipulating the Sticks." Nilsson's chapter begins by noting the significance played by esoteric movements for how Asian religions have been viewed in 'the West'. He discusses the westward migration of texts, ideas and practices originating in Asia, and especially how China became integrated in some of the influential historical narratives developed in the occult milieu. Nilsson further explores the creation of divination rituals influenced by the Ancient Chinese *Book of Changes*, the *Yijing*, within an influential early 20th century esoteric movement: Aleister Crowley's Thelema. Crowley created a form of *Yijing*-based divination, one of the first well-documented examples of the *practice* of divination connected to the *Yijing* adapted to a worldview with historical roots in Europe. Nilsson discusses how Crowley's ritual explorations became the basis of a *community of practice* which has continued to influence ritual techniques among new religious movements to the present day.

The merging of environmentalism and new spiritualties is manifested in the ritual practices connected to Dark Green spirituality. In "The Sounds of Silence," Ive Brissman explores the role of silence in various workshops that aim to encourage reflection on environmental matters. Brissman draws from fieldwork conducted in environmental workshops in the UK. She discusses the practices of ritual silence (walks, sharing circles, meditations, *et cetera*) that work to stimulate and encourage reflection, and how minor ritual acts of silence can further our understanding of ritual creativity. Brissman applies Hornborg's term 'interrituality' to address ritual creativity and how ritual acts are used as building blocks, not in creating new rituals but in the wider context of practices and workshops. Brissman argues that being in silence is a way to relate to a soundscape and larger-than-human-world and – relating to Donna Haraway – to make kin with other species and rebuild quiet places.

The last chapter in Part 2, "Durga is also living in Sweden," authored by Göran Ståhle, brings us back to the question of how new spiritualities are lived out in secular contexts. Ståhle explores the celebration of a Hindu festival in the secular setting of contemporary Sweden by using Ronald Grimes's concepts of competence and performance. Ståhle distinguishes different characteristic features of the celebration of Durga Puja, relating to ritual performance and competence. While variations are inherent in the performance of this festival, Ståhle identifies the framing of the festival in the Swedish secular setting as especially illustrative of how ritual sets and the settings interact. These insights contribute toward our understanding of the ritual performances of new spiritualities in what is often viewed as an increasingly secular majority society.

Part 3: Ritual and Body: Bodies as Rituals

Part 3 deals with rituals and bodies as well as viewing bodies as rituals. It can be argued that these are inseparable, and that any attempt at separating them is only possible because of the history of western philosophy and religion. In his famous work

Discourse on Method (1637) René Descartes – whom Ronald Grimes has humorously described as "the bad-boy nemesis of all who would overcome body/mind dualism" (Grimes 2014: 337) – writes that he realised that he could pretend that he had no body, and that "there was no world nor any place in which I was present, but I could not pretend in the same way that I did not exist" (Descartes 1637 [1999]: part 4, 24–25). Although Descartes is seen as an important thinker in the scientific revolution, his religious insistence on the primacy of thought and ultimately of *the soul* (which he paradoxically thought was located in the pineal gland) and the Catholic God is one of the most important anchoring points of philosophy and science as intellectualism, rather than materialism. Like all of us, Descartes lived a bodily life, no matter how much his legacy of intellectualism over physicality might give the impression of the opposite. He drank and slept, he was a mercenary and a master fencer, he romanced women and fathered a child with a servant girl (which they lost to scarlet fever). Although the Cartesian split may never be bridged entirely, it is being criticised increasingly in the human, social, and natural sciences. In the context of Ritual Studies, Anne-Christine Hornborg has been an avid critic of over-intellectualisation, arguing for the importance of understanding the role of somatic modes of attention and pointing out the 'blind alleys' of Cartesian dualism:

> I take a critical stance to intellectualism, which has defined the body as a passive object and, as such, only a reflection of ideas and symbolic meanings manifested in ritual practices. By contrast, phenomenology has shown that it is with a mindful body and somatic modes of attention that we approach the world and that bodies are active in learning and remembering. It is not only our mind that constructs identities and "imagined communities"; our body is at work simultaneously, and the Cartesian split between mind and body has generated blind alleys in ritual studies (Hornborg 2005: 356).

Some of the pitfalls of the understanding of the relation between ritual and body are linguistic in nature. Small words that separate the words *body* and *ritual* – words such as *and*, *in*, or *of* seem to infer connectedness, but may also implicitly signal separation. Bodies ritualise, are ritualised, or perform rituals. But can we separate rituals from bodies? Can we separate rituals from language? And can we separate language from bodies?

Whatever perspective one applies, the study of ritual is intricately linked to the study of the regulation or redefinition of bodies. Bodies are central to some of the oldest written outlines of ritual activity, whether it be living bodies, dead bodies, or bodies in the afterlife, such as in ancient Egyptian funerary texts, or the regulated display of discipline and ceremony by living bodies such as those of the ancient Chinese Book of Rites. Similarly, bodily aspects of ritual, and ritual contexts of bodies, social and physiological, have been, and remain central to Ritual Studies. The four chapters of Part 3 investigate this intricate relationship between rituals and bodies, rituals

as bodies – and even bodies as rituals – in the context of a variety of case-studies. They offer fresh perspectives on distinct areas related to the intersection between body and ritual. In the first chapter of Part 3 entitled "Ritual dance from a Philosophical Perspective," Erica Appelros asks and offers answers to why dance might be interpreted as a universal vehicle for religious experience and expression. Appelros' chapter deals with this question through the lens of the philosophy of religion and casts light on how movement can embody religious concepts.

In the chapter "Transformation Beyond the Threshold" Olivia Cejvan investigates a Swedish initiatory society, Sodalitas Rosae Crucis (S.R.C.), a group inspired by the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Based on two years of fieldwork Cejvan explores how ritual heritage from the 19th century is brought to life in group rituals and solitary ritual work by individual members. Cejvan's chapter offers new insights on rituals from anthropological and educational theory and applies them in new and thought-provoking ways on a contemporary initiatory society.

Paul Linjamaa's chapter "Bringing Embodiment Back to Antiquity" presents a novel exploration of one of very few textual fragments traceable to the early Christian theologian Valentinus. Based on points made by Professor Anne-Christine Hornborg, that "religion is lived, carried and manifested in human bodies" the chapter analyses the rhetorical concept *parrhésia* (παρρησία) and argues for a bodily dimension to Valentinus' work, rather than a strict religious intellectualism. As such, the piece exemplifies how contemporary ritual theory allows us to approach ancient material in new ways.

Finally, in the chapter "Man Who Catch Fly with Chopstick, Accomplish Anything" Tao Thykier Makeeff explores ritualised bodily learning and pursuits of excellence in the martial arts. He proposes that martial arts are an overlooked, but relevant cultural practice in Ritual Studies. Through analyses of both traditional and modern examples, as well as pop-cultural representations, he demonstrates that martial arts share key characteristics with ritual, and that both social and physiological changes result from the ritualised repetition of movements.

Part 4: Regional Perspectives: Islam and African Christianity

The fourth and last part of the book explores rituals from regional perspectives in the two largest religions in the world: Christianity and Islam. However, as the contributions here illustrate, regional perspectives in ritual and religious studies often demonstrate what theoreticians of religion frequently point out: categories spanning vast areas of space and lengths of time are accompanied by serious limitations. The first chapter in this part of the book is an exploration into a ritual that is performed daily by millions of Muslims world-wide: *al-ṣalāt*. In his chapter "*Al-ṣalāt*: The ritual of rituals in Islam" Jonas Otterbeck presents broad insights into this ritual, by revisiting the

meaning making aspect of rituals, its importance for sustaining and building viable group identities. Otterbeck presents *al-ṣalāt* as a forceful ritual that both enables the practitioner to express their individuality while attaching themselves to broader identities. Otterbeck argues that it is vital for ritual analyses to focus not only on words and acts but to recognise how rituals are part of socialisation and its discourses of meaning making.

In the second chapter of this final part of the book we are immediately brought back 'to the ground'. From the broader reflections offered by Otterbeck concerning the wide-ranging Muslim ritual *al-ṣalāt*, Hege Markussen presents an exploration of ritual perspectives relating to a very concentrated reflection of Islam: an annual Alevi festival in central Turkey in commemoration of the thirteenth century Sufi saint Hacı Bektaş Veli. While previous studies of the ritual aspects of this festival have highlighted its diversity and commemorational activities Markussen approaches the festival as an arena of complex ritual participation and reflects on the meeting between devotee and researcher. Markussen reflects on the 'ritual field' as an arena where both researcher and devotee are seen as participating ritually, but from different perspectives.

These two chapters which open the last segment of the book demonstrate the breadth of ritual studies. The last two contributions in the final part of the book offer insights into a growing field of study, in a way bringing back ritual studies to a context in which it was once developed: in the meeting with African peoples. In her chapter entitled "Who Got the Rite Wrong?" Martina Prosén explores the innovative use of music and dance among young adults in the mega-church of Mavuno in Nairobi, Kenya. In particular, Prosén reflects on an alternative Christmas service she attended in the church in December 2013. She argues that the ritual framing of the event enabled young people to divulge thoughts and ideas about feelings that are rarely spoken of in church, concerning romantic desire, jealousy, and anger. However, this new ritual setting which caters to the emotional needs of the congregation's young people comes at a price: in order for the rite to be successful for part of the congregation, it is necessary for it to fail for others.

In the last chapter of the book "A Ritual that Turned the World Upside Down" Mika Vähäkangas explores the ritual setting of what is known as "the annulment of Ham's curse," a ritual performed in Kimbanguist communities around the world. Vähäkangas begins by setting the ritual in its historical, political, and cultural-religious context and proceeds to interpret it in the particular Kimbanguist cosmology. Vähäkangas demonstrates how the ritual is employed by Kimbanguist to counter colonialism, a way for a community to renegotiate their black identity. As such, Vähäkangas offers important insights of the ways in which rituals are employed to challenge feelings of oppression in a post-colonial world and the recreation of new identities based on older historical and cosmological paradigms.

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Part 1: Ritual and Indigenous Religion

⊠

Chapter 1: Earthen Spirituality or Cultural Genocide?[(2)]

Radical Environmentalism's Appropriation of Native American Spirituality

Bron Taylor

1. Introduction[1]

> The problem is one of cultural appropriation. Eurocentric intellectuals habitually take the knowledge of indigenous peoples and incorporate it into their own thinking, usually without attribution. In the process they tend to deform it beyond recognition, bending it to suit their own social, economic and political objectives. Unfortunately, this has, with very few exceptions, proven to be as true of professed 'allies' of native people as it has of their avowed enemies.
>
> M. Annette Jaimes, Alfred University

This epigraph introduces a scathing critique by Ward Churchill of Jerry Mander's *In the Absence of the Sacred* (Mander 1992). Ward Churchill, who was then well known as an American Indian Movement (AIM) intellectual and activist, had "been sharply critical of the appropriation of Native American ideas and spirituality by Euroamericans" (Churchill 1993: 43–48). Mander had argued that Native American wisdom could help us discern how to live in harmony with nature "if only we'd let them be and listen to what they say" (Mander 1992: 382). Churchill concluded that despite Mander's stated desire to learn from Indians, by borrowing from them largely without attribution, and by absorbing Indian ideas "as their own 'intellectual property' while synthesising new (and therefore inherently 'superior') vernaculars of societal/ecological reality," Mander "embodies the worst of what [he] purports to oppose," namely, the destruction of indigenous culture and wisdom (Churchill 1993: 46, 43).

[1] This text is an edited version of the previously published article by Bron Taylor, "Earthen Spirituality or Cultural Genocide: Radical Environmentalism's Appropriation of Native American Spirituality." *Religion* 17, no. 2 (1997): 183–215.

It is easy to assemble examples where New Age devotees or others drawn to Native American spirituality have stolen sacred artefacts, trespassed and desecrated places considered sacred, or interrupted ceremonies while insisting that they have a right to be present.[2] There are writers who have been accused of profiteering off Native American cultures by fabricating experiences or apprenticeships with indigenous shamans (Rose 1992: 403–421). There are non-Indians who are scorned for profiteering off of sweat lodges or other ceremonies that are purportedly derived from Native American traditions. Some of these practices clearly hinder and even thwart specific Native American religious practices (Rose 1992; Deloria 1992: 35–39). Yet such threats to Native American religious practice seem small compared to the policies of Federal and State governments that fail to protect, or directly destroy (often through road building and subsequent commercial enterprise) the land base and specific places considered essential for ceremony, herb gathering, and so on (Jaimes 1992; Vecsey 1991).

Herein, I focus on cases of the borrowing and sharing of Native American spirituality where it is difficult to find agreement about what constitutes proper conduct or easily discern social impacts.[3] The following case studies and reflections are motivated equally by the belief that threats to Native American cultural integrity and religious practice are real and should be forthrightly resisted, and by a fear that blanket condemnations of the appropriation of Native American cultural practices may hinder the nascent and fragile alliances developing in some regions between Indians and non-Indians, and thereby erode the survival prospects of native peoples, their cultures, and places.

My primary purpose is to provide careful descriptions of the specific dynamics involved in, and of the arguments about, the appropriation of Native American spirituality, so that readers can form their own views about these phenomena. A secondary purpose is to submit my own views about these dynamics for the reader's consideration, with the understanding that I consider them to be tentative and subject to further revision. Ultimately, I hope the description and reflections in this paper will contribute to dialogue and behaviours that will reduce the tensions attending these phenomena.

I began this inquiry with three main perspectives in mind about the appropriation of Native American spirituality. Put simply, one view argued similarly to Churchill that, however well intended, such borrowing represents a form of cultural genocide, either destroying such traditions by syncretistically transforming them as they selectively borrow from them, and/or directly threatening Indian survival by assuming that native spiritualities are dead and in need of resuscitation by whites. A second view contended that the appropriation of *Native American* religion is impossible, since the resulting

[2] Many terms are currently employed to refer to North America's native peoples. As no consensus term has emerged, I ask the reader's forbearance as I use several of the terms in common use today, including Native American, American Indian, Indian, and Indigenous peoples.

[3] I intend that 'appropriation' and 'borrowing' be taken as synonyms.

phenomenon is no longer Native American religion. A third view held that, since the borrowing of myth, symbol, and rite from one group by another is a central characteristic of cultural and religious evolution, it is inappropriate for religious studies scholars to categorically condemn such developments because such condemnations inevitably privilege one form of religion over another.[4]

Some readers would like to know something about my conclusions at the outset. For now, I hope it will suffice to say that I have found – in various ways to be specified later – that there is merit to and legitimate concerns expressed in each of the preceding three views. Other readers will be interested to know whether and to what extent I have participated in ceremonies led by or borrowed from Native American traditions. My participation in Native American ceremony has been limited to several occasions where Indians and Euroamerican environmental activists have gathered in solidarity around issues of mutual concern. Often, during such occasions prayers and sometimes rituals are performed, usually led by an Indian elder or medicine person. My own participation has been limited to standing and respectfully listening to such proceedings.[5]

2. Case Studies

The following discussion is based on field observations and archival research conducted between 1990 and 1996 exploring several streams of the North American Deep Ecology (or Radical Environmental) movement, focusing especially on its radical vanguard, Earth First!. Earth First! is best known for dramatic civil disobedience campaigns and the use of sabotage in their efforts to thwart commercial incursions into the planet's few remaining roadless areas (Taylor 1995). Earth First! activists believe that the natural world has value apart from its usefulness to humans. This moral claim

[4] These three views emerged in interesting discussions with Richard Grounds, Ann Braude, and Matthew Glass at the 1992 meeting of the American Academy of Religion, and led to a panel in 1993 in which we discussed these views more publicly.

[5] I have vacillated over whether to divulge my own levels of participation in the phenomena discussed in this paper. But reviewer comments on earlier versions of this paper indicate significant interest in my personal experiences in this regard (some of this interest is based on curiosity regarding whether I am personally involved with some of the described practices and have a personal stake in defending them). I was reluctant to say that I am not personally attracted to ceremonies inspired by Native American cultures because I did not wish to leave open an interpretation that I feel superior to those who are so attracted.

As a young man, however, after receiving an invitation by an Indian friend I almost attended a sweat lodge ceremony, but I never did. I felt honoured and hoped to attend, but these sweats were held on short notice and I was never did. At that time (the early 1980s), I was unaware of the controversy surrounding such ceremonies. I have never had, however, a burning desire to participate in such ceremonies. I feel awkward at virtually any religious ceremony where some participation on my part is explicitly or implicitly expected. I am, however, curious enough about ceremonies, like the sweat lodge, that I would like to attend one. Nevertheless, given the feelings of many Native Americans about the participation of non-Indians in such ceremonies, I have decided to pass up such opportunities. Thus, the motive behind the analysis in these pages is in no way a personal apologia.

is often grounded in mystical experiences in the natural world that yield pantheistic and/or panentheistic worldviews, and is often combined with a sense that nature is full of animate, spiritual intelligences, including but not always limited to animals, who can communicate with humans. I have previously labelled Earth First!'s religious orientation "primal spirituality" because many within this subculture venerate and seek to learn from and emulate the world's remaining indigenous cultures, especially those cultures unassimilated into the global market economy. They generally consider such cultures to be spiritually and ecologically wise (Taylor 1994: 185–209).

The desire of many deep ecologists to learn from indigenous cultures produces an impulse to borrow ritual practices (Taylor 1995). In North America, this has been facilitated by the increasing openness of some Native Americans to such cultural sharing and by the proliferation of New Age practitioners and institutes claiming to be authentic bearers of such practices. The following examines such appropriation within the Deep Ecology movement and explores the ensuing controversy among those Indians and Earth First!ers who are attempting to work out an alliance in defence of places that both consider sacred.

3. Gary Snyder: Early Appropriation by an Elder of the Deep Ecology Movement

Gary Snyder is considered an 'elder' within the Deep Ecology movement. His Pulitzer prize winning book, *Turtle Island* (1969), borrowed its title from a Native American name for North America. Snyder hoped to promote what he took to be native wisdom regarding the sacrality of the landscape, believing that ultimately all people are capable of becoming psychologically and spiritually Native American (Snyder 1990). During his most formative years a Native American path was inaccessible to him so he went to Japan to study Zen Buddhism, eventually calling himself "a practicing Buddhist, or Buddhist-shamanist" (Snyder 1980: 33). Snyder was subsequently criticised for "cultural imperialism in the adoption of the persona of a white shaman/healer."[6] He responded that shamanism is a universal cultural experience, is not "proprietary ... to any one culture," and is found everywhere throughout most of pre-history, not only among Native Americans. Although crediting Native Americans for preserving shamanism in North America, Snyder insisted that at the centre of shamanism is "a teaching from the nonhuman." Shamanistic experiences are widely available, Snyder believes, because they are ultimately rooted in "a naked experience

[6] This is how an interviewer, in Snyder's *Real Work*, summarised the objections of several Native American intellectuals to Snyder's *Turtle Island*, including Leslie Marmon Silko (1978: 211–16). See also Hobson's contributions to this volume. For a contrasting view see Gloria F. Orenstein (1993: 172–180). She is critical of the ethics of some practitioners of neo-shamanism (especially Michael Harner 1990), arguing that by reducing these phenomena to an essential core, Harner erases many forms of indigenous religion. For more on Harner and shamanism see Paul C. Johnson (1995: 163–78).

that some people have out in the woods" (Snyder 1980: 154–155). He argues that many Native American stories, "like the trickster and the woman who married the Bear ... are found all over the world. Nobody owns them. It's only a lack of [a global] perspective that would make people think such things are their own property."[7]

With such a perspective Snyder participates in rituals invented and borrowed by those in his own intentional community in the foothills of California's Sierra Nevada mountains. Once when I mentioned to him that new rituals are unfolding within the Deep Ecology movement that he helped inspire, he cautioned that it takes time to discern if newly developed rituals are authentic. Nevertheless, he then expressed optimism that profound and new rituals may well be unfolding. Explaining that his community has been doing ceremonies at May Day and Halloween for twenty-two years, he commented, we're "just beginning to feel we're getting it right. Basically we're synthesising Buddhist, European pagan (Maypole), and Native American elements, and combining it in our own experience," and he added that there are many communities working on similar ritual processes. "We're trying to find a middle ground between our interests – like I'm a fairly orthodox Buddhist – but I can recognise" a lot of value in other traditions.

Snyder and his community's selective borrowing from Native American spirituality and blending of it with religious practices from other traditions presages the type of appropriation found in the North American Deep Ecology movement in general – and especially in Earth First!

4. American Indian Spirituality in the Earth First! Movement

The most important spiritual home for many Earth First! activists resembles what religion scholar Amanda Porterfield calls "American Indian Spirituality" and defines as "a countercultural movement whose proponents define themselves against the cultural system of American Society" (Porterfield 1990: 152). The central tenets of this spirituality:

> include the condemnation of American exploitation of nature and mistreatment of Indians, regard to precolonial America as a sacred place where nature and humanity lived in plentiful harmony, ... and an underlying belief that American Indian attitudes toward nature are a means of revitalizing American culture (Porterfield 1990: 154).

Such beliefs are pervasive in Earth First!, although I have not encountered anyone claiming to systematically practice Native American religion. I have found, however, a

[7] Interview with Gary Snyder, 7 June 1993, Davis, California. For a criticism of such rationales,

variety of ritual processes and practices *inspired by* and borrowed from Native American traditions, generally in a piece-meal and unsystematic way, and combined freely with practices borrowed from neo-paganism, traditional religions (especially Buddhism, Daoism, and Hinduism), and even self-help groups and the human potential movement.

Among the practices borrowed (explicitly or implicitly) from Native American cultures are the sweat lodge, the burning of purifying sage, the passing of a talking stick during community meetings, ritual processes such as the Council of All Beings, which involve a solitary seeking of nature spirits in a way that resembles vision quests (Taylor 1993: 225–230; Taylor 1988), the taking (or discovery) of 'earth names'; group and solitary wilderness experiences undertaken under the influence of peyote or hallucinogenic mushrooms, 'tribal unity' and war dances characterised by ecstatic dancing and prolonged drumming (which bear no resemblance, as far as I can discern, to Native American dancing); neo-pagan ritualising that sometimes borrows elements from Native American religion such as prayers to the Great Spirit in the four directions; a variety of rhetoric such as 'ho' to express agreement during 'tribal' meetings, and 'hoka-hey', an exclamation sometimes spoken to register approval of expressions of militant defiance against the oppressors of nature. A small number of these activists live in tepees and do not cut their hair, sharing the belief held by some Native Americans that their strength would be dissipated were they to cut it. Shamanic beliefs in transpersonal experience, such as the possibility of interspecies communication and soul-travel beyond this world, are sometimes found in movement poetry, song, and art.

The sweat lodge appears to be a form of borrowing and it has been offered at some Earth First! gatherings. I have not participated in these ceremonies but from interviews and by observing the sign-up sheets, it is clear that they contain a variety of ritual practices. One sweat held at a woman's retreat, for example, was led by a Euroamerican woman who indicated that she was in training with a Native American spiritual leader and was authorised by him to lead this sweat. A participant indicated that the sweat lodge resembled a traditional Native American ceremony.[8]

At the 1993 Earth First! 'rendezvous', at least three different sweats were advertised, 'neo-pagan', 'Native American', and a 'woman's sweat'. Defensiveness was apparent, however, and behind the scenes, criticisms of the sweats were expressed by a couple of American Indian Movement activists. Some Earth First!ers responded that these sweats, although inspired by Native American religious practices, were not Native American ceremonies.

Ambivalence pervades the movement with regard to sweat lodges. One woman chose not to attend an Earth First! sweat after the 1993 rendezvous because it was not led by a Native American and therefore was not 'traditional' enough. (She conceded, however, that it was meaningful for the participants.) Others will only attend 'neo-pagan' sweats because, they believe, such sweats do not 'rip-off' Native Americans. Still others attend

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see Rose (1992: 404–405).

[8] Telephone interview with Jean Crawford, 5 November 1993.

neo-pagan sweats simply because criticism of Native American style sweats has become so fierce.

Some of the confusion about what to do results from differing perspectives among Native Americans themselves. Most Indians, however, would prefer that non-Indians explore their own heritage as a spiritual resource rather than borrowing from Indian traditions (Smith 1993: 172–180). Yet I have also often heard Indians say that Native American religious practices are crucial if the world is to be preserved. Some believe that it is only pure, *uninfluenced* native ceremony that can preserve the world. But a significant minority argue that non-Indian participation in 'the red road' is necessary if humans are to reharmonise life on earth. Still others believe that borrowing from Native American traditions is nothing but another incident of Euroamerican thievery.

One deeply spiritual Earth First! musician who has diligently worked to forge alliances with Native Americans, for example, was told by a Native American friend that non-Indians should not participate in sweat ceremonies. This Earth First!er told me that he empathises with native concerns about the integrity of their culture, but quietly indicated that such ceremonies have facilitated some of his most formative spiritual experiences, drawing him closer to the creator and all creatures. I have heard such testimony from numerous participants in this movement. Although he is willing to forgo such ceremonies in the presence of Indians who might take offense, he stated emphatically that he would not entirely forgo this ritual practice, because "nobody's going to fuck with my spirituality."

This example shows how the hope of most Earth First! activists to preserve the natural world becomes intertwined in a complicated way with their respect for Native American spirituality and their feelings of kinship with the natural world, their concomitant desire to preserve the indigenous cultures they revere, and their own tendency to find meaning in indigenous myth and ritual practice. These related but not easily reconcilable tendencies can be illustrated by discussing some of the complications resulting from the effort to forge an alliance among Earth First!ers, traditional Indians, and militant American Indian Movement activists.

5. A Morning Circle

Earth First!ers chose Mt. Graham in Southeastern Arizona as their national rendezvous site during the summer of 1993 partly because they consider it a "sacred island ecosystem" due to its unique and threatened flora and fauna, but as importantly, because people they consider sacred, namely the Apaches, who also revere the mountain, believe a University of Arizona telescope project there is an act of desecration.[9] More-

[9] Earth First!ers generally wish to support indigenous nature peoples wherever they are found, believing they provide the remnant human knowledge and spirituality needed for the reharmonisation of humans and sacred natural processes.

over, the Earth First!ers hoped that their defence of the mountain would promote a broad alliance with Native Americans.

Although traditional Apache spiritual leaders had invited Earth First!ers to ceremonies on their reservation and on Mt. Graham itself, tensions flared during a morning meeting at this rendezvous. These tensions revealed diverse views among Earth First!ers and Indian activists about the appropriate ways to respect Native American culture and religion.

Precipitating the long, emotionally wrenching discussion was an evening where inebriated Earth First! revellers encroached upon an 'alcohol free campfire'. Complaints were raised at the next morning's 'circle' (begun after a ritualised passing of smouldering, purifying sage). The assembly was reminded that the Apache elders had requested that there be no alcohol on the Mountain. Someone proposed a resolution to this effect. (As early as the 1991 rendezvous in Vermont, activists worried that the alcohol-fuelled party atmosphere at movement gatherings would alienate those Native American activists who decry alcoholism and its contributions to cultural genocide.)

A majority were willing to pass a resolution disapproving of alcohol consumption. The outnumbered opposition, however, was difficult to budge. Virtually all of the debate centred around whether alcohol consumption was compatible with respect for the sacred people – the Apaches and other indigenous nature peoples – and the sacred mountain itself.

Among the most prominent voices was a young American Indian Movement activist named Angel Salazar. Appealing for abstention from alcohol, he articulated two arguments often repeated thereafter: drinking is disrespectful to the mountain itself, and to the indigenous peoples of this continent, whose nature-beneficent cultures are threatened with extinction by the dominant European culture. "In our hearts we don't want you to drink," he entreated, "look to your heart. Look to respect these natural places." "If your family is into the bottle ... you'll respect that by not drinking ... You're supposed to be our allies, not our enemies, and you can't be our allies if you don't help us here."

At this point, the debate went back and forth. "As an anarchist," a woman helping to block a resolution against drinking explained, "I don't want any restrictions. Even if we make restrictions, they will be ignored." Several others agreed loudly, clapping and exclaiming 'ho', ironically using a mode of agreement borrowed from Native Americans. Passionately, and on the verge of tears, a man expressed dismay at such sentiments, "There are lots of native nations watching us. Many won't come here because of the alcohol, because of their fear" of us, due to our reputation for alcohol abuse. "We're talking about [risking an alliance with] six million indigenous people in North America!"

This plea did not convince those ideologically opposed to any official position: "We don't want to make laws about this stuff. It should come from the heart." Verbalising his disbelief, another impassioned appeal followed, "We're arguing about whether or not to respect a mountain. What's going on here? Are we going to respect the mountain or not?" Another confessed to feeling bad that she drank alcohol the previous night,

"I've prayed and asked the Mountain for forgiveness" she exclaimed, "we can learn a lot from this mountain – and alcohol gets in the way."

To all this another woman replied incredulously, dismissing the notion that the mountain has an opinion, "The mountain doesn't care if we drink or not." Another woman rejoindered that to deny the mountain has a perspective is "a white view," arguing "we also have people in our tribe hurting themselves with alcohol" and concluding that "out of respect for the mountain we should not drink."

Despite occasional interjections opposing the resolution against alcohol consumption, the majority relentlessly mounted their case for it. A wiccan priestess who had facilitated diverse forms of ritual practice in the movement began by expressing her empathy for those who want to drink, "I come from a Catholic and a pagan perspective. In both, drinking is sacramental." Normally I'd rebel against rule makers, she continued, "But here, this is some one else's church. It's right for them, in their church, to ask us not to drink – just as I would ask them not to use tobacco, their sacrament, in many of our pagan ceremonies." She also reminded the assembly that Ola Cassadore Davis, the Apache elder leading the opposition to the telescopes, had requested that each morning and night, they all take a moment alone to listen to the Spirit of this mountain. "If we do that," she suggested to much clapping and many 'Hos!' "that voice will make the decision for us."

Dennis Davies, a man who leads neo-pagan sweat ceremonies at some Earth First! retreats argued similarly, "It seems to me that, despite the fact that the entire Earth is sacred, this place is especially sacred. We must remember why we're here, what our duty is. Respect is not too much to ask."[10] A woman agreed, noting that "We've drawn inspiration from their cultures – it's the least we can do – we're talking about helping them to survive." Another woman argued that there had been too much talking about what 'I' want, not enough about what's good for the Earth or what's good for "the sacred alliance with the native peoples here." These appeals were greeted with expressions of approval by at least ninety percent of the approximately two-hundred assembled activists.

After a dissenter again inveighed against more rules, Daniel Zapata, a long-term American Indian Movement activist, stepped forward to state that his people have substances like peyote to alter consciousness, but "the bottle symbolises the destruction of our people. If you want to help the family, you have to be in solidarity" with us in this struggle too, he insisted. He concluded by grounding his anti-drinking argument in the sacrality of the Mountain, reasoning "If we are to respect this mountain you have to respect our bodies that come from it."

Shortly thereafter, Calvin Hecocta, a Paiute from southern Oregon and another long-term American Indian Movement activist who, in his case, had worked closely

[10] Several months later during an interview in the Angeles National Forest in Southern California (10 February 1994), Davies expressed confusion, "Some Indians think that 'the red road can save the world'. Some think its 'cultural genocide'. I'm really confused." I'm trying to prevent the conflict by "moving to neo-pagan sweats [and because they] correlate well with my Celtic ancestor's beliefs." Organisers of many

with Earth First! activists since 1989, exclaimed, "I don't want to have to go home and report that we spent so much time talking about chemical dependence [and] respect for Native Americans. I want to talk about strategies to make respect for the land happen." Expressing his sense of kinship with the land and its inhabitants, he made a variety of observations: the tree people, the bird people, are listening, "These peoples have to decide if they want you back ..." "Think about, when you're leaning against a tree, you're leaning against a relative ..." "I came here to promote community; to pray; to understand that it's all alive."

After a long discourse he returned to the central debate: To be warriors you have to do the [ceremonies] to purify your body. Keep in mind that you are teachers, he urged, "We need powerful minds and spirits to be real warriors ... The trees don't need [alcohol, you don't] either." Ominously, he warned that alcohol jeopardises the alliance, "I'll oppose you coming to sacred mountains if I know you bring alcohol here."

What is striking about this discourse, especially the views expressed by these Indian activists (and by the Apache elders at other times and places), was that they *expected* the Earth First! activists to respect their religious practices *and the mountain itself*. Yet there is disagreement and ambivalence about Earth First!ers and other non-Indians borrowing specific rituals. Nevertheless, a central part of their religious practice is the consecration and veneration of sacred places (in this case, Mt. Graham), and clearly, they expected their allies to conform to and practice this element of their religion through their own acts of consecration and veneration toward this mountain (Taylor 1995). Indeed, at this rendezvous, the Indians present were much more concerned that Earth First!ers act reverently toward the mountain, thereby respecting Native American religion and implicitly borrowing from it, than there was criticism or concern about the borrowing of elements of Native American religion.

6. An Alliance Workshop

This can be illustrated by describing a workshop of about 40 Earth First!ers and half a dozen Indians on the theme of the emerging Earth First!-Indian alliance, which immediately followed the morning circle. The workshop was led by two Earth First!ers and two Indian activists.

The session was introduced by Patricio, a young Indian activist who asserted that cultural genocide is the underlying theme of the workshop, urging the assembled Euroamerican activists to support their struggle for survival. We need you, he explained, because "you know the language of the enemy, lots of big words. You know a lot about nature. You get to go to the Universities. We need you to help us." But you can't

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neo-pagan sweats are trying to eliminate overt copying of what they consider to be the most 'orthodox' Indian forms, Davies explained, but he acknowledged that at home in Santa Cruz, he performs a more traditional, Indian-style lodge.

just be intellectuals, he implored, "you have to understand our spirituality" and our customs if we're going to work together.

Daniel Zapata also stressed how the Indian community needed the talents of educated earth peoples. He described how alcohol has separated many Indians from the earth, that he himself had been struggling with alcohol for ten years, and that his participation in the Sun Dance helped him realise that he should seek an honourable death, not in a brown bottle, but "in an act of resistance" against those who would destroy his culture and all their non-human relations.

Zapata then described prophesies that had been emerging among the Sun Dancers and in other Native American communities. "We're seeing many prophesies saying the same thing. This is a most critical time. We all have a purpose and a meaning here." He explained that the elders of the Sun Dance believe "all struggles were one struggle," and that if we "sage ourselves off [and] sit in a circle [we can] work it out." Therefore "go to the sweat lodges, purify yourselves – the medicine people are saying the time is at hand." Later in the discussion he again urged the assembly, "Go out, get naked ... come to the sweat lodges, pray with the pipe. Give me some of that Earth First! religion! But don't do that with a bottle in your hand. Act not out of guilt, what's done is done."[11]

Several times, during interviews with different Native American activists, I was invited to attend a Sun Dance following the rendezvous, including by Tom Bedonie, a spokesperson for the Traditional Independent Dineh (Navajo) Nation (as identified by his business card.). He stressed that one must bring a proper spiritual attitude and that those attending would be questioned before admission.[12] Here the concern was not that Euroamericans should eschew sharing in Native American ceremony, but rather, that they do so sincerely. It seemed to be assumed that those in the Mt. Graham resistance, who were fighting for endangered species and for the religious freedom of the Apaches, would be worthy – hence the invitations.

Such invitations to sweat lodges or Sun Dances confused some of those assembled who were familiar with criticisms of Euroamerican participation in such ceremonies. One man asked if this were appropriate. Another explained that he was confused about his own identity – detached from his own heritage which at one time was pagan. He

[11] In July 1992, after the national Earth First! Rendezvous in the San Juan mountains of southwestern Colorado, a young Dineh (Navajo) man attended the demonstration. He indicated to me that the elders were prophesying that a group of Caucasians would join with them to defend all their relations and help reharmonise life on earth. During the May 1994 Transpersonal Association conference in Killarney Ireland, Marilyn Tewa, a spokeswoman for the traditional Hopi elders, mentioned Hopi prophesy about a fair skinned one who would come and be the leader toward the fourth world, and that they were to welcome him. But the wrong one came, she said, implying that a fair skinned people may yet come and act in solidarity with native people. But she urged caution about borrowing Indian ways, "when you use Native people's ways to try to regain your spirituality you could be, you know, seriously damaging yourself, because you don't know how to do it. And you could destroy the elements too."

[12] When reviewing this paper Catherine McHale pointed out that there is a rule against alcohol at the Sun Dance and also at Lodges.

said he didn't want to imperil Indian spirituality. Patricio responded "lots of my people too have forgotten their roots. I've made alliances with all sorts of people everywhere." But he nevertheless urged them to "try to go back to your traditions, your family places. Know yourself first," before borrowing our practices. Salazar also expressed his clear preference that the whites strive first to return to their own pre-Christian, pagan traditions.[13]

To this another man complained that he can't go back and find a Druid for a teacher because non-Indian paganism has been systematically suppressed. Our teachers have all been internal, but this is not enough, he explained. Plaintively he continued "We need to turn to Native American elders. How else [given the extermination of our own pagan heritage] can we find an earth way? We're asking how to live on this land, and we're not trying to rip-off Native Americans."

Salazar responded "I'm not saying you are," while another Earth First!er declared that Druidary is alive in England and Ireland, recommending a new book on Druidary as a way to steward nature. To this, after agreeing that it is valuable to seek one's roots, another man insisted that now, we are all from Turtle Island, "the visions and prophesies are here now; the dream time is for all people."[14]

Jim O'Conner, who often facilitates Council of All Beings rituals at Earth First! gatherings, injected another idea, that Earth First! itself was a tribe developing its own nature spirituality. Although he borrows from Native American religion, he insists that he is in a different tribe, "I'm an Earth First!er," he proclaimed. Lone Wolf Circles, another Earth First!er involved in facilitating Earth First! ritualising, also thinks that Earth First!ers are developing their own form of tribal nature religion and that, in the alliance between Indians and Earth First!ers, both can contribute to each other's spirituality. He believes that a prerequisite to such reciprocity is a recognition that both Indian and Earth First! spiritual practices deserve respect.

The alliance workshop was capped when Calvin Hecocta suggested that the key to spirituality "is to go out and talk to the land." That is how we learn about spirituality, he explained. We've been programmed to wait for others to guide us, but you find it within your own spirit. Don't wait for guidance. Only the Creator can do it. Do vision quests, be alone. Go talk to creation. Ask for permission to enter. All the trees are watching you. After watching you, the trees will pray for you, they will help you. Go out alone, don't announce it, it's a personal step. He concluded:

> I'm on a search. I've had a dream that somewhere in this land – we'll focus on the biggest occupation of a mountain or a river, with three to five

[13] As mentioned previously, this preference, that non-Indians first explore their own heritage as a spiritual resource, is widely shared among the Indians whom I have heard discuss this issue.

[14] This is a good example of what bothers critics of appropriation: by mixing the 'dream time' notion (borrowed from the aboriginal peoples of Australia) with the Turtle Island name for this continent (borrowed from American Indians) this statement reveals how the borrowed amalgamations are not site-specific, and thus, have little to do with the traditions they purport to revere.

> thousand people, to prove a point, that this place, all of it, all the beings, are so important that we'll protect it. I'm searching for that place now. A major occupation will take place. A place the government and multinational [corporations] want most. Will you be the Earth people? Let's show them what resistance is. [Shouts of approval.] We do share an alliance of nations, the tree nation, plant nations, animal nations, people nations. Raise your hands in solidarity with the whole world, in the creators. Let's show them what the spirit of people is. The children deserve more than clearcuts ... Let's raise the spirit and conscience of this whole country and find a place we can all converge on. I'm a firm believer in *no compromise*!

7. Dennis Martinez: Ambivalence, Culture Cops, and Hot Heads

A month prior to this workshop, in the Sinkyone Wilderness of Northern California, I spoke with Dennis Martinez, who is a board member of the Society for Ecological Restoration and a Native American (an O'odham-Chicano) activist involved with the Takelma Intertribal Project and the American Indian Cultural Center, located in southern Oregon.[15] Martinez advocates the use of 'traditional ecological knowledge' or 'Indian stewardship' as a model for land management. He has fought alongside those members of the small Indian bands of Northern California who have sought to preserve sacred places in northern California wilderness areas. In such struggles, Martinez has worked closely with Northwestern Earth First! activists. Consequently, he is well aware that many of these activists are drawn to Native American spiritual practices.

During the interview, after he mentioned favorably the poetry of Gary Snyder, I asked him to respond to Snyder's view that, because animistic perceptions and shamanism are prevalent wherever monotheism is not, no one province or tradition has a monopoly on such spiritualities. Martinez noted that Indians have a legitimate concern about non-Indians introducing "other cultural influences" when participating in Indian ceremonies and that given the diverse threats to Native American cultural survival, such blending can be destructive. Nevertheless, he acknowledged Snyder's point about the universality of nature spirituality:

> Everything is alive and has a spirit ... it's universal, that's true, all tribal people [have this experience]. [But] also, you don't have go to Indian ceremonies to communicate with the spirits of this land, or go to sweat lodge, or things like that. In the old days, the [Indian] people used to do a lot more alone-type stuff; ceremonies are a lot more public today than they

[15] Most of the following is from an interview with Dennis Martinez, Sinkyone Wilderness, Northern California, 6 June 1993. A few additional points of information were added during a telephone interview

> used to be. It's really kind of dangerous to [go more public] because you're open to all sorts of other cultural influences. But the real thing is that you, as a spiritual sovereign, and the Creator, and the spirits of the land, you can talk to [them], ... It's a matter of going and believing that nature is sentient and can respond to you and has a spirit that can respond to you. That's what it's all about. You don't need a group ... ceremony ... [or] ritual to do it. There are certain things that come out of that that are powerful, and healing takes place, but to communicate as a Native, you can do that alone in the woods ... The old people always spent a lot of time alone ... There are Indians who say that white people can go back to their European [pagan] roots, but for all practical purposes the ties to that land were gone a very long time ago. [But] you don't have to go the Indian way ... [or] resurrect Celtic traditions to be spiritual, it's all very simple, you can just go direct back to the land.[16]

I then reiterated Churchill's critique of non-Indian borrowing and profiteering from Native American spiritual practices and suggested that even Churchill, and certainly the Traditional Elders Circle (which has condemned such profiteering), seemed to leave room for respectful, not-for-profit participation in, and learning from, Native American spirituality and wisdom (Churchill 1990: 94–98).[17] Martinez replied,

> I don't know any medicine people, from South Dakota or Minnesota, or Sedona Arizona who don't have mostly white people going to their sweat

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on 28 April 1995, after Mr. Martinez reviewed an earlier draft of this paper.

[16] This applies not just to non-Indians. He mentioned that many young Indians, partly in an effort to resolve crises of identity, are now going to ceremonies like the Sun Dance. Martinez thinks this is good. But he also believes that they could just go and be alone in nature, and "you don't need Indian ceremonies to do that."

[17] Churchill approvingly quotes Russell Means, "As to white people who think it's cute, or neat or groovy or keen to hook up with plastic medicine men, to subsidise and promote them, and claim you and they have some 'right' to desecrate our spiritual traditions, I've got a piece of news for you. You have *no* such right. Our religions are *ours*. Period. We have very strong reasons for keeping certain things private, whether you understand them or not. And we have every human right to deny them to you, whether you like it or not" (Churchill 1990: 98). But in quoting a traditional Indian elder, Churchill shows some ambivalence by assuming that there is an authentic Indian spiritual wisdom of value to non-Indians: "Oren Lyons, a traditional chief of the Onondaga Nation [complains that] 'Non-Indians have become so used to all this hype on the part of impostors and liars [fake Indian spiritual leaders,] that when a real Indian spiritual leader tries to offer them useful advice, he is rejected. He isn't "Indian" enough for all these non-Indian experts on Indian religion' " (Churchill 1990: 94). Churchill also cites Lyon's proposed solution:

"The bottom line here ... is that we have more need for intercultural respect today than at any time in human history. And nothing blocks respect and communication faster and more effectively than delusions by one party about another. We've got ... problems which threaten the survival of the planet. Indians and non-Indians must confront these problems together, and this means we must have honest dialogue, but this dialogue is impossible so long as non-Indians remain deluded about things as basic

> lodge. But there are many who only have Indians, but even those teachers have white people involved in the ceremony at some point, so I would say that horse is out of the barn and it's too late to close the door, but you have to direct the process.

Martinez seemed sad that the horse *was* out of the barn, but nevertheless was hopeful that the outcome could be positive. Martinez believes however, that it is unlikely the outcome will be positive unless "legitimate medicine people" oversee the more widespread extension of Native American spirituality.

Martinez does not think, however, that the danger is people *selling* the practices: "that will come back on them."[18] He related a story about Walter Bresette, a member of the Red Cliff band of the Lake Superior Anishinabe (Chipewa), a prominent defender of treaty rights and co-founder of the Green Party in Wisconsin, who forged alliances between environmentalists and Native Americans in the Great Lakes region.[19] When someone asked about whites taking the spiritual ways, Bresette recounted a time when he attended a pow wow immediately after being called a "woods nigger" by the rednecks in Northern Wisconsin. There he witnessed an Indian man verbally assailing a white woman for reading Tarot cards. "Walter started listing all the things in the pow wow that were modern and not traditional, and he said, 'how do we know that the Spirit hasn't told her to do it, she has the right to pursue the calling'." Martinez commented, "That's a real spiritual person talking. Most culture cops are not personally very spiritual people ... I don't believe in culture cops."

Martinez understands why people are upset, of course: It seems like their religion is "the last thing [Indian] people have that's theirs." He agrees that the introduction of non-Indian influences can be destructive. And he understands why people think that the commercialism of Indian practices is dangerous, why people are "uptight" about money changing hands, "even though in the old days there was always an exchange for healing." But, he insisted,

> really spiritual people are not culture cops, they don't exclude. The bitterness is understandable. But the commercialism will come back on those who abuse the ways. You have to have faith in the Spirit. It's not a human thing, it's a spiritual thing. People everywhere are too removed from that idea of what spiritual is. Spiritual people are scattered evenly throughout all ethnic, racial and cultural groups. [Although there is a lot of anger about

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as Indian spirituality" (Churchill 1990: 94).

[18] Several Native Americans I have interviewed since this gathering spontaneously expressed a similar sentiment, although without the additional statement that it is dangerous to accept money for such involvement. For some Native Americans, the danger of misusing Indian ritual inheres to the abuser: she or he who engages in rituals without proper motivation, training, or connection to the community.

[19] Anishinabe is the term this Indian nation generally prefers, but they are better known as the Chippewa in the United States and as the Ojibwa in Canada. For an example of Bresette's work in

> feeling ripped-off, Martinez concluded that, in] the Indian way, you pray for everybody ... The real tragedy is that the really spiritual people, the elders, are dying; and that there are too many hotheads.[20]

8. Vision Quests – for a Fee

I have entered into the discussion of the appropriation of Native American spirituality with trepidation, cognizant of the legitimate fears, sensitivity, and anger such appropriation arouses. Certainly there are examples within the deep ecology movement, including within Earth First!, that are troubling for anyone concerned about the flourishing of Native American peoples and cultures.

During the spring of 1993, for example, Lone Wolf Circles (mentioned above as one who thought that Indians and Earth First!ers were tribal nature peoples who could learn from one another), and a group calling itself the 'EarthWays Tribe', advertised a series of wilderness workshops. Some of these dealt with practical wilderness skills, others apparently borrowed from Native American spiritual practices. The brochure described Lone Wolf as a shaman "of Nordic descent" who "draws from twenty years of visionary wilderness experience to teach a consciousness once common to all peoples." Lone Wolf was to lead vision quests and rites of passage, drawing on "traditional tracking skills, ceremonial sweats ... a pipe ceremony ..., ritual, drumming, walking meditation, personalised study of the medicine wheel [including the mapping of one's growth on it], and the intensity of the wilderness experience [itself] to reconnect, to remember our *place* in the sacred flux ..." The flyer explained that "*The quests* end

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building alliances (Whaley and Bresette 1994).

[20] In our 28 April 1995 telephone interview, Mr. Martinez said that he did not want to be perceived as taking one side or the other in the controversy over borrowing. He has increasingly heard his Native American colleagues discuss the "aggressive defense of the ceremonies," and understands their concerns. Although he sees a danger from "undue influence from non-Indians," however, he remains ambivalent. When he looks at threats to Native American survival he views the market economy with its insatiable desire to consume the land and her creatures as the number one threat to Native American survival. The borrowing of the ceremonies is not much of a threat, he told me, compared to the severing of Indians from their lands and from life itself. Consequently, he views the defense of the treaties as among the most important issues because the treaties represent "reserved rights" to a land base – the preservation of which is the most critical cultural survival issue. His highest priority is to protect Indian lifeways on their aboriginal land base.

One key reason that Martinez is less categorical in his views than are some critics is that he has seen how some of the criticised phenomena help Indian people and contribute to the resurgence of Native American cultures. He personally has participated in ceremonies from many places and considers himself something of a pan-Indian. He told me that eighteen years ago a Lakota sweat lodge led by White Cloud (in Oakland, California, away from the Lakota land base) turned him away from alcoholism and facilitated his return to his Indian roots. Moreover, he has seen how sweat lodges in the Lakota tradition that are held in prisons have helped many Indians and are contributing to Indian "reculturation." Martinez provides an important assessment of this issue because, unlike the least compromising critics, he is willing to consider the possible positive aspects of the phenomena in question.

with silent time on a power spot, and for those who are willing, a solo of one to four nights on the Kachina Cliffs, places of animate spirit."

Perhaps anticipating objections, the brochure also asserted, in a way reminiscent of Gary Snyder's defence of white shamanism that, "throughout the history of humankind, our primal ancestors have turned to the wilderness for instruction and empowerment. On every shimmering continent, indigenous Africans, Celts and Vikings all engaged in some form of Vision Quest, instigating and celebrating the transitions in an individual's life. As a result, the tribe was blessed with shared insights available nowhere but the source itself; raw, inspirited nature."

Lone Wolf planned to charge between $350 and $475 for these ceremonies, bringing down the wrath of several Earth First!ers who took to calling him a charlatan, mostly behind his back. One public rebuke, a scathing letter published in the *Earth First!* journal, clearly identified Lone Wolf in everything but name. The letter began by decrying the physical and cultural genocide waged against the native people of this land. Then, borrowing from Ward Churchill's classic attack on 'plastic medicine men', the author vented:

> Everywhere, (every-fucking-where) one looks plastic medicine men/ women and pseudo shamans are popping up calling up spirits like Kokopelli or selling sweat lodge ceremonies, vision quests or rites of passage. These new age morons ... are ripping off native culture and their naive new age groupies ... Sincerely practicing Native religious beliefs on an individual bases (sic) is not wrong, but exploiting Native religious beliefs for personal gain whether it be for money, or to get the pants or skirt off some naive new age wanna be is fucking wrong! (Lawhorn 1993: 3).

The letter's author concluded, "just because one is a long time EF! activist doesn't give one an unquestioned right to exploit Native American culture." (Lawhorn 1993: 3) The workshops did not occur and Lone Wolf's attempt to charge money for them was viewed as a mistake by many Earth First! activists, even those who value his contributions to tribal unity and spiritual ritualising.

I know of no other examples within Earth First! where activists charged for rituals inspired by Native American spirituality. Lone Wolf responded to these criticisms in the subsequent issue of *Earth First!*, arguing that there is

> a fine line ... between protecting the exclusivity and privacy of one's cultural processes and invalidating another's personal, [spiritual] connection [to the earth]. What of non-Indians who have grown up on the reservation, and call a particular tribal world-view their own? What should a non-Indian do if invited by a Native American to join a ceremony? The line is further blurred when we consider the ritual use of sweat lodges, drums and vision quests, which are common to primal peoples of every race and point of origin (Wolf 1993: 28).

Lone Wolf noted that most people "are of mixed lineage with no single point of origin to return to [and therefore] ... it doesn't serve anyone, or the Earth, to make them feel 'out of place'." Since "we have lost our Pleistocene shamans [and] have had our Celtic/Nordic rituals stolen from us" he continued, we must "listen to the elders of North America ... [after all] we have no elders to turn to for instruction, no rites to call [our] own." This is why

> the deep ecology and land based environmental communities have begun to fashion rituals relevant to ... the planet's dire straits ... So in base camps next to threatened forests, at river rendezvous, and even in county jails ... they piece together pieces of prayers, symbols and ideas. They draw from the universe to tap the power of the sacred circle, sweats and burning sage. They gather bagpipes, drums, rattles, a saxophone – and open themselves to giving voice to Spirit, to Gaia (Wolf 1993: 28).

Despite these rationales for borrowing from Native Americans, at the 1993 Earth First! rendezvous, after two Indian activists objected to a scheduled sweat lodge, and after Lone Wolf explained to these activists that medicine sweats were practiced "by my own Nordic and Sami ancestors," he nevertheless asked a Euroamerican friend to refrain from leading a sweat with his Plains-style medicine pipe. Instead, he urged him to conduct the sweat "with only things the meadow provides. Act out no ritual that doesn't arise from our own tribe and our own experience and sing no song in any language not channelled through us by the spirit." Describing his approach in *Earth First!*, Lone Wolf explained that in this exhortation,

> I was giving voice to sentiments I'd heard from [Winona LaDuke], a powerful native activist [who said], "It is essential that people reconnect with Earth-based religions, but many times people are trying to practice Lakota vision questions (sic) or other practices out of context. You can't practice Lakota without being in the context of a Lakota community" (Wolf 1993: 28).

These apparently contradictory impulses – defending the borrowing of Native American wisdom and practices while eliminating obvious Native American elements in a sweat ceremony when objections arose – illustrate how difficult it has been for Lone Wolf Circles and others to appropriate elements from Native American spirituality while simultaneously appeasing those critical of such appropriation. Recent events suggest that the problem may become perennial. Sweat lodges were again controversial at the February 1995 Earth First! activists' conference near Austin, Texas. One planned sweat was labelled 'spiritual – not Native American', a second was set aside for women 'in their moon', and a third for children and parents. A fourth was labelled a 'party sweat' and scheduled because some of the organisers felt that activists who do not consider themselves to be religious should have an opportunity to 'enjoy' the lodge.

At a morning circle, Lakota activist Guy Lopez objected to the party sweat. He asserted that this sweat was sacrilegious (especially since alcohol was permitted) and was more than enough to ensure that Native American traditionalists would not work with Earth First!. In a low-key manner, he nonetheless proclaimed that he was "ready for an action," and threatened to tear down the lodge and widely publicise the offense.

In response, a meeting was arranged with the lodge builder who, upon hearing the objections, decided to dismantle the lodges. He said that he viewed this area as holy ground and he apologised for giving any offense. Still, he defended the lodges arguing that, as an anthropologist, he knows that all religions borrow. He added a personal testimony regarding how sweat lodges had transformed his own consciousness and bonded him to the Earth. Nevertheless, by the end of the conference, the organising committee had drafted a formal apology that was delivered to Mr. Lopez.[21]

Mr. Lopez responded by supporting the decision to take down the lodges, indicating that he did not want such barriers to cooperative relations. But he also indicated that he was not opposed to their participation in sweat lodge ceremonies, only sacrilegious ones. He told the gathering that indigenous people could have been present, "blessing this meeting and holding sweats here for you." There is nothing like having traditional elders support your work. Without such support, he said, something is missing here. Underscoring that alcohol and a women's moon time should never be mixed with the sweat ceremonies, he warned that if the American Indian Movement were present, the lodges would have been dismantled. He concluded by offering the hope that these difficulties could be overcome.[22]

9. A Mountain Hermit

Lou Gold provides a contrasting example. A burnt-out social activist and professor of urban sociology, Gold retreated to the Pacific Northwest seeking personal healing and regeneration. There he heard a talk by Oren Lyons, a traditional chief of the Onondaga Nation. As Gold recalled it, Lyons said, "Indians are the only people who speak for the trees, for the water, for all beings, and when you lose that, [you've lost everything]." Lyons inspired Gold to get involved politically and soon he was arrested and convicted for blockading logging trucks.

Gold rejected the condition of his probation, that he stay out of the forest, telling the judge, "*The forest is my church*, and you can't restrict my religion... I'm going

[21] Although the organisers originally decided to publish the apology in *Earth First!*, this decision was later reversed and the apology was not published.

[22] The following summer at the national Earth First! rendezvous in Northern California, sweat ceremonies were back but renamed 'sacred saunas' in an effort to assert a Northern European heritage for them. Yet activists often forgot the new convention and misspoke, expressing embarrassment when they used the newly-taboo 'sweat lodge' term. In January 1996 a traditional elder was recruited to lead the sweat ceremony at the Activist conference near Tucson, Arizona, revealing an effort to implement the guideline previously suggested by Guy Lopez.

to go back in there." He had brought Ed Little Crow, a Native American friend with whom he had participated in sweat lodge ceremonies "to witness to my authenticity and sincerity." He also issued a press release as he set off for a vigil on Bald Mountain (within the Kalmiopsis wilderness of southwestern Oregon) explaining that it was "for peaceful and religious purposes."

Gold spent 56 days on the mountain, falling in love with it. In an act of consecration, he set up a medicine wheel and began praying every sunset on the mountaintop, resolving to return every summer as an act of religious devotion. He recalled magnificent discoveries during a second summer on Bald Mountain. One afternoon, standing in the medicine wheel during a thunderstorm with "lightening ... striking everywhere, arms wide open ... singing at the top of my lungs ... a makeshift Indian chant ... my version of it ... as these lightning bolts were hurtling everywhere." Afterward the mountain settled down into this outrageous peacefulness:

> [revealing] what I had been looking for, that in the wild ... it's not an issue of peace, not a choice between violence and non-violence, [after all], what can be more violent than a raging thunderstorm ..., at the same time, what can be more peaceful than that gentle calm after the storm. And I looked at [everything around me] and I saw them as equally valuable. And I said, damn, I haven't been looking for peace, I've been looking for harmony. What the natural world represents is a harmony between elements. And I looked around at the medicine wheel, and I suddenly had another level of awareness ... that it was all in the medicine wheel; the west is the darkness, the color is black, the east is the sunrise, and the color is yellow, the south is a peaceful place of young growing things, and the north is a fierce place of struggle. And what the medicine wheel said was that we had to walk the whole circle, that we couldn't get around the circle by preferring the light over the dark, or by preferring the calm security of growth and gentleness to the fierce struggle of the winter.

This experience led Gold to conclude that the "challenge to human beings was to walk in balance to experience [all these elements] intelligently. Expect the snake to be the snake, don't be angry at it." Gold recounted that through this experience he saw that "the expression of goodness in a natural system was the intricate web of life itself, it included everything, including the fact that one organism eats another organism ... it was all good."

Gold was not practicing Native American religion but was influenced and inspired by it; yet he did not do so lightly. When I asked him how Native American religion had influenced him, he initially denied that he knew much about it. Nevertheless, he stated that native ceremonies had played an important role in his path to forest activism. Shortly after moving to Oregon he attended Lakota-based sweat ceremonies with Ed Little Crow, reporting that "the sweat lodge just connected me with Earth,

the mother." After describing the ceremony, and how the heat forces one to hug the earth, Gold explained how it enhances one's connection to the earth, "it's like you're sitting there in the womb of the Earth, and the rocks are actually referred to as the Ancient Ones ..."

He recalled how when standing on the top of Bald Mountain, he felt the need for a ritual, and that making a medicine wheel seemed appropriate. On the mountain:

> you want to talk to the four directions, to the sky above, to the Earth below ... it just seemed natural and comfortable ... The most important thing that I do [to ritually bond with the mountain] is going up to the mountain top every sunset, lighting some cedar and sage, walking the circle, and doing a little ritual, in which I take the West for the darkness, the North for the struggle, the East for the vision and the light, the South for the ability to grow, and the sky above and the Earth below, and then I acknowledge that there is something greater than me, the Mystery, the Great Spirit. And I enact a relationship by doing the ritual, and that in fact creates the relationship.

Gold believes that ritual is very different depending on how grounded people are in their relationship with the Earth. He believes that usually, hippies doing sweat lodges are not grounded in such a relationship, but that it is different with an Indian medicine man. Even though Gold obviously prefers that Indian spiritual leaders lead sweat ceremonies, in his view, not all ceremonies must be led by them. "People like my ceremony on Bald Mountain ... this is my tenth summer, and I have seen people do the ritual [even] in driving storms."

Many Native American ways and ideas "just seem comfortable" to Gold. "I use them and try to do so in ways that will be of service to those who are listening." Nevertheless, Gold said that "I don't consider myself a follower of Native American religion ... my spirituality is soup, its stew ... but when it's time to find the right metaphors, I find [Native American] metaphors come easily to me [and have become] a source of genuine religious experience." Native American cosmologies "give me an ability to access what I'm calling ecological consciousness ... feeling the relationship to all this magnificent stuff we call the creation."

When asked if he uses such metaphors in his talks in order to promote ecological consciousness, Gold answered, "Sure, if my mission were to promote detachment, I'd go the Buddhist direction, but my mission is teaching people about our relationship to the Earth, and trying to foster the development of an ecologically based consciousness." Thus, all "metaphors and ceremonies and rituals from the aboriginal world [are important], but the only one[s] I have access to are Native American."

Furthermore, Gold explained, Native American symbols are preferable to the philosophical and abstract parlance of deep ecology. Promoting spiritual breakthroughs is a poetic challenge, "I'm not going to stand up in front of a group of people and talk

about biocentrism, because it won't reach into them [affectively]." It is more effective, Gold insists, to use the Lakota medicine wheel "to assert a vision of the harmony of all parts." This Euroamerican deep ecology activist believes that Native American symbols and ceremonies are the most effective means of tapping into human spiritual potential and facilitating activism in defence of the natural world.[23] From this perspective, the appropriation of at least some elements of Native American religion is an important prescription for the future harmony of life on the planet.

When I asked him if he has been criticised by Native Americans for anything related to his affinity for Native American spirituality, Gold replied, "not at all [although] I was worried about it." He then told a story: "There is an incredible song from the Sun Dance. I tried to sing it, but couldn't remember it well, and I evolved it my own way. Later [at a sweat lodge], I asked to sing the Sun Dance song the wrong way, and my Indian friends said 'ok'. Then I sang it as I had done on Bald Mountain. Afterward they said, 'Lou you didn't sing the song the wrong way, you sang the Bald Mountain song the right way'." Invariably, Gold said, Indians who hear my [public presentations] say, good work, keep doing it. When I asked Ed Little Crow how to pray with the medicine wheel on Bald Mountain he said, "there are two ways to do it. Do it like your grandfather taught it, or come from your heart. People will know and will recognise it [as authentic], and you'll know."

10. Summary and Reflections on the Ethics of Appropriation

Moral reflection on the appropriation of Native American spirituality requires an adequate understanding of the diverse ways it occurs and the complex social contexts from which it emerges. By illustrating the complexity of the controversy, the preceding examples erode quick judgments about such appropriation, I will presently offer some reflections on the ethics of appropriation, some of which may be controversial. They are designed to spur constructive dialogue about the ethics of appropriation and promote understanding among those engaged in the defence of diverse lands and cultures.

There certainly are controversial examples within radical environmental subcultures of the appropriation of Native American religion; even though these groups are generally sympathetic to if not romantic about Native Americans. Yet as we have seen, many of these activists express concern about cultural imperialism and strenuously object to any profiteering associated with borrowing Indian religious practices, and still others object to any borrowing whatsoever.[24]

[23] Gold explained that his effort is not only to alert people to the scientific information about how we are harming the earth, but also "to alert people to the reality of magic and mystery ... that they can in fact have a relationship to [the creation]." Interview with Lou Gold, Madison Wisconsin, 26 March 1992.

[24] For example, during planning sessions prior to the 1995 Earth First! activist conference, some activists objected to the planned sweats, later regretting they had not done so more assertively.

Generally speaking, I have not found comprehensive attempts to appropriate Native American religious practice but rather a piecemeal borrowing from such practices and rhetoric. The activists engaged in such borrowing do not presume that they are actually practicing *Native American* religion. Rather, they tend to believe that they are developing their own tradition, that their 'tribe' is different from but has spiritual affinity with what they take to be the spiritual perceptions of traditional Native Americans, namely, a sense that the land and all its inhabitants are sacred, related as kin, capable of communicating, and worthy of defence.

Similarly, I have not found Euroamerican Earth First!ers pretending to be Indians or Native American spiritual leaders, as has occurred within the New Age movement. The closest thing to this was an occasion when, at an Earth First! women's gathering, a Euroamerican woman led a sweat after asserting that she was in training under a Native American spiritual leader. Given the controversial nature of such occurrences, the desire by Earth First!ers to build an alliance with Indian traditionalists and activists and recent confrontations about sweat lodges, this occurrence would be less likely today.

A somewhat similar case involves the few Earth First!ers who consider themselves to be shamans and who engage in what they take to be Shamanic practices. Such claims are greeted with suspicion and even derision by some within the movement.[25] Nevertheless, those experimenting with Shamanic ritualising can plausibly argue that no ethnic group can claim sole ownership of such spiritual practice. This is amply documented in ethnographic literature.

Although there have been examples of borrowing within Earth First! that are insensitive to or ignorant of native concerns, thoughtful reflection on these phenomena, and the effort to construct mutually respectful relations between Indian and non-Indians, requires more than demanding that people abstain from practices that some (or many) find offensive. An effort to resolve these issues also requires that those most hostile to cross-cultural borrowing acknowledge, among other things, that the blending of myth, symbol and rite is a common and rarely escaped dimension of religious life – especially in the modern period – since few societies today remain insular.[26]

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[25] Such ritual practices tend to occur among a religious elite. Partly because such practices are not highly regarded by some Earth First!ers, most Shamanic ritualising and experimentation takes place at times and locations separate from the major Earth First! gatherings, which prioritise activism.

[26] I have in mind here writers like Churchill 1990 (see 257, 252) and Native American intellectuals like Rayna Green who, at the 1993 meeting of the American Academy of Religion, in a panel on the themes of this paper, asserted that the "weight of history," namely, the ongoing theft from Native Americans by Euroamericans, is of such a magnitude that a sincere and permissible form of such borrowing is inconceivable. Such a view, while understandable at an affective level, is so overly broad that it provides little help for those trying to work out respectful relations between Indians and non-Indians in the complex social contexts in which these phenomena are found. In my judgement, since some borrowing and cross cultural influence is probably inevitable, it would likely be wiser for Native Americans to do as Dennis Martinez suggests, guiding the process as best they can toward the most acceptable forms. Indeed, this study provides evidence that this is precisely what is occurring at the level of popular religion in certain encounters between European and Native Americans.

The academic study of religion has focused significant attention on syncretic processes. The emerging consensus suggests that syncretism (the blending of elements of two traditions) and bricolage (amalgamations of many bits and pieces of diverse cultural systems) are prevalent in the production of religion, and that often these processes are contested and subject to negotiation (Stewart and Shaw 1994: 20; Droogers 1989: 7–25). David Chidester put vividly such an understanding when observing that conflict over the ownership of sacred symbols is so common that religion may be seen as "that dimension of culture involving the stealing back and forth of sacred symbols," when stealing is understood as a "shorthand designation for complex negotiations over the ownership of symbols" (Chidester 1968: 157, 137–162).

Many studies attend to status and power relations in such contestations over the ownership of sacred symbols. Simon Harrison described how in Melanesia deities and the rituals related to them are treated "as a category or property or wealth" and that thereby they have been safeguarded "from misappropriation from covetous outsiders" even occasionally by violence. Nevertheless, such rituals may for a price be divulged (either for exclusive use or as a performance entitlement) (Harrison 1993: 140–41, 156) and in diverse places ethnographers have found transfers of "property rights in rituals across cultural or ethnic boundaries," including among Native Americans (Harrison 1993: 140).

André Droogers has shown that opponents of syncretic processes are often resisting threats to their own hegemony over religious production (Droogers 1989: 7–25). In another provocative study, Harrison examined diverse contests over rituals, likening them to prestige goods in gift economies whereby rituals "symbolize their owner's identities and function to establish and maintain social relationships," thereby revealing the relative prestige and legitimacy of political actors (Harrison 1992: 225–226). Harrison concluded that focusing on the process of ritual acquisition, preparation, and staging, can "make the current state of a complex and shifting network of power relations apprehensible" (Harrison 1992: 225–226).

Charles Stewart and Rosalind Shaw suggested that, although it is important to attend to power differentials in these processes, it is not only colonisers and the relatively powerful who exercise agency in syncretic processes. They argued, drawing on studies of:

> religious synthesis in contexts of colonialism and other forms of ... exploitation, ... [that] syncretism may be ... a form of resistance because hegemonic practices are never simply absorbed wholesale through passive 'acculturation', at the very least, their incorporation involves some kind of transformation ... which converts them to people's own meanings and projects. In colonial contexts syncretism on the part of colonial subjects [can] have particularly subversive consequences.
>
> In many such contexts, the penetration of Western forms of capitalism and cultural hegemony has been – paradoxically – both subverted and promoted

> through syncretism. ... [Indeed,] the appropriation of dominance and the subversion of that dominance may be enacted at the same time, in the same syncretic act. Subversion may even be an unintended consequence of a syncretic process (Stewart and Shaw 1994: 20–21).[27]

The studies Stewart and Shaw summarised suggest that syncretism neither exclusively subverts nor reinforces a dominant order. Taken together, the academic study of syncretic processes and of ritual as intellectual property provide helpful background for considering arguments about the appropriation of elements from Native American religion. Specifically, these studies suggest that assumptions underlying some antipathy to appropriation are unfounded. Some critics of appropriation seem to assume, for example, that cultural traditions can or should be immutable and geographically enclosed. Such assumptions are historically naive and contain logic that would relegate all religion to the 'dustbin of history', unable to adapt to cultural and evolutionary developments.

But what of the legitimate fear, described previously, that the appropriation of Native American spirituality threatens and destroys Native American cultures by diluting or blending them into new forms? Based on such concerns, Ward Churchill, a controversial scholar and American Indian Movement activist, strongly condemned as "misplaced and sacrilegious" a series of pan-Indian Sun Dances (originating within Lakota culture but recently held on Navajo land in Arizona). Because, Churchill averred, Native American ritual is "both culturally and geographically specific," there is little if any room for new cultural work involving such pan-Indian ceremony (Churchill 1990: 207–281, esp. notes on pages 257, 252).[28] Churchill's critique is especially ironic since

[27] The analysis by Stewart and Shaw 1994 contains several case studies focusing on the agency of colonised peoples in syncretic processes. See Wolfgang Kempf, "Ritual, Power, and Colonial Domination: Male Initiation among the Ngaing of Papua New Guinea," 108–126. Kempf asserts that marginalised and colonised peoples assert their own meanings and resistance within syncretic processes and urges that we reject any notion of "traditional culture as a fixed, transmissible corpus in favour of that of an open system of ongoing cultural construction" without a fixed point of origin. Birgit Meyer in "Beyond Syncretism: Translation and Diabolisation in the Appropriation of Protestantism in Africa," 45–68, argues that anti-syncretists underestimate the agency of the less-powerful involved in these processes, that both mission and independent churches resisted missionary hegemony by inserting traditional religion and their own interests into their religious amalgamations. David Mosse in "The Politics of Religious Synthesis: Roman Catholicism and Hindu Village Society in Tamil Nadu, India," 85–107, describes a Hindu village society also using the appropriation process to their own ends. Jim Kiernan in "Variations on a Christian Theme: the Healing Synthesis of Zulu Zionism," 69–84, argues that syncretism involves "multiple instances of agency and power," 70.

[28] Churchill would likely condemn as well a Sun Dance held on the Eastern side of Mt. Hood in Oregon for violating his geographic-specificity rule. A multi-nation Indian encampment began in the late 1970s after a Lakota medicine man had a vision and sent an emissary to traditional elders of the Tygh band. This band has long considered the Mt. Hood forest to be sacred. But since their own culture had been nearly destroyed these elders endorsed the importing of the Lakota ways as part of an effort to preserve Indian identity. In 1983 the Anpo (a Lakota word for 'daybreak' or 'new day') Native American Cultural Youth Camp and Ceremonial Grounds was established and subsequently has been

he was credibly accused, including by prominent AIM activists, of not even being a Native American.[29]

Few native voices are as categorical as Churchill's. A much more common view among native activists is that it is the *non-Indian* appropriation of elements from native cultures that functions in a genocidal way, eroding cultural foundations and thereby fostering cultural disintegration and eventually, cultural annihilation. Borrowing is thus, according to this perspective, a *camouflaged* form of mass killing.[30] This claim poses a crucial empirical question, but it should not be accepted without compelling evidence. Although such views are provocative, little evidence has been provided to demonstrate that these phenomena are as destructive as sometimes claimed.

Providing clear empirical evidence, however, is difficult. It is hard enough for social scientists to tease out the variables that cause cultural decline.[31] Anishinabe intellectual and activist Winona LaDuke, however, has astutely described social processes whereby appropriation and even pan-Indian religious practice can threaten a native culture: When members of Indian nations that are at risk of losing their culture get distracted from their own tradition by the traditions of others – whether by the traditions of non-Indians or other Indians – they may well fail to learn the language and practices that constitute their own culture. Consequently, according to LaDuke, many Indians do not want their people participating in outside ceremonies, including pan-Indian ritual, and do not want non-Indian observers or participants either. For LaDuke, some Indian nations are strong enough to participate in pan-Indian ceremony, but others are not.[32]

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used for Sun Dances. It has become an important cultural resource for diverse Native Americans in the Portland region, and now serves as a staging area for resistance to logging.

Churchill might not approve but, according to Irma Araiza, an Apache and Anpo board member, "This is a prayer site. It is ancestral land to the Tygh Band indigenous people and they have given us their permission and their blessings to continue our ceremonies and youth camp there." As I write this (June 1996) the First Nation Survival Network, a group comprised primarily of Euroamerican radical environmentalists, is working with the Native Activists to defend this and other sacred sites in Oregon, such as Enola Hill which is located on the other side of Mt. Hood. (I am grateful to Andy Davis and others involved in the First Nation Survival Network for help gathering this information.)

[29] Some even suspect that he is a federal agent provocateur who, through his extremist views, is sowing dissent throughout Native America. For a scathing letter from the national American Indian Movement leadership re-affirming an earlier expulsion of Churchill and accusing him of acting like an agent provocateur, see American Indian Movement 1993: 12–13. See also DeMain 1994: 2–3 and Bradley 1994: 8–9. Despite Churchill's problematic status, his views have been influential and thus deserve serious consideration. To do otherwise would be to succumb to an *ad hominem* critique or the *genetic reasoning fallacy*.

[30] See "Bringing the Law Home" (Churchill 1990: 11–63), for Churchill's essay on genocide, esp. 11–15, which lays the foundation for the book's critique of US government policies as well as other cultural practices.

[31] Although I think empirical assessment is important, we should not underestimate the difficulties involved.

[32] This is how LaDuke explained Churchill's objection to pan-Indian ceremony when I asked her about it (interview in Killarney, Ireland, May 1994). She also explained that many smaller native nations

George Tinker, an Osage/Cherokee and Professor at the Iliff School of Theology in Denver, agreed with LaDuke that the New Age interest in Indian spirituality has "become a major destructive force in our Indian communities." Tinker identified several dynamics unleashed by the appropriation process that he believes are destructive: (1) The exposure of young Indians to the deep cultural individualism of Euroamericans leads them to misapprehend their own traditions by "learning their own ceremonial traditions through increasingly individualist eyes" (Tinker 1993: 122); (2) By tempting "many Indians to convert their spiritual tradition into career and economic development opportunities" as they "cater ... to the individualist needs of white New Age aficionados" (Tinker 1993: 122); and (3) By subtly changing the thinking of traditional people as they "accommodate the participation of white ... alien culture in ways that can be more easily understood and appropriated (or rather, misappropriated)" (Tinker 1993: 122). Consequently, "this meeting of cultures is in the final analysis harmful to Indian peoples and their tribal traditions" because it erodes the "cultural value of community and group cohesion that is important to virtually every indigenous people" (Tinker 1993: 122, 123).[33]

LaDuke and Tinker have advanced plausible arguments about how the processes of cross-cultural borrowing and blending might erode the cultural integrity of a native nation. Keeping such social processes in mind, and the legitimate fears they engender, it is still possible to raise cautions about the logic that may underlay these concerns, and critically examine whether such critiques are sometimes over broadly applied.

Some of the hostility to the appropriation of Native American spirituality, as well as to pan-Indian movements and ritualising, is based on understandings and assumptions about syncretism that need qualification. We might ask, for example: Is some of this antipathy based on simplistic assumptions that, in cross-cultural syncretic encounters, the cultures of dominant peoples prevail while 'pure' and 'authentic' traditions are destroyed? Are such views incompatible with current anthropological views of syncretic processes which speak "less about culture as syncretic than about culture as collage, as creolized, as fragmented ... [and even] as subversive hybrid invention"? (Stewart and Shaw 1994: 2).

Stewart and Shaw have urged attention to the agency of colonised and otherwise oppressed peoples because "synthesis, adaptations, assemblages, incorporations or appropriations are renegotiated and sometimes denied and disassembled" (Stewart and

view the Lakota (Sioux), whose practices have been influential in pan-Indian circles and borrowed widely by non-Indians, as spiritual imperialists. See also Dennis Martinez's concern about "other cultural influences" described previously.

LaDuke regularly criticises the appropriation of Native American religious practices by Euroamericans. Upon reading an earlier version of this paper, another Native American activist and intellectual who is less hostile to such appropriation urged me to "problematise" LaDuke's views by mentioning that her own struggle with her identity is influenced by having a Jewish mother and an Indian father, Vincent "Sun Bear" LaDuke, who during his life was actively involved in extending Native American ceremony to non-Indians. For Churchill on Sun Bear see *Indians are Us?*, pp. 252–253.

[33] These processes are "equally harmful to those well-meaning white seekers who ... hope to find

Shaw 1994: 6). Moreover, they have insightfully further problematised the understandings of authenticity and purity that typically underlie anti-syncretism:

> Anti-syncretism is frequently bound up with the construction of 'authenticity', which is in turn often linked to notions of 'purity' ... Yet 'authenticity' or 'originality' [do] not necessarily depend on purity. They are claimable as 'uniqueness', and both pure and mixed traditions can be unique. What makes them 'authentic' and valuable is a separate issue, a discursive matter involving power, rhetoric and persuasion. Thus both putatively pure and putatively syncretic traditions can be 'authentic' if people claim that these traditions are unique and uniquely their (historical) possession. It could [even] be argued ... that syncretic blends are more unique because [they are] historically unrepeatable (Stewart and Shaw 1994: 7).

By recognising the potential for agency among diverse social actors and by recognising that more unamalgamated traditions are not inherently more valuable than relatively 'pure' ones, we can see that caution is warranted when moving from descriptive to normative reflection about syncretic processes.

Certainly no one should intrude unwelcome into religious societies – whether borrowing from them or introducing innovations. Yet too often understandings of syncretism have embedded within them a simplistic anti-syncretistic ideology that assumes that, with syncretism, pure and authentic religious forms become amalgamated into impure and inauthentic constellations.[34] Such an understanding of syncretism, however common, is dangerous.[35] When people believe in pure, authentic forms of religion, lurking in the shadows are tendencies to repress the inauthentic and impure forms. Religious history is replete with examples where the logic of religious purity devolves into the repression of 'impure' religious practice. It is reasonable to wonder if assumptions about the inherent dangers of syncretism underlie recent threats to physically disrupt the ceremonies of those engaged in appropriating native ritual practices.

Some native activists (unlike some intellectuals and other activists) recognise that the idea of a 'pure' culture is problematic. At the meeting described previously addressing the Earth First!-native alliance, for example, after mentioning the prophesies regarding a coalition of peoples coming together to reharmonise life on earth, Angel Salazar noted that:

> The Aztec came from here, [they were] related to [the] Anasazi, they took lots of things from the Maya and Toltecs ... nothing is pure ... [unlike how

themselves on some Indian reservation," just as "the conquest has always been spiritually harmful to Euroamericans" (Tinker 1993: 123).

[34] The contributions in Droogers et. al. posit a relevant irony in suggesting that anti-syncretism's deepest roots are in Christian exclusivism.

[35] This discussion of the logic of 'syncretism' is indebted to David Chidester in various conversations.

> many Europeans believe] ... we just take from the Earth and everything is mixed, our bodies, and any instrument you play or any food you mix in, that's what we're about. We're mixing in with a lot of people who are trying to fight the same thing [industrial society], and it [the prophesied unity] is coming about.

Salazar's comments are especially suggestive in the light of the previous discussion of agency and negotiation in syncretic processes. His view about the blending of cultures, linked here to a prophesied alliance, may reflect both agency and reveal a form of negotiation. It may be that this prophesied alliance and Salazar's perspective on cultural amalgamation represent a strategic appeal for solidarity and reciprocity from the assembled Euroamerican activists.[36] Indeed, many of the reactions by Native Americans to the appropriation of elements from their cultures described in these pages could represent strategic negotiations designed to guide syncretic processes and/or gain compensation, in the form of political solidarity, for such appropriation.

The preceding considerations lead me to agree with Angel Salazar, that we should be reluctant to accept notions that contrast 'pure-authentic-unblended' with 'impure-unauthentic-blended' religion. It is difficult to conceive of how the logic of syncretism understood as a deviation from purity and authenticity can promote Native American cultural survival, let alone the freedom of religious practice generally.[37] There are better *arguments* to defend specific cultural traditions against unwelcome influences, such as those based on the right to self-determination or upon the value of preserving diversity in contestations about truth and virtue. There are also better *strategies* for defending cultural integrity than threatening to disrupt offensive syncretic ritualising.

Vine Deloria, for example, Native America's most prominent scholar, who earned advanced degrees in theology and law and whose 1972 book, *God is Red*, provided a classic account of Native American religious life and the threats to it (Deloria 1994), has explained how, in response to increasing Euroamerican appropriations of Native American spirituality, traditional Indians have increasingly withdrawn from ceremonies that have been appropriated by non-Indians (Deloria 1994: 38). Combined with strategies to secure access to the lands essential to their cultural survival (usually the more important and difficult endeavour), this strategic withdrawal takes responsibility for preserving traditions in a way that can be effective even in the face of persistent and offensive non-Indian behaviour. Such a strategy recognises that offensive behaviour will never be completely eliminated, even by militancy and threats.

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[36] This suggestion was sparked by Armin Geertz who, in a study of Hopi prophesy, found that for strategic reasons "the Traditionalist Movement was manipulating its own prophecies" as were other Hopi groups. Geertz reminds us that "prophesy is tradition that is spoken by someone to someone else for specific ... moral, ideological, or political reasons." (Geertz 1994: 1–2). See also Geertz 1992, endnote 30.

[37] An equally interesting problem for religious studies scholars who refuse to privilege any particular metaphysical truth-claim is, on what basis can they consistently object to such borrowing? Arguing that such borrowing is pernicious, at least in the absence of compelling empirical evidence, is tantamount to

Whatever arguments and strategies are developed to defend the integrity of Native American religious practice, recognising the dangers of contrasting pure and impure religion underscores the need for a careful, case-by-case assessment of claims that syncretic amalgamations threaten free religious practice.[38]

In addition to rooting an assessment of appropriation within a broader discussion of syncretic processes, it is equally important to acknowledge the diversity of opinion about these phenomena among Indians themselves. If one relies exclusively on published essays about these phenomena it would be easy to conclude that Indians strenuously object to virtually all such religious blendings. The descriptions in these pages, however, suggest that, at least among those activist and traditional Indians who have forged links with Earth First!, there is more tolerance for at least *some* forms of appropriation than there may be among those who usually write about it.[39] It is also possible to wonder if some of the opposition to Euroamerican appropriation might represent efforts by a cultural-religious elite to control religious production and either guide syncretic processes or destroy disapproved of forms of popular religion.[40]

In any case, at the popular level, there is often less resistance to borrowing, blending, and shared ritualising than there is an *expectation* that non-Indians – especially those acting in solidarity with a native community – will participate respectfully in certain Native American religious practices. One Euroamerican attorney representing a group of Native American traditionalists in a lawsuit against the desecration of a sacred site, for example, told me he was expected (not asked) to go through purification ceremonies before entering court. His clients believed that the battle was not only legal but spiritual

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taking sides in battles over religious truth.

[38] This is the advantage of Deloria's thoughtful discussion in "Is Religion Possible?" – it is based on his own first-hand observations of specific forms that such cross-cultural blending is taking.

[39] One of the most disturbing aspects of the debate is that some critics of the Euroamerican appropriation of Native American spirituality categorically condemn, as witting or unwitting traitors, those who demur from their blanket condemnations of these phenomena, see for example, the previous discussion of the views of Ward Churchill and Rayna Green. See also Tinker 1993: 122, for a less strident but still ad hominem dismissal of Indians with differing views, tracing such views to "Indian dysfunctionality – a result of conquest [that] means that Indian people are all too ready to participate in their own oppression and continuing conquest." Tinker thinks this 'dysfunctionality' is due to Indians "craving the approval of white acquaintances and hoping for a broader understanding of and appreciation for the validity of traditional ceremonial life" (Tinker 1993: 123).

[40] This is one way (but not obviously the right way) to view the anti-appropriation efforts of both overtly religious elites but also of certain intellectuals and activists such as Churchill, Green, LaDuke, and Tinker. The possibility of such an interpretation was posed by Stewart and Shaw's assessment that " 'indigenizing' projects are often elite attempts, imposed from the top down, to control the direction of religious synthesis" (Stewart and Shaw 1994: 12). For a related comment on this dynamic in a different cultural context, Droogers writes that "exclusive claims are often maintained by a class of religious specialists who monopolise the definition of truth ... If, as normally happens, a popular religion succeeds in maintaining itself next to the official religion[s], this is a symptom of the clergy's power being less effective in maintaining exclusive access to the production of religion" (Droogers 1989: 16).

and therefore the attorney's participation was essential. Although uncomfortable, the attorney chose to participate rather than risk offending his clients.[41]

Often Euroamericans are expected to participate in ceremony led by Native Americans, particularly in contexts where environmentalists and Native Americans gather. During a university conference in 1995 that focused on grassroots environmentalism, for example, Walter Bresette, the Anishinabe leader who has done much to promote native-environmentalist alliances, 'hijacked' the conference.[42] As he shut the doors telling people to sit in a circle, he jested that he did not want anyone to escape. Assisted by Scottish and Irish activists playing instruments from their homeland, Bresette burned sage and performed a purification rite. He then ceremonially absolved the assembled Euroamericans for the crimes committed by their people against this land and its first peoples, and then welcomed them to his homeland. He asserted that until they felt at home on Turtle Island, they would never resist its destruction. He concluded urging the Euroamerican participants to defend this land and its native peoples.[43]

Again, in this example, shared ceremony can be viewed as a strategic negotiation for a specific form of compensation, in this case reciprocity and solidarity in ongoing eco-political struggles, and again, at the popular level, participation was not really optional. Similarly on Mt. Graham, there was an expectation among some Indians that their non-native allies would respect and venerate the mountain – the veneration and consecration of sacred places being a part of their tradition – not in every way that the Indians would themselves, but at least by refraining from the desecrating act of alcohol consumption.[44] Such examples underscore my point that sometimes Native Americans are more worried if others *do not* participate in religious practices encouraged or sponsored by them than they are worried about the possible negative impacts of cross-cultural borrowing and blending.[45]

Another reason why popular religiosity is relatively receptive to appropriation processes can be found in the idea expressed by some Indians and shared by many in the Deep Ecology movement (such as Lou Gold) that Native American symbols and

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[41] This attorney prefers to remain anonymous.

[42] This was Bresette's musing description of this ceremonial 'action'. His assistants were Alastair MacIntosh, a professor at the Centre for Human Ecology at Edinburgh University. MacIntosh is also an indigenous rights activist and spiritual leader from the Scottish Highlands who has been involved in fusing liberation theology, paganism, Celtic Christianity, and eco-psychology into a green spirituality akin to deep ecology. Tara O'Leary was the Irish participant in the ritual, is a graduate student at the Centre, and has spiritual and activist interests similar to MacIntosh's.

[43] Afterward he explained that performing such a ceremony is emotionally difficult but important, because people are more likely to care for places if they feel they belong to them. This ceremony occurred at the November 1995 conference entitled *Ecological Resistance Movements: Religion, Politics, Ethics* at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

[44] For an in-depth discussion of the controversy over alcohol on Mt. Graham, and how the consumption of it was viewed as a desecrating act by many of the Indians present, see Taylor 1995.

[45] Many examples could be added from activist assemblies when non-Indian activists are instructed by Native Americans on how to properly participate in planned prayer and ceremony.

practices are especially good at evoking a proper perception of the value of the natural world. Native and non-natives alike share the view that Indian spirituality may promote a re-harmonisation of life on this planet and that consequently, the widespread extension of such spirituality is precisely what the world needs (McGaa 1990).[46]

Vine Deloria, however, is suspicious of such extensionist ideals. In a nuanced essay he argued that any such missionary impulse is "contrary to every known tenet of any tribal tradition" because "no demand existed ... for the people to go into the world and inform or instruct other people in the rituals and beliefs of the tribe." Nevertheless, he acknowledged that there "may be a new revelation given at the end of this world." But he remained sceptical and worried about the trivialisation of native spiritual practices, suggesting "we should examine the nature of the [various] teachings and practices" that are emerging.

Taking his own advice, Deloria arrived at a different conclusion about new forms of ritual practice: "I cannot find much real disrespect and exploitation in the way the pipe is prayerfully passed between Indians and non-Indians," suggesting that such ceremony may even erode individualism and greed.[47] He further argued that sharing a sweat ceremony is probably a minor violation since it is often used as a purification before "ceremonies which have a deeper significance." Yet he opposed the extension of other ceremonies, such as the Sun Dance, outside their original tribal context.[48] Deloria's case by case approach provides a better basis for constructive dialogue about how to develop mutually respectful relations between Indian and non-Indian people than do blanket condemnations of all cross-cultural borrowing and blending.

The present reflections are also based on a case study approach. One plausible reading of these data is that Native American myth, symbols, and ceremonies do have an ecologically salutary effect by motivating Indians and non-Indians alike toward deeper ecological commitments. The view that Native American cultures may embody

[46] McGaa 1990 is a controversial book, written by a Lakota Indian and Sun Dancer, which justifies the extension of Native American ritual to non-Indians as a way to promote respect for nature and Indian culture. McGaa writes, "Reviving [the Seven Mother Earth Ceremonies and extending them to non-Indians] in this time of [ecological] crisis will, it is hoped, bring forth a new-found perception and respect for the natural elements" (McGaa 1990: 41, see also 44–48, 208–209). For Churchill's critique of McGaa, see Churchill 1990: 283–289. (Compare also Dooling and Jordan-Smith 1989 & 1992.)

[47] Describing the practice as he has observed it, Deloria wrote, "They light it, say a few prayers, and pass it around the group asking each person to say a prayer or mumble 'All my relatives'. In some cases this simple set of actions invokes behavior of great respect by the non-Indians." Deloria concluded that it seems to promote community and work against greed and individualism and "we should be grateful for what the pipe is able to accomplish" under "such circumstances" (Deloria 1994: 35–37; see also 43, 253). Deloria's qualified optimism that, despite the threats, "traditional religions in some form will transcend the inroads that contemporary American culture has made" (Deloria 1994: 253).

[48] In "Is Religion Possible" Deloria concluded his concerns about the trivialisation of the Sun Dance by suggesting that, "Perhaps a clear statement by traditional people as to the seriousness of the ceremony and a disavowal of authorisation for people outside the respective tribal traditions to perform this dance is in order" (Deloria 1994: 36).

insights and practices that, if extended widely, could promote ecological sustainability, is held by many Indians and non-Indians and ought not be dismissed a priori.

A more constructive dialogue could ensue if critics of appropriation would at least entertain the possibility that some extension of Native American cultural practices might promote, in perhaps unexpected ways, the wellbeing of native communities and their wider relations in nature. One reason such shared and blended ritualising might promote cultural survival is, as we have seen, that the Indians involved in such practices often exercise agency and demand reciprocity in such multicultural encounters.

The possibility that blended and appropriated forms of Native American spirituality might have a salutary effect for native cultures is, however, a little addressed empirical question. But if we are to assess the overall impact of such borrowing, it is as important to discern the possible positive impacts as it is to illuminate negative ones. Too few of those who condemn such appropriations and blending consider the possibility that there could be positive dynamics that might offset or mitigate the negative ones they perceive.[49] It may be that some appropriation of Native American myth and rite by non-Indians increases tolerance of and sympathy for Native Americans, perhaps with concrete but difficult to measure political benefits to them.[50]

To even raise this possibility will seem counter intuitive to some and pernicious to others. Such a suggestion will understandably raise suspicions, since one of the major complaints about 'borrowers' is that they take and rarely give back – and most grievously of all – do nothing to defend American Indians and their religious practices from commercial and governmental acts of desecration. Yet I have observed that, at least within radical environmental subcultures, there are usually a number of activists who have been moved by rites inspired by Native American cultures and are actively engaged in solidarity work in defence of native communities.[51] Sometimes Indian activists have come to respect the sincerity of such non-Indians and, as a result, have become more tolerant of Euroamerican interest in Indian ritual.[52] Perhaps the inter-

[49] In the updated *God is Red* Deloria reflected on a salutary effect of some pan-Indian ritualising, that the emergence "of a national Indian religion ... that incorporates major Indian themes" can introduce Indians to a native religious milieu that eventually can lead them to "the more precise practices of their own tribes" (Deloria 1994: 253).

[50] Analysis ought not preclude the possibility of both positive and negative dynamics at work in syncretic processes. For a concrete example of a successful alliance between Indians and non-Indians, see Whaley and Bresette 1994.

[51] A cynical reading might suggest that such concern only occurs when environmental worries overlap with the Native American interests – but such a reading would be too simplistic. Many of the Deep Ecology activists introduced in these pages, guided by their affinity with Native American spirituality, have made significant sacrifices, even suffering arrest, in defense of places they and their Indian allies consider sacred. Indeed my impression is that, at least within the Deep Ecology movement, those most closely aligned with Native American spirituality, those most likely to participate in sweat lodges or other ceremonies inspired by Native American religion, are the ones most likely to engage in environmental activism that defends places considered sacred by Native Americans.

[52] For example, at Mt. Graham, after watching a demonstration that involved spontaneous grieving, prayer, and rage in front of the telescope site that both the Indians and Earth First!ers considered a

est of activist Euroamericans in Native American spirituality (even if they portray an imperfect portrait of it) causes other Euroamericans to entertain the possibility that native cultures have value. Perhaps the images of Indians that are consequently conveyed are stereotypical and pernicious. In either case – more likely, in *both* cases – the overall impact remains an unanswered, empirical question that deserves further inquiry. But the possibility that some contemporary spiritual combinations are adaptive, promoting the long-term survival of native cultures, should not be dismissed out-of-hand.[53]

As we have seen, plausible arguments have been voiced describing social processes that may well harm native American cultures. This possibility alone is enough for many to abstain from such borrowing. But since the social impetus producing such appropriation is apparently quite strong, it appears likely that people will continue to produce such cross-cultural amalgamations. Compelling calls for abstention from such ritualising would more clearly demonstrate that such practices are unambiguously, or on balance, destructive. Only then will it be possible to convince all well-meaning people to abstain.

Rather than threatening to repress newer religious forms in the cause of free religious practice, a dubious proposition even if evaluated charitably, it makes more sense to respect, or at least tolerate, diverse expressions of religion.[54] It would be better to reserve condemnation for those cases where it can be clearly demonstrated that religious practices threaten humans and/or their wider relations.

It is also important to recognise that at least some of what is happening is perfectly human and to be expected. Many Earth First!ers are essentially home-grown nature mystics. Since a sense of connection and kinship with non-human nature is a relatively infrequent spiritual perception in North America today, it is unsurprising that those with such perceptions and experiences would seek out one another. Not surprisingly, Euro-American earth mystics often feel affinity with and reach out to Native Americans, whom they often perceive, sometimes accurately, to share similar religious and moral sentiments. And since Native American religion has been suppressed in diverse ways, severing many Indians from their lands and traditional religions, it is no surprise that some Indians who revere nature would find some common ground, at least in the area of spirituality, with certain Euro-American earth activists.[55] Thus are such peo-

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desecration, one of the AIM activists who had vociferously objected to a planned sweat lodge and who had been offended by the presence of alcohol stated, "I used to hate all white people, but today, you people showed me something" (Taylor 1995). Even Ward Churchill, perhaps the most trenchant critic of appropriation, drafted and signed a statement of Solidarity with Earth First!.

[53] One case where it seems this may be true is with pan-Indian religious revivals.

[54] Some American Indian Movement militants have disrupted the sweat lodges of persons they consider profiteers and have threatened others they consider charlatans with more of the same. But as morally repugnant as such profiteering may be, such a repressive response, suppressing religious practice in the name of the free exercise of religion, is inconsistent. It is difficult to see how such a response is an appropriate antidote to boorish behavior on the part of some spiritually hungry Euroamericans.

[55] In activist circles I have heard many Indian activists lament the divisions within their communi-

ple drawn together, sometimes sharing their spiritual understandings and ceremonies. When observing and reflecting on these dynamics I find it hard to pass categorical judgments upon those wrapped up in them.

Many critics of appropriation recognise that these dynamics are fuelled by real human needs, by the emptiness of materialistic industrial culture, and that they occur because, as Wendy Rose puts it, "it is the Indian way to try to help" (Rose 1992: 418). Nevertheless, the often-stated preference, even among those more tolerant of borrowing, is for non-Indians to find their spirituality alone in nature or by recovering their lost traditions. Many non-Indians have taken this preference to heart, eschewing borrowing and looking to nature and their own heritage for their spirituality. Within Earth First!, there has been increasing discussion about reviving European paganism. Yet a constructive dialogue will acknowledge the difficulty faced by those drawn to native American spirituality. Some who have found meaning in such myths and rites now agonise over whether to continue such practices, but are reluctant to abandon them. Further dialogue will also profit from the recognition that confusion about what constitutes respect in this area results, in part, because of the incompatible beliefs about such borrowing found among native Americans themselves.

I have sought to provide a fair-minded analysis of diverse perspectives regarding the controversial practices in question. One thing seems clear: there is no easy answer to the conflict I have analysed. Nevertheless, it is possible to view the various opinions as a continuum in which some forms of borrowing and blending are viewed as extremely offensive by most, while other forms are judged harshly by fewer still, and yet other forms are relatively uncontroversial. Those unwilling to abstain from appropriated rites would be wise to steer their participation toward the least controversial practices. At least they should clearly understand that intrusive invasion of privacy and commercial exploitation of such practices are considered the greatest offenses, along with the physical desecration of the ritual sites and objects that are essential to the free exercise of native American religion. They should avoid the tendency to project a "superior attitude" or any pretence that they "know all about Indian religion" – attitudes which Vine Deloria blames for much of the conflict in this arena (Deloria 1992: 7).[56] They should exercise reciprocity by joining in solidarity with the native communities fighting commercial and governmental plans and laws that threaten to displace them from their remaining lands and ceremonial sites. The path of least offense would be for them to accept and support native leadership in these battles for sovereignty and simply wait for invitations to ceremonies from the communities with whom they are working. Of

ties and describe how much of their struggle is against those Indians who have been severed from their own earth revering traditions.

[56] Such attitudes reinforce "the message that Indians are indeed a conquered people and that there is nothing that Indians possess, absolutely *nothing* – pipes, land, water, feathers, drums, and even prayers – that non-Indians cannot take whenever and wherever they wish" (Deloria 1992: 7).

course, native communities have no obligation to provide such invitations, but in these political struggles, it is not uncommon for allies to come together in prayer.[57]

11. Conclusions

The conundrums presented in these pages paint a morally muddy landscape and leave me with significant ambivalence. Nevertheless, I offer several conclusions that revisit the three broad perspectives about appropriation set forth at the outset of my analysis.

1. There are serious threats to Native American cultural integrity and survival. At least with regard to smaller and weaker native nations, it is likely that the appropriation of native American spirituality can contribute to cultural decline (the first view). The most serious threats, however, continue to be found in the relentless Euro-American thirst for land, usually backed by Federal and State power, which threatens to further erode the land base upon which Indians depend for their cultural survival and free religious practice.

2. Appropriation does lead to something new and different (the second view), but there are reasonable arguments and evidence to the effect that not all of what results is destructive, in no small measure because often times the Native Americans who witness or are actively involved in these processes exercise agency and demand reciprocity.

3. Some cross-cultural borrowing, reciprocal influencing, and blending is an inevitable aspect of religious life – thus at least *some* of the hand-wringing over appropriation and syncretic processes is misplaced and overly broad (the third view).

Finally, I add a fourth suggestion, that it may be (and my own research provides some evidence for the proposition) that at least *some* of such borrowing promotes respect for and concrete political solidarity with Native Americans. Such a dynamic may play a role in mitigating whatever negative impacts that appropriations from native American religions may precipitate.

12. Coda, December 2023

Since the preceding analysis was published twenty-five years ago the fervour about cultural appropriation has expanded to an increasingly wide range of cultural and

[57] See, e.g., Gedicks 1993: 129–30, for an example of a shared ceremony at a demonstration, and various examples scattered about in Whaley and Bresette 1994.

creative phenomena, sometimes with great fervour. Much of this ferment echoes the unnuanced positions described in this article. During the summer of 2020 I attended another national Earth First! Rendezvous, this one in Eastern Ohio. The attendance was significantly lower than was typical during the late 1980s and 1990s, and the then extant movement's identity was overwhelmingly anarchistic, as it had become increasingly during the 21st century. Several Native Americans attended and were given a privileged position to ritually welcome the activists and pray. There were workshops that focused on cultural appropriation, strongly criticising such phenomena. Compared to the 1990s, there was a dearth of nature-related ritualising at this gathering; it seemed that overtly spiritual ritual had been largely purged from the gatherings taking place under the Earth First! umbrella. There was a great deal of attention to the rights of transgender people, and other leftist causes, and far less of a focus on defending Earth's ecosystems. Those who had earlier been drawn to the movement in part because of their Earthen spiritualities appeared to have, for the most part, drifted away. It appeared that the possibility that nature spirituality might be the glue to creating social solidarity within the group had not been realised.

As for the analysis and arguments reprinted here without substantive changes, I think they have held up well, and that they continue to offer some insights for those seeking to build bridges and alliances between activists and indigenous peoples.

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Chapter 2: The Return of Mi'kmaq to Living Tradition[(3)]

Graham Harvey

1. Introduction[1]

In 1995 an eagle flew a perfect circle over the drum arbour as the final honour song was being drummed and danced in the first 'traditional powwow' at the Miawpukek Mi'kamawey Mawi'omi (a Mi'kmaq reserve by the Conne River in Newfoundland). My being there was serendipitous – a common experience for researchers. I had attended a medical anthropology conference organised by Memorial University of Newfoundland, and hosted at Miawpukek. With most other conference delegates I stayed longer because the community had organised its first powwow (called 'traditional' to distinguish it from 'competitive powwows'). At the time, my research was largely concerned with contemporary Pagans, and my conference presentation was about neoshamanism as an individualised therapy within evolving Pagan cosmologies. The eagle's flight initiated a change in my research which, in part, reverses the journey involved in subtitle of Anne-Christine Hornborg's *Mi'kmaq Landscapes: From Animism to Sacred Ecology* (2008). I had been engaging with the sacred ecologies of Pagans as they created new ways of celebrating "Nature" (the capitalisation and scare quotes will be explained later). Witnessing an eagle's flight – and the responses by other people present that day – led me to join the growing community of researchers intrigued by contemporary animisms, especially among Indigenous peoples.

For this chapter, I have been reflecting on Anne-Christine Hornborg's exploration of "historical changes in the lifeworld of the Mi'kmaq Indians of Eastern Canada" (Hornborg 2008: i). In particular, some key themes in her final chapter, "The Return of Kluskap (1970–2000)" resonate strongly with events at Miawpukek and with larger consideration of animism. Readers of this book celebrating Anne-Christine's work will not need a detailed explanation of recent uses of the term 'animism'. So I briefly note

[1] I am grateful to Saqamaw (Chief) Misel Joe, Miawpukek Senior Conservation Officer Dan Jeddore, and my wife Molly Kady for feedback on an earlier draft of this chapter.

only that Edward Tylor's (1891) usage is left behind in favour of a richer and more provocative 'new animist' evocation of the knowledge that the world is a community of living persons, or kin, most of whom are not human, and that this knowledge is worked out in efforts to live respectfully. The term has found a significant place in the critical vocabulary of diverse scholarly disciplines – and resonates with 'turns' to materiality and ontology, and with material semiotics, Actor-Network Theory, new materialism and more. Its previous Tylorian colonial and primitivist usage continues to make it questionable or objectionable to many Indigenous scholars. For others, the term is simply redundant because, as Linda Hogan points out, "we call it *tradition*" (Hogan 2013, emphasis in original) and, needing no other word, seek to get on with living respectfully within the larger-than-human community. Nonetheless, the term seems to be helping scholars and others to re-engage with that community and to contest the human separatist movement that is Modernity. More on that later.

In the following section I say more about responses to the flight of the eagle at the end of that first powwow. I have come to think that everything I have learnt among animists elsewhere was present in that interaction between the eagle and Miawpukek Mi'kmaq and their guests. Much of the following chapter seeks to make additional links between Anne-Christine Hornborg's discussion of Mi'kmaq relations with the world and wider ongoing discussion of animisms. A bright thread in the final chapter of her book, "The Return of Kluskap (1970–2000)," draws attention to the shifting performances of Indianness, Mi'kmaq-ness, and Indigeneity as Maritime Mi'kmaq sought to protect a mountain from mining at the end of the last century. I link this to distinctions between conservation and animism. This is followed by a discussion of the trajectory from sacred ecology to animism which parallels a challenge to Modernity (understood in Latourian terms) from Indigenising movements (Johnson 2002). Integral to this trajectory and challenge is a re-evaluation of tradition as a necessarily improvisatory practice of adaptation within living cultures. I consider Anne-Christine Hornborg's discussion of 'lost and living traditions' in relation to events at Miawpukek and follow that with a reflection on the responsibilities that follow from coming to know something. In a short concluding section I pick up a thread from *Mi'kmaq Landscapes* to sum up thoughts about 'becoming Mi'kmaq', becoming Indigenous and becoming animist.

2. Eagle! Kitpu!

Eagles are a relatively common sight at Miawpukek and the Conne River, Bay d'Espoir region of Newfoundland. The eagle who flew over the powwow grounds and around the drummers probably had an eyrie on the other side of the river. Nonetheless, it was not only visitors like myself who had exclaimed excitement, surprise, intrigue, and/or joy as the eagle flew. I am not sure if the dancers paused, mid-step in the final dance of elders and veterans in the powwow; the drummers certainly maintained their rhythm and song. But locals and guests alike spontaneously called out "eagle!" or

"kitpu!" and perhaps other names for the bird. The woman next to me was not alone in raising her hands (in awe, greeting, or joy) and in watching as the eagle flew back to a resting or viewing place at the top of a tree above a rocky outcrop over the river.

For the rest of that day and the next morning before people left Miawpukek, conversations frequently turned to the eagle's flight. The consensus of opinion was that the eagle had made a clear statement affirming the rightness and timeliness of the (re)turn to tradition by local Indigenous/Mi'kmaq/Lnu people. One man summed it up in spontaneously saying to me: "Did you see that eagle? He was saying 'we've kept the traditions going all this time, we're happy you're joining in again'." A younger man offered an additional response to the eagle's flight: "This is the first time I've felt proud to be Native! The powwow was great, but that eagle ...! I'm glad I was here!" Having kept in touch with some community members and some powwow dancers, I know that this key moment in that first powwow is fondly remembered. Those who had organised it still celebrate the eagle's affirmation of the rightness of their efforts, not only in establishing an ongoing powwow tradition but also in promoting and enabling Mi'kmaq values, practices, and well-being.

This was far from being the only element of animism during the powwow. In sunrise and Sweat Lodge ceremonies the larger-than-human community was honoured and thanked. One morning, looking at a cliff across the Conne River, I was told by one of the ceremony-leaders, "that's the home of the little people." But when I asked him to say more, he said, "ah, I shouldn't talk *about* them, only *with* them" before he walked away. At least some of the fires around the powwow grounds were kept fed not only with logs but also with offerings from the food prepared and shared among the elders, dancers, and others. Drums were spoken of not (only) as instruments (in the sense of inanimate objects) but (also) as full participants, with their own needs and responsibilities. Opening and closing events involved respectful holding aloft of eagle feathers. At key points in the powwow, audience members were instructed to remove any hats or headgear that were without eagle feathers. I am not sure if this happened in that first powwow, but should a dancer drop an eagle feather, drumming and dancing ends while an Elder conducts a purification ceremony and then decides whether to or not to return the feather to the dancer. These diverse elements of inter-species relational etiquette are at the heart of Indigenous animism as it was being inculcated and performed in the powwow – as it is in wider Indigenous cultural movements. I found all of this interesting, but it was the eagle's flight that transformed interest into an ambition to understand animism in contemporary life. In the following sections I note links between Anne-Christine Hornborg's work and some wider scholarship.

3. Environmentalism and Conservation

The final chapter of *Mi'kmaq Landscapes* engages us with the ways in which Mi'kmaq communities and activists dealt with a proposed granite mine at Kelly's Mountain on

Cape Breton Island. A complex and shifting assemblage of acts and activisms were deployed not only to attract attention and gain a hearing on behalf of the mountain but, importantly, to enact elements of Mi'kmaq culture that were widely seen as decayed or forgotten. Just as powwow traditions had previously enabled other Indigenous communities to gather, socialise and maintain aspects of their traditional worlds (often hidden from dominant, colonising authorities), so cultural practices supported animated Mi'kmaq seeking to protect the mountain. One Mi'kmaq spokesman is quoted as saying

> [T]he nativeness is growing. And it's fortunate. If I were to fight for this mountain fifteen years ago, I'd be locked up in one of the mental hospitals. My people would have signed me in ... Some of our Elders ... I would never have believed fifteen years ago I would be walking around with eagle feathers, going to powwows, dancing (Hornborg 2008: 170, citing a quotation in Hornborg 1994: 253).

The wearing of feathers and other regalia enabled some Mi'kmaq activists to contribute Indigenous perspectives, especially as they attracted international media and environmental NGOs. Mi'kmaq were able to contribute an increasingly important cultural dimension to environmental and conservationist efforts. Sometimes this involved references to a pan-Indian Mother Earth and sometimes to more specifically Mi'kmaq narratives about Kluskap (a shaper of the landscape and of local practices). All this, and more, is set out in Anne-Christine's chapter. She concludes that Mi'kmaq spokesmen

> know how to make their entrance as 'wise Indians' on the how-to-savetheworld stage, but they refuse to play passively the White man's Indian. Instead, they criticise or even make use of the [Indian] images in order to discuss important issues in Canadian society concerning the environment, life on the reserves and the Mi'kmaq future. They have, as in the past, other demands on society than the Western image allows them (Hornborg 2008: 179).

While Mi'kmaq traditionalists made good use of pan-Indian culture and spirituality in the actions on behalf of the mountain, the "other demands on society" could include a more animist emphasis on relationality rather than conservation. In Nurit Bird-David and Danny Naveh's articles about the Nayaka, of India's Nilgiri Hills, a contrast is strongly drawn between conservation and animism. The central indicator of animist relations with the larger-than-human world is immediacy (Bird-David and Naveh 2008; Naveh and Bird-David 2013). While all beings are related, having coevolved together, some relations are closer than others. Kinships, like friendships, can be improved or damaged by interaction. The social and ethical imperative of animism

is the putting into practice of locally appropriate, respectful behaviours. It requires immediacy and specificity. In contrast, conservation (as it is usually defined and/or practiced, for example, by international NGOs) focuses on ecosystems or ecological communities. Specific relations or kinship can even get in the way of conserving packages of environment, and individuals can be sacrificed for the greater good. Animists, in this argument, do not set out to conserve species or even ecologies, but seek to enhance relations or contribute to the well-being of local multi-species communities. While some of the results of conservation and animist ambitions can be similar, this is an accidental convergence of ways of engaging with the larger-than-human world.

Nonetheless, conservation at Miawpukek is often an animist practice. The commitments of the local conservation officers and of community leaders coincide in an indigenised style of care for the more-than-human community. This illustrates one aspect of the way in which Mi'kmaq animism has, I think, become more explicit at Miawpukek, as it has among many Indigenous communities world-wide. It might not be labelled 'animism' but an emphasis on relationships (and all-pervading relationality) is the warp and weft of Indigenous actions which seek to dwell respectfully within larger-than-human communities and protect them from further ecological damage, biodiversity loss and climate change. The flight of one eagle in 1995 did not initiate or even propel this increased celebration of *nogamuk* (larger-than-human kinship). It does, however, demonstrate it – and inculcates it whenever the flight is remembered and talked about.

4 From Sacred Ecology to Animism

A closely related strand in Anne-Christine's presentation of the creativity of Mi'kmaq traditions involves a comparison between 'sacred ecology' and the animism that underlies and became more evident in Mi'kmaq and other activism and wider cultural activities. Drawing on an interesting range of proponents and opponents (scholarly and otherwise), she defines sacred ecology as a combination of science, ethics, and spirituality in which respect for 'Nature' underpins proposed solutions to environmental and other crises (Hornborg 2008: 152–6).

'Nature' is not the same as country, homeland, territory or terroir. These necessarily and integrally include and involve humans as participants and kin. The term 'Nature' (whether or not it is capitalised) is a signal of Modernity's effort to separate (not merely distinguish) humans and culture from the wider world. It labels a putatively universal realm of inert matter, controlled more by mechanical laws than by interactive relationships. Although contested by more scholars and other critics than can be helpfully listed here, Modernity's Nature/Culture dualism continues to structure academia, for example, by institutionalising a separation between 'natural' and 'social' sciences, in Alf Hornborg's encapsulation of the theme.

> As a number of social theorists have suggested, the social condition and technological accomplishments of 'modernity' have been founded on a categorical distinction between Nature and Society. It is by drawing a boundary between the world of objects and the world of meanings that the 'modern' project has emerged. By, as it were, 'distilling' Nature into its material properties alone, uncontaminated by symbolic meanings or social relations, modernists have been freed to manipulate it in ways unthinkable in premodern contexts (Hornborg 2006: 21).

Indeed, that there is an 'it' to be manipulated is literally unspeakable in many Indigenous languages. As Anne-Christine Hornborg notes, for instance, "the Mi'kmaq language does not distinguish between he, she, and it in the third person singular" (Hornborg 2008: 154, n. 60, citing personal communication from Ruth Whitehead). The fact that this is true in other Algonquian languages encourages Robin Kimmerer to propose that "To Stop the Age of Extinction, Let's Start by Ditching [the pronoun] 'it'" (2015). She does not mean that only her Potawatomi kin should avoid the 'neutral' pronoun but that anyone who resists human-separatism should find ways of speaking that do not objectify and otherwise 'distil' the world into the inert materiality that Modernity's 'it' entails.

Similarly, Bruno Latour's slogan "We have never been modern" (1993) is an incitement to stop trying to become (more) "Modern" rather than a bland statement of fact. 'We' (contemporary humans living within and under the conditions of Modernity's globalising, universalising, and colonising project) keep doing things to distinguish ourselves and humans in general from the larger-than-human world – such as saying 'it' when referring to a tree, eagle, hedgehog, or land. Efforts to resist Modernity are undermined by our learnt de-animation, de-personalising, and denial of kinship with the larger, multi-species communities within which we truly live, move, and make meaning. Resistance to the disenchantment, alienation, and social disembeddedness of Modernity may also be undermined within the 'sacred ecologies' of Pagans and others who practice 'nature religions' by an (often unreflective) acceptance of Nature/Culture dualism. Even celebrants of 'Nature' cannot live there every day because 'it' is elsewhere, a destination demanding a move away from humans and humanity. This has never been possible in a multi-species co-evolving world of pervasive relationality and symbiosis. It is even less possible in the Anthropocene era. Meanwhile, Modernity's dualism maintains authority over alternative ways of world-making by relativising 'cultures'. They are permitted only to be placed on a scale marking progress away from "the long immersion in the concrete and experiential *specifics of place*" (Hornborg 2006: 29, emphasis in original) towards the universalism of the "one-world world" (Law 2004; Law 2011). An eagle's flight and the reception of its affirmation can break open that limited, boxed-in 'one-world' and allow other possible worlds to flourish (see Marcos 1996; Escobar 2020).

5 Lost and Living Traditions

If the eagle did mean to say "we [members of the larger-than-human community] have kept tradition going," then Anne-Christine Hornborg's contrast between cultural loss and life gains further power. She writes

> A study of Mi'kmaq traditions can on first examination be equivalent to totting up constant losses. There are, of course, actual losses ... The mighty *buion* [shaman] has gone, bone ceremonials and hunting rituals have disappeared and no one lives in a wigwam any longer. ... But if the culture concept is given a dynamic definition, in which culture is an ongoing process that is negotiated in meetings, the Mi'kmaqs' own way of approaching changes becomes not a culture loss, but cultural creativity (Hornborg 2008: 174).

In short, what we see is cultural change, the creativity of tradition and the adaptiveness of Indigenous (and other-than-Indigenous) people. Although other readings are possible, Hobsbawn and Ranger's *Invention of Tradition* (1983) can make the link between 'tradition' and falsehood seem unassailable – and is therefore unhelpful and misleading. While the fantasy that real and pristine culture or tradition can be found only in pre-Columbian and pre-colonial practices has largely been rejected, creativity and changeableness seem to require regular reiteration. *Mi'kmaq Landscapes* provides plentiful evidence to support more interesting approaches – and demonstrates improved academic engagement with living traditions.

Linda Hogan's "We call it tradition" (2013) – among many other Indigenous interventions – demonstrates that 'tradition' labels repertoires and repositories that require application and adaption. Tradition provides exemplary models but not blueprints. It contains the germ of seeds from which new growth unfurls in response to changing climate and compost. In some cultural contexts it is hedged by rules and requires instruction manuals. But a common theme in inter-Indigenous discussion is that culture or tradition are contagious and learnt more-or-less slowly by observation and practice. Thus, when Larry Gross says that Anishinaabeg children are encouraged not to make much noise during the annual collecting of maple syrup he emphasises that the practice of respectful silence is caught from elders in incremental stages over years (Gross 2014: 61–2).

Land-rights legal cases are rarely as welcoming of the creativity of traditional cultures as Indigenous communities and their allies wish. A creative exploitation of Settler fantasies of 'wise Indians' with impeccable green spiritual credentials, dressed with feathers and declaiming the motherhood of the planet, is often required to gain a hearing. Sometimes it even advances a cause. This is clear in Anne-Christine Hornborg's discussion of Mi'kmaq activism on behalf of their mountain – and, integrally, of cultural sovereignty.

Despite all of this, it is true that even the recognition that tradition is a repertoire that always involves improvisation can result in dismissal of alleged novelty and inauthenticity. The example of Indigenous references to Mother Earth are a commonly cited example. Anne-Christine Hornborg's discussion of this in relation to the tension between animism and sacred ecology is invaluable. I only add a nascent (for me) thought that *if* Mother Earth was unknown in North America prior to the European invasion, there is something remarkably prescient in traditions which extend respect for homelands into respect for a more global or planetary belonging. Not only would such an extension exemplify creativity, it could also illustrate an Indigenous strategy to enable settlers to reject colonial Modernity's dislocations. *Perhaps* this is what some of the 'wise ecological Indian' speeches often cited by environmentalists were about.

I am, however, more certain that the recognition of an eagle's flight as a statement about traditional culture is unlikely to persuade those who continue to fit into Modernity's model of human progress. Nonetheless, the widespread Indigenous understanding that culture or tradition is more-than-human, that it is shared across species boundaries (Viveiros de Castro 2007, citing Kopenawa 2000), and that it derives from more-or-less locally agreed protocols makes excellent sense for those resistant to Modernity. As Alf Hornborg indicates, "the long immersion in the concrete and experiential *specifics of place*" provides us "with clues about the prospects for resurrecting 'relational' ontologies" (A. Hornborg 2006: 29, original emphasis). This is what Indigeneity and tradition involve and the eagle knew it.

6 Knowledge and Responsibility

Respondents to the eagle's flight at Miawpukek's first powwow agreed about what the eagle wished to communicate. Traditionalists and previously disinterested youths, locals and guests, and everyone else who spoke with me, all recognised a welcoming affirmation of what was happening. No-one doubted the possibility of knowing what the eagle was saying. The eagle's circular flight over the drum arbour and dance arena needed no reflexion or debate. It had immediate impact and the force of self-evident verity. A story about an eagle might have been less compelling. Certainly, second-hand reports that such a thing had happened would not have the same transformative power.

This could be true also of brief allusions to enigmatic facts such as that a rocky crag is home to 'little people'. Without a longer story, or a more immediately sensual or visceral experience, the implications of such a statement remain a mystery. In fact, the most forceful aspect of that telling was the refusal to say more. The simple reference to the existence of those beings and their home remains easier to place in a category of someone else's enchantment. In line with the norms of cultural relativism, such an assertion poses no challenge to Modernity's de-animating, human-separatist project.

However, perhaps I was being protected from knowledge about matters that I was unlikely to be able to respond to in any appropriate way. If so, saying no more was not

only an avoidance of a breach of local, inter-species etiquette but also an avoidance of burdening me with knowledge that might otherwise have imposed an impossible relational responsibility. That is, perhaps I was being protected from entering a relationship which was not open to me as a non-Indigenous visitor and could never have worked out in practice.

As an aside addressed to a mere observer, someone defined by distance more than presence, the reference to 'little people' has become little more than a moment in the collection of data or bald facts. In contrast, the eagle's flight was a ritual of animist engagement that remade witnesses into interactive participants. So, the 'little more' which has been achieved here is a reflection on contrasting modes of communication (ritual and asides) and therefore the provocation of thoughts about how gifts of knowledge enable the kind of transformations worthy of being called 'learning'.

A frequent refrain in conversations I have had with Indigenous people in many communities is that learning requires further action. It is not enough to understand other people's ideas and practices. The learner should expect transformation in some way. As Terry Pratchett wisely said, "if it is true that the act of observing changes the thing which is observed (because of Quantum), it's even more true that it changes the observer" (Pratchett 1994). This may seem like a danger to those academics who are committed to strong versions of objectivity – including those for whom the participative phases of research (or participant observation) are carefully enclosed within the secure borders of objectivising observation. I have come to understand that such restrictions make it impossible to adequately understand ritual – and much else about the world.

Elsewhere, acknowledging the authority of Māori hosts, I have written about protocols and practices which can bring researchers into guest relations with those who already know what researchers want to know (Harvey 2003; Harvey 2017). In common with scholars involved in Ritual Studies, participation has changed my performance of research. Like them, I have grasped the edgy possibility of being changed by observation. Scholars who turn rituals or everyday practices into 'beliefs' and 'worldviews' seem to have a harder time conveying the sense of what religion and culture are about (Harvey 2013).

As an aside for those nervous of this simplified representation of matters of research positions, methods, and relations: I am not asserting that guest-researchers must agree with everything they are told. This would be untenable. Guests (*manuhiri* in Te Reo Māori) as well as their local hosts are expected to present their own ideas, needs and objects, and to vigorously debate possibilities arising from encounters with respected hosts. In a world in which many worlds are possible (Marcos 1996), ontologies and epistemologies necessarily interact but not always harmoniously. However, the point is to engage respectfully, honestly seek mutual benefit, and expect to be changed in the process.

My most long-lasting and continuing response to the eagle's flight has been to join in the community researching animisms in the contemporary world. Anne-Christine and Alf Hornborg are high on the list of skilled and inspirational provokers of and

contributors to relevant debates. Not coincidentally, the study of Indigenous religious traditions has blossomed, borne fruit, and seeded yet more research and teaching in diverse disciplines globally. Within the study of Indigeneity and of animism, it could never have been enough to explain the eagle's flight as a coincidence. That is not an explanation but an evasion. This was not an inter-species encounter of the kind that would require us to ask "what would animals say if we asked the right questions?" (see Despret 2016). It was clearly deliberate and communicative – even assertive. The message itself was obvious from the context even if the precise translation into any human language could be debated. However, seeking to honour the eagle's gift of inter-species communion has, for me, become a quest to understand how animists in many places not only resist the disenchantments and dislocations of Modernity but actively seek to spread animism's contagious gratitude for the grace of living alongside other-than-human kin in larger-than-human communities (also see Yeh 2020 citing Robin Wall Kimmerer's reflections).

7 Conclusion: Becoming Mi'kmaq

Anne-Christine Hornborg's *From Animism to Sacred Ecology* could also be called "Becoming Mi'kmaq" as she traces diverse ways in which people in Maritime Canada reclaim the sovereignty of self-definition and self-presentation. This is partially encapsulated in her section heading: "To be a Mi'kmaq: Ascribed Images and the Power to Control Them" (Hornborg 2008: 148). Taking control and taking responsibility are clear themes in the remaking of the Mi'kmaq world. Local or regional (creative) traditions and practices are key to the current evolution of that "long immersion in the concrete and experiential *specifics of place*" (Hornborg 2006: 29) that defines Indigeneity. In no way does such localisation or emplaced belonging negate participation in and contribution to the more global movement in which communities make good use of the label 'Indigenous' (also see Kraft et al. 2020).

Like animism, Indigenous and Mi'kmaq identities are relational. They necessitate social interactions – with and beyond human kin and communities. They are not categories but relations. They are not thought-experiments but everyday matters of negotiation. They are better evoked by the now classic conversation between Irving Hallowell and the elder Kiiwiich – "Are all the rocks we see around us alive?"/"No, but *some* are" (Hallowell 1960: 24, emphasis in original) – than by the Tylorian distinction between animate and inanimate existences. Similarly, the eagle who flew over Miawpukek's drum arbour was addressing one community rather than all humanity. The message of the eagle's flight was not a lesson in spirituality but a powerful affirmation of the re-making of a more just world of respectful kinship and joyful celebration. This is the kind of radical change demonstrated in Anne-Christine Hornborg's quotation of Rita Joe's poetry: "Today I am at a pow-wow ... Today I practice my tradition free" (Hornborg 2006: 178, citing Joe 1991: 65).

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Chapter 3: Cosmologies of the Earth and Ether[4]

Spirituality and Sociality among the Mi'kmaq, Warlpiri and Māori

Michael Jackson

1. Introduction

It must have been around 2000, not long after my family and I came to live in Copenhagen, that I first met Anne-Christine and Alf Hornborg who almost immediately invited us to visit their farm in the Swedish East Coast archipelago. Inspired by the Green Movement, they had worked for almost a decade to create a sustainable lifestyle on the land, and they proudly showed us the byres in which their cattle wintered, their garden, and their home, though they made no bones about the difficulty of balancing work on the farm and the demands of university teaching. They also spoke movingly of how their emotional identification with the landscape had drawn them actively and passionately into the land-rights struggles of the Mi'kmaq people of Nova Scotia where they had lived and done fieldwork from the early 1990s. Coincidentally, at the time of their involvement with the Mi'kmaq fight to prevent a 'sacred' mountain (Kluskap) from being quarried, I was researching the destruction of a Warlpiri 'sacred site' in Central Australia as a prelude to a legal claim for compensation.

In her 2008 monograph on Mi'kmaq cosmology and ecology, Anne-Christine focuses on both nineteenth century accounts of Kluskap and the late twentieth century environmental struggle to protect the mountain. This historical perspective enabled her to document a traditional worldview in which the 'World beneath the Earth' appears to have been more "'welcoming' and vital to earthly well-being than the 'World above the Earth'" (Hornborg 2008: 32). Gradually, however, the world above the earth, traditionally associated with evil magicians and guardian spirits, becomes the dwelling place of God and associated with absolute moral values. Pre-Christian and Christian worldviews become so entangled that even Kluskap becomes ambiguous, sometimes described as a Mi'kmaq culture hero, sometimes as a Messiah, or compared to Noah who

caused the flood and Jesus who walked on water (Hornborg 2008: 107). As people's livelihoods come to depend less on subsistence hunting than imported food, alliances or shapeshifting between humans and animals, or shamanic journeys to other worlds, give way to a preoccupation with land rights and the adversities of reservation life (poverty, unemployment, drug use, suicides, disease, and depression). It is against this backdrop that the struggle to prevent the destruction of Kluskap Mountain has to be understood. It is a struggle for life itself.

As Anne-Christine's ethnography shows, the wellspring of life is kinship and the ethos of care, symbiosis and reciprocity that obtains within a family. These ontologically basic social relationships also inform relationships with the land, including its flora and fauna. In so far as kinship and land are the sources of life, they are associated with ultimate value. In our parlance, they are 'sacred'. But it is important not to lose sight of the social, ethical, and material connotations of sacrality and spirituality. As Marcel Mauss notes, the gift of life is a "total social fact," irreducible to mere materiality, and incalculable (Mauss 1954: 5). Perhaps this is why concepts of home, God, spirit, and fate are universally so elusive, pointing to realities beyond our empirical reach, and even beyond language.

As Anne-Christine argues, 'the sacred' not only conjures an image of absolute moral value; it is deployed strategically and rhetorically in prosecuting indigenous claims for recognition and respect from outsiders for whom value is signified by money and materiality, but who at the same time seek religious justifications for the accumulation of wealth. While Mi'kmaq adroitly 'play the game' of speaking the language of Gaia and 'sacred ecology' in pursuit of social justice, and compare Kluskap Mountain to a church or place of worship, these are not their ancestral idioms. "The Mi'kmaq spokesmen knew that they had to negotiate with Canadian society about what should be defined as 'holy', [claiming] that just as Jews, Christians, and Muslims have their traditional holy places, the Mi'kmaq also have such places" (Hornborg 2008: 158, 163). Although Anne-Christine points out that *who* controls such concepts is more important than whether or not the concepts mirror reality (Hornborg 2008: 154–165), indigenous people often experience a double-bind in adopting the language of the other. For in deploying the etherealised language of spirituality and holiness in making cross-cultural negotiations possible, one must sometimes sacrifice one's own cosmology of the earth for a cosmology of the ether, in which the social imaginary of post-Reformation Christianity eclipses the grounded, visceral, and emotional vernacular of indigenous discourse (Hornborg 2008: 178).

In adducing material from my ethnography among the Warlpiri of Central Australia and the Māori of Aotearoa New Zealand, I now turn to exploring these issues of translation, knowledge and power from a comparative perspective.

2 Incident in the Desert

After heavy rain in Central Australia's Tanami Desert, a petrol tanker, heading to a remote gold mine, got bogged on a dirt road. After radio calls for help, the mining company dispatched a grader to haul the tanker out of the mire and create a detour. In doing so a desert walnut tree was knocked over and destroyed – a tree which stood on an important Warlpiri Dreaming track where, according to mythological accounts, an ancestor-hero, Yunkuyirrarnu, and other initiated men camped with their wives and several uninitiated boys during an epochal journey from the north. Because I had first-hand ethnographic knowledge of this locality, I was contracted by an Aboriginal Organisation to investigate the mishap and find out if the 'owners' of the site wanted to seek compensation for damages in a court of law.

Once word got around that I was investigating the destruction of the site, I had only to mention 'that *watiya*' (that tree), and faces would darken with sorrow and anger. Billy Japaljarri, an eccentric individual at the best of times, looked at me as if I were *warungka* (socially inept), and should not need to ask. "We all sad for that *watiya*," he said. "Everyone is full of anger and sorrow, specially the *kirda* and *kurdungurlu*" – those who were patrilineally and matrilineally related to it. "The tree was *tarruku* (sacred)," Wilson Japangardi said. It was not really a tree, but the life essence – the *pirlirrpa* – of a person. The tree was the *yuwirnngi*, or Dreaming spirit, of Yunkuyirrarnu. "Everyone was grieving for that old man," Wilson said. Later, I talked to Clancy Japaljarri, who bore the same name as the Dreaming-hero. "If you spoil a Dreaming-place," Clancy explained, "you destroy the people that belong to that Dreaming-place." His argument was that the loss of the life (*pirlirrpa*) of the tree entailed a corresponding loss of life among those who called the tree 'father'. Both the tree and those who held this patrimony in trust shared the same Dreaming essence. This was why the 'fathers' of the damaged site were so worried. They felt that someone would sicken and die now that the tree was dead. Their anxiety was compounded by a suspicion that perhaps they had not done everything in their power to safeguard the site. The words they used conveyed emotions of feeling sick in the stomach and filled with a sense of inner worthlessness. Indeed, the remorse went so deep that there had been talk of people singing themselves to death.

Clancy kept using the word *wajawaja-mani*, which suggested not only the loss of the tree but the loss of a link to the past. "We feel the same way when a person passes away," Clancy said dolefully. "We pity that person, we feel great sadness for them." Clancy touched his abdomen to show me where these emotions were most deeply felt. He paused for a moment, then added: "I'm sad now. I can't show my children that tree. My father told me that Dreaming ... but I can't show it to my son."

Old Lumi Jupurrurla spoke of the Yunkuyirrarnu site as *mukanypa nyayirni* – 'really sacred'. It was something 'money can't buy'. "That proper dear one," he told me, "'im dear one." It was exactly the same way one spoke of a person who was near and dear. But this value does not consist solely in the sedimented meanings of the past at a

place one thinks of as sacred; it depends on the generative activity of people in the here and now. We owe to Marx and Engels the insight that labour and begetting are both reproductive activities (1964: 89–92).[1] In the metaphor of birth, Warlpiri recognise the same connection. Hunting and gathering, food-sharing, initiation, and marriage, bearing and rearing children, are all expressions of a mode of activity which is at once social and visceral – the activity of bringing life into being and sustaining it. The Warlpiri metaphor for this life-sustaining activity is of 'growing up'. To 'grow up' (*wiri jarrimi*) implies a process of nourishing and strengthening. The metaphor holds good for rituals of increase, the activity of making boys into men, raising children, and upholding the Law.

The 'sacred' is synonymous with this generative power. For Warlpiri, the value of any site is given to it cumulatively through the vital and concentrated activity of those who hold that place in their care. This implies social value, since caring for a site or performing ceremony at the site involves creating and affirming relationships among those who call the site 'father' (those patrilineally related it), those who have 'drunk the breast milk of that place' (those matrilineally related to it), and contemporaries and countrymen on whom have been bestowed honorary rights of ritual affiliation. A site thus assumes an ethical and economic value proportional to the social value placed on the networks of people who perennially perform the ritual work of reembodying and reanimating – in stories, songs, body paintings, and dancing – the inherent vitality of the place. In the absence of this activity, a site does not cease to possess value; rather, its value becomes latent. If the site is rarely visited and ceremony never performed there, this latency and silence may take on negative connotations. The site may be seen as the haunt of ghosts, an object of sorrow and loss, a subject of fear. In other words, the intersubjective relation between people and country loses its vitality in the same way that a body wastes away through lack of activity, or the bonds of kinship fall into abeyance when people lose touch with one another, or the deceased become dangerous shades.

But perhaps the most compelling insights Warlpiri informants gave me concerned the existential ground of their feelings for the destroyed site. Displays of grief over the destroyed site were a way of bringing home to me not only the *social* value invested in the site, but the existential loss people had suffered in having their voices ignored, their land trampled on, their views unrecognised, and their pleas dismissed.

"How could people make good their loss?" I asked. On this question, Clancy was adamant. Miming the stabbing action of a spear, he made as if to eviscerate himself. Just as the belly (*miyalu*) was the seat of a person's life-force, so a sacred site was the *miyalu* of the land where the life-force of a people was concentrated. The whitefella

[1] This interplay between persons and things preoccupied Marx in his early essays on the nature of ownership, since it is through labour-action that a person not only produces a livelihood but produces and reproduces a mode of life, a sense of identity, and a sense of communal belonging. In agricultural labour, for example, the soil becomes not only "the objective condition" of the worker's own reproduction; it is experienced as "the objective body of his subjectivity" (Marx and Engels 1964: 81), "a prolongation

who had disembowelled the sacred site should suffer in kind, paying for his error with his own life. That was the Law.

More realistically, Old Jangala said, "We got to hurt those whitefellas, so they're more careful in future. We got to make them pay."

"We say money is the whitefella Dreaming," Clancy explained. "They make a lot of money, they want a lot of money, so if they have to fork out money, that teaches them a lesson."

"How much are you asking them to pay?" Clancy named a sum. Given everything that he had told me, it seemed a paltry amount. But neither blood vengeance nor financial compensation were the real issue, which became very clear when I spoke to the older men at an initiation camp a few days after they had performed ceremony at the site in the presence of the white miners, showing them rarely seen 'sacred' objects in an attempt to impress upon them the seriousness of what had happened.

Interrupting the card game that was going on, I asked if the miners had understood what was revealed to them. "Those *kardiya* (white people) alonga Granites, don't understand *yapa* (Aboriginal people) side," Joe Jangala said. "Those miners have to go through *yapa* first," Frank said. "Sometimes they don't ask no one alongside them. When whites get the OK to come on, they think they are free to do what they like." The anger cut deep. Japanangka turned from his cards. He was wearing a T-shirt in Aboriginal colours. His curly white hair was dirtied to rust, and the stubble on his chin was like mica. He too had taken part in the ceremony. "Did they catch that man who knocked that tree over?" he wanted to know. "Did they get 'im? What they goin' to do to him? They bin punish 'im yet?"

Pepper Jupurrurla saved me from having to come up with an answer. Tossing in his cards and struggling to catch his breath, he embarked on one of his long-winded explanations of the Law. "In the old days you signalled with fire smoke if you wanted to cross other people's country. You waited until you were asked. Same if you shared in other people's ceremony. You got to be invited, you got to be asked. But in those days we couldn't stop those whitefellas. We had to be friendly, to get tobacco, matches, and tucker, so we tried to work along together. But they too strong for we." "We got to put a stop somewhere," Joe broke in. "We know we bin robbed. Whitefellas have to wake up to themselves, to Aboriginal people. They got to work with Aboriginal people and try to make a deal with us when they're going through Aboriginal lands. Whitefellas have to go through Aboriginal people first."

Frank Jungarrayi tilted the Stetson back on his forehead. His voice was harsh and deliberate. "We gotta push im properly. We worry for that business all the time. We worry too much because they bin knock down sacred trees for us. Really worry. They got to pay up. We want that money now!" Frank's vehemence triggered an angry chorus.

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of his body" (89, 92). In other words, labour is experienced not simply as the action of an individual subject on inert matter, but as an intersubjective relationship that simultaneously transforms both the object worked upon and the worker himself (90–91).

The card game was over. Even Zack was awake and listening. "This isn't bullshit," Joe rejoined. "We not just making this up." "White people cheating us for money," Japanangka said. "Rubbish money. They gotta pay us properly."

Under this barrage, the last thing I wanted to do was play devil's advocate. But I needed to know what the men thought about the miner's mitigating plea that the destruction of the tree had been a regrettable accident.

The men listened as I stated the non-Aboriginal case. Their expressions were obdurate and unimpressed. When I had finished, Frank was first to speak. No longer belligerent, he now seemed at pains to help me grasp something that was obvious to any Warlpiri. If a 'sacred' tree simply grows old and dies, that is all right, Frank said. But if a person damages or cuts down such a tree, that person must pay with his or her own life.

"But what if that person did not know the tree was 'sacred'?" I asked. "Everyone knows!" Frank said. He reminded me that boys were taken on long initiatory journeys across the country and shown sacred places, instilled with knowledge of the Dreaming and their responsibility for the land. "But what of whites?" "Those whitefellas knew about the tree," Frank said.

For Frank and the other men, knowledge was something you lived. It wasn't something you bore in mind and never acted on, something to which you simply paid lip service. And it certainly wasn't something abstract, which you wrote down on a piece of paper, filed away, and then forgot. That was why there was no excuse, no extenuating circumstance, for what had been done. Indeed, the destruction of the tree suggested not ignorance of its significance but calculated indifference, and possibly malice.

How could the situation be redressed? Archie rolled a cigarette and lit it. There would have to be payback, he said. "That tree held ceremony." Wilson explained that people had been shamed by what had happened. *Kurnta* connotes both respect and shame. Only by taking action to exact retribution could a person lift the burden of shame from himself. That was why people were demanding compensation. The whites had acted without any regard for Warlpiri values. Warlpiri had been demeaned. By paying compensation, whitefellas would demonstrate respect, and everything would be 'level', 'resolved', 'square and square'.

In the ultimate scale of things, the destruction of the tree was transitory. Damage to the bedrock had not been done. Already saplings were springing up from the ground at the site – a sign of the vital ancestral essence embedded there. Even the insult and injury people had suffered would be forgotten once compensation had been paid and whites acknowledged their mistakes. So ran the Warlpiri reasoning. But could one reconcile this reasoning with the scientific rationality invoked by politicians when justifying the nation's pursuit of what they called 'the general good' or 'the national interest' – a rationality they assumed to be a part of a Western cultural essence, and therefore lacking in Aborigines? Much of my anthropological writing has been an attempt to deconstruct this kind of supposed division between pre-modern and

modern mentalities, and the epistemic cuts with which we historically and habitually distinguish them from us.

3 Earth and Sky

Although, I refer to 'spirits' and 'sacred sites' in the foregoing account, the Warlpiri words, *pirrlipa* and *miyalu* have bodily, emotional, and social connotations that the English terms fail to capture. While my interlocutors rejected the view that Dreaming sites were like holy places or pilgrimage sites, they drew a comparison with the Pool of Remembrance at the National War Memorial Museum in Canberra and road markers commemorating the travels of early white explorers in the Northern Territory. But there was a difference, for remembering was not so much a psychological process as a form of concerted physical and ritual labour in which ancestral life-essences and traces *(yirdi)* lying dormant in the womb or belly of the earth were regenerated and re-embodied by the living. In ritual performances, men and women paint their bodies with ancestral motifs, arouse ancestral essences through the rhythmic stomping of their feet on the ground, reenact episodes from Dreaming myths, and chant ancestral song-cycles to the clacking of boomerangs. These bodily and often bloody exertions conjure images of birth and rebirth (*palka jarrimi*) and explain why ancestral or Dreaming sites are associated with the belly (*miyalu*) and with places where water and game are abundant.

In contemporary Australia, however, even the concept of the Dreaming *(jurrkulpa)* has become etherealised and reflects a pervasive post-Enlightenment tendency to associate religious experience with subjectivity and the sublime, and to identity culture with a realm of authentic 'spiritual' values realised through an "idealized cult of inwardness radically opposed to the world of social utility and material means" (Marcuse 1968: 129). As European powers expanded their spheres of influence into the Global South, idealised definitions of religiosity and rationality were invoked to separate 'higher' from 'lower' forms of sociality and mentality, thus providing a rationale for the denigration and exploitation of so called primitive or savage peoples by allegedly more civilised ones.

4 Spirituality as Compensation for the Loss of Physical and Material Well-Being

When Joe Jangala said that whites didn't understand Aboriginal people and that it was about time whites 'woke up' to the realities of Aboriginal life, his comments could be interpreted as an indictment of the unequal power relations between corporate Australia and indigenous people *and* as a call to reflect critically on the abstract, and disembodied conceptions of religiosity, culture, and reason to which Westerns are

heir (Jackson 1989: 120–122). It is painfully ironic that while Warlpiri adopted a non-Aboriginal rhetoric of sacrality and spirituality in order to persuade whites that their kinship with the land was the source of their very humanity, this rhetoric obscured the deep emotional and social resonances of this existential connectedness with the earth (*walya*, earth, land). The same double-bind followed the passage of the Land Rights Act in 1976, for Aboriginal people now had to claim their traditional lands as 'traditional owners'; even though the concepts of property and ownership mistranslated indigenous experiences of belonging which were grounded in notions of birth and begetting.

In turning to the struggle of Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand to reclaim traditional land and recover lost *mana*, I want to show how Western notions of spirituality were not only projected onto Māori, but became internalised by Māori, from the earliest years of contact and colonisation, as a magical compensation for their social, physical, and economic losses.

While most Europeans in early nineteenth century New Zealand denigrated Māori as creatures of nature, living depraved, sinful, undeveloped lives, and prone to violence, some saw them as deeply religious, with beliefs, myths and superstitions that constituted genuine cosmologies. In the thought of Thomas Kendall, who came to New Zealand as a Calvinist missionary in 1814 but by 1827 had lost his soul to the heathen that he had come to 'improve' and convert, these two strains are equally evident. Thus, Kendall's contempt for native beliefs coexisted uncomfortably with a profound intellectual curiosity about the Māori worldview, just as his desire to keep himself socially separate from Māori was compromised by a need for their company (Binney 1968: 76–77). In Kendall's struggle to reconcile a view of Māori and Pākehā as radically different with an anthropological relativism that recognised historical and human continuities between them, we may discern one side of the tragedy that is colonialism. Since the coloniser cannot abandon the idea of natives as inferior beings without calling into question his right to have power over them, he has recourse to a compromise. He will deny reason and secular power to them but recognise their humanity as potentially his spiritual equal. For the colonised, a similar dilemma emerges. By entering into contracts and treaties with a materially and militarily more powerful polity, their autonomy, sovereignty, and identity are undermined. But through spiritual power they imagine that they will make good the political losses they have incurred. Gradually, these stereotypes will come to constitute a 'second colonisation' (Nandy 1988: xi) in which *both* Māori and Pākehā unwittingly collude.

5 The Enchantment and Disenchantment of Literacy

In the decade before 1820, Māori relations with Europeans were motivated by economic and political interests. Missionaries were tolerated, not because Māori had much

interest in Christianity, but because they sought new opportunities for trade and the acquisition of muskets (Binney 1968: 30). In the late 1820s all this changed. Where only a few years earlier, flax and potatoes had been traded for weapons, reading matter was now the commodity in greatest demand. But was it Christian notions of salvation from sin and spiritual rebirth to which Māori were drawn, or a desire to safeguard or salvage their dwindling political and economic power? By the early 1820s Māori in Northland had diversified their agriculture to include pig breeding, as well as imported crops such as turnips, parsnips, carrots, cabbages, and peas, and by 1830 most chiefs had Europeans living among them, mediating trade relations with the outside world (Polack 1840, vol. 1: 172). But profits from sales of flax, potatoes and other crops had been used, with disastrous results, to acquire muskets, gunpowder, and iron tools. Musket warfare decimated defenceless southern tribes, epidemic illness led to dramatic population decline, pigs ravaged gardens, the *tapu* system of controlling food production and conserving resources was undermined by the market economy, and villagers often starved or worked themselves to exhaustion in an effort to produce goods for Europeans. It was against this background that Māori turned their attentions from traders to missionaries, as if the bible held the secret to European power. Significantly, slaves were among the first to convert, and they became the principal evangelists, catechists, and teachers. But one suspects that Māori were not so much seeking individual salvation but the means to regain their health, social integrity, honour, and power. It was literacy, rather than Christian teachings per se, that held the promise of this restoration. Māori spoke to the explorer Colenso of being sick for lack of books (*E mate ana matou i te pukapuka kore*), and of needing books to use as guns to shoot evil spirits or as compasses with which to reset their course (Bagnall and Petersen 1948: 50). By 1845 there was at least one New Testament for every two Māori in New Zealand, but any hope Māori may have placed in these texts as magical or practical solutions to their problems was already waning. Religious instruction had made no difference to their lot, and though some Europeans were advocating that Māori be taught English so they could acquire the kind of knowledge most relevant to their needs (Polack 1938: 100) and many Māori were making the same demands (Parr 1963: 216), the missionaries' counter argument was that this would only make Māori vulnerable to the profane subculture of illiterate whalers and sealers. More to the point, perhaps, the missionaries were well aware that such a move would free Māori from their dependency on the missions. As for Māori, they undoubtedly had already seen that illiterate Pākehā were succeeding where they were failing, and that missionaries were selfishly and competitively interested in saving Māori souls rather than dedicated to the protection of Māori interests, as if the injustices in this life could be redeemed in the next. Te Pakaka Tawhai puts this succinctly: "While the Christian God provides Māoridom with its first Redeemer, he appears mostly to ignore needs at the temporal and profane level, leaving this domain to the ancestral gods who continue to cater for those needs" (1996: 11).

When large-scale colonisation began in the 1840s, there was widespread Māori repudiation of literacy and mission-based Christianity, yet in attempting to control and comprehend the forces working against them and bring unity to tribes still bent on settling old scores, Māori had recourse to many of the ideas they had assimilated from their oppressors. At *runanga*, or meetings, where only a decade before catechisms were recited and instruction in literacy eagerly received, questions of unification and the recovery of lost *mana* were now vigorously discussed. A form of theocratic rule, modelled on the English monarchy was widely debated, and the voices of new religious leaders, called *tohunga* or *wairuarua*, were heard. At a meeting with Māori in 1856, the missionary Thomas Grace poured scorn on the "absurd pretensions of the Wairuarua," only to be told, "When the missionaries came we consented to them because we thought they were a law of life to the body. When the Wesleyans came we consented to them because we thought their worship was a law of life for the body. Afterwards, when the Romanists came, we consented unto them because we thought they, too, had a law of life for the body. For the same reason we now listen to the Wairuarua" (Grace 1928: 60).[2] Christian teachings were also repudiated if they conflicted with Māori notions of identity, including the imperatives of revenge for insults suffered and the upholding of the *mana* of one's land. Thus, John White relates that "no less than ten of the Rev. M. Brown's Native Congregation at Tauranga left him, returning their books to him, and saying, 'We must fight to defend ourselves. ... If we may not fight, we will no longer be missionaries'" (1887: 157).

6 The Invention of Culture

Like any catastrophe, colonisation ruptured the network of relationships that constituted the Māori lifeworld, reducing people's capacity to act effectively in relation to the circumstances that overwhelmed them. In the period 1840 to 1901, the Māori population fell from 100,000 to 45,549 and Māori land was reduced from 66 million acres to 3 million acres. In a prevailing image of the times, people became as slaves or exiles, lacking power, influence, or presence. It is in this passivity, defeat and shame that accompanied the loss of land, livelihoods, and health, as well as the loss of the

[2] One of the first of the prophets was the mission-educated evangelist Papahurihia, who had a large following in Northland between 1834 and 1840. Knowledgeable in both Judaeo-Christian and Māori traditions, Papahurihia had also picked up, in the course of his travels, skills of ventriloquism and hypnotism, and used these in communicating with the dead (Gudgeon 1907: 75). Papahurihia was, however, only one of many new *tohunga*, using séances and other spiritualist techniques to control and comprehend the forces that were now overwhelming Māori lands and lives. As such he was a precursor of prophetic figures like Te Kooti Arikirangi (who founded the Ringatu faith in 1868), Te Whiti-o-Rongomai who led passive resistance to Pākehā settlement in Taranaki in the 1870s, Rua Kenana Hepetipa, the New Messiah (Te Mihaia Hou) who created the community of Maungapohatu in 1906, and Ratana, who proclaimed himself *mangai*, the mouthpiece of God in 1918 and promoted a pan-Māori ideology that transcended tribal differences.

means to resist colonial power, that we may begin to understand Māori expressions of grief and grievance, and the role of fetishised notions of culture (*Māoritanga*) and spirituality (*wairuatanga*) in the struggle for social justice.

Etherealised Pākehā notions of culture undoubtedly influenced these discursive transformations. Nineteenth scholars of Māori society persistently speak of Māori lore rather than law, of Māori religion and cosmology rather than science, and of Māori tradition and myth rather than history. Inscribed in these nominal distinctions is a more entrenched myth – that the European scholar possesses reason while the Māori, for all his or her spirituality and cultural knowledge does not. So profoundly have these discursive markers entered our consciousness that they continue to be the terms on which 'we' talk about 'them' and both Māori and Pākehā deny their coevalness.

In the 1920s, the ethnographer Elsdon Best observed that Māori possessed a "mythopoeic nature," and that "true to his ... ever-present human desire to know the origin and meaning of everything [he] has evolved a cosmogonic scheme" (1954: 10). In 1965, the scholar J.C. Laughton asserted in a similar vein that the "central feature in Māoritanga is the religious nature of the Māori. The whole ancient Māori life turned upon the poles of religion [and] community life ... was built around 'the concept of the divine'" (1965: 435). But is there any empirical justification for this reification of spirituality, or is it a projection of a Eurocentric worldview that habitually separates spirituality from materiality, and religion from reason?

What we do know is that the nineteenth century scholars on whom we rely for accounts of the 'Māori as he was' wanted to construct abstract and systematic models of Māori *thought* rather than see knowledge (*mātauranga*) as Māori did, as a body of resources with which social relations were produced and reproduced. As for Māori practical and scientific knowledge of medicinal plants, ocean navigation, kumara storage, flax cultivation, and agriculture, this would remain unacknowledged until researchers in the 1960s turned their attention to it. The emphasis was on the *vita contemplativa*, not the *vita activa*. Rather than investigate *korero tahito* (ancestral explanations) in the form in which they appeared in the course of events such as *hui* (social gatherings) and *tangi* (funerals), scholars like George Grey and John White compiled collections of decontextualised information from key informants, all of whom were mission-educated and literate men, and doubtlessly disposed to present their knowledge in ways that met the expectations of the scholar-collector or satisfied their own need to show that they too had a religious system or philosophy that bore comparison to the religion and philosophy of the Pākehā. But, writes Sir Apirana Ngata, "Neither Grey, nor any of the men who helped him to make his collection" sought to "discover the authorship, the history and the background of the cryptic expressions and allusions contained in these compositions" (1959: xxxi). Moreover, in the works of scholars like Grey, Shortland, Gudgeon, Colenso, White, and Tregear, the crucial Māori concepts of *mana*, *tapu*, and *mauri* are defined without reference to the contexts in which they were used, so giving the impression that they constituted a belief system that answered peoples' need to comprehend the world rather than control or manage their relations with it.

The 'dissociation of sensibilities', whereby mind and spirit become abstracted from the social situations in which they are deployed and the interests they serve, tends to create false dichotomies between body and soul, or the secular and the sacred.

Consider the contemporary Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa, which projects a bicultural ideology based on implicit contrasts between Māori spirituality and Pākehā materialism (Goldsmith 2003). Margaret Jolly perceptively notes how Te Papa plays down the sacred in Pākehā cultural history, by contrast with the Māori exhibits which "create a strong sense of seriousness, calm and spirituality" (2001: 445) – something that may be seen as an expression of liberal Pākehā guilt since, in extolling Māori spiritual superiority and pandering to the stereotype of crass Western materialism, Pākehā seek to compensate Māori for their political powerlessness without actually changing the status quo (*conferatur* Brown 2002: 293).

There is a tacit collusion here between Māori and Pākehā, both of whom all too often depict Western culture as bereft of spirituality and romanticise Māori culture as a domain of authentic values. In recent years, however, many New Zealanders of European descent have repudiated this ritualised self-deprecation, while Māori intellectuals have bemoaned the fact that among Pākehā "there is little recognition that the Māori world is anything other than a cultural object noted for its spirituality and its music" (Moana Jackson 2001). To construct Māori rights on the basis of spirituality and aesthetic presence rather than rationality is to introduce a double standard into discussions of social justice, pitting 'cultural values' against sound scientific understanding. The effect is to force Māori into making claims for social justice in terms that are deemed, by the dominant culture, to be inimical to 'economic development' and the 'national good'. In as much as these priorities express the neo-liberal philosophy of global capitalism, Māori are marginalised both locally *and* internationally, their place in global culture defined solely in terms of their identity as bearers of an ancient heritage. Thus, the bind in which many indigenous intellectuals find themselves in the cosmopolitan world: recognised and respected only as custodians of non-Western lifeways, tribal values, and a spirituality that the West has allegedly lost. Indigenous people are thus doomed to define themselves, and be defined, in terms of their radical otherness rather than their common humanity.

Such was the case in dialogues between Pākehā scientists and Māori activists over the introduction to Aotearoa New Zealand of biogenetic technologies. Debates centred on Māori resistance to the Human Genome Project ('an insidious expression of genetic capitalism'), on proposed amendments to euthanasia laws ('yet another technology of genocide'), on GE (genetic engineering) techniques for the biocontrol of noxious weeds and possums, on GE techniques of livestock breeding, and on bioprospecting of native flora and fauna. Mindful of New Zealand's bi-cultural constitution, the Labour government that came to power in 1999 saw that any radical division between Māori and non-Māori over the uses of gene technology would have serious consequences for the economic and cultural future of the nation. A Royal Commission on Genetic Modification was therefore established in May-June 2000 to receive submissions, convene

meetings and organise workshops that would explore the issues. While many Pākehā saw biocontrol as a practical solution to an environmental problem, Māori argued that transferring genetic material across species boundaries constitutes a dangerous, unprecedented, and irreversible intervention in the natural order of things for, like mixing waters from different catchments or sources, moving genetic material from one species (a virus or parasite) to another (the possum) outraged *tikanga Māori* (the Māori way of doing things), disrupted the *whakapapa* (genealogy) and *mauri* (life essence) of those species, destroyed a primordial balance between Ranginui (sky/father) and Papatuanuku (earth/mother), and by infringing these *tapu*, threatened the world with illness and degradation (Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment 2000: 25–27).

When the Royal Commission completed its work, lip service was paid to respecting the Māori point of view but politically it was ignored, the unspoken assumption being that European 'science' and Māori 'values' could not be placed on the same epistemological footing. Māori lawyer Moana Jackson concludes a trenchant critique of this double standard, and the way it deployed value-laden terms to suggest an opposition between allegedly superior and inferior ways of reasoning, by pointing out that epistemology is not the issue; the issue is a political one of recognising that the Māori viewpoint is not an intellectual conceit but a matter of existential survival:

> For the issue is not just about the potential and unknown risks of GE but also the nature of the constitutional relationship that the Treaty [of Waitangi] sought to establish between our people and the Crown. On a matter that holds so many risks for what Māori submitters called the 'ira tangata', it is not enough that we be heard with 'exquisite politeness' and then marginalised. Our mokopuna [grandchildren] demand more (Moana Jackson 2001).

Māori intellectuals are often caught in a bind. By arguing the case for social justice in the language of traditional, ancestral, cultural or spiritual values, they risk perpetuating the epistemic split between unreason and reason that has always diminished such claims in European eyes; yet by not invoking their own worldview, they risk abandoning the symbolic system that underpins their sense of having a distinct identity and history.

There is a danger, however in reifying any worldview and treating it as a blueprint we follow rather than as a resource we call upon in relation to our diverse and ever-changing needs.

General statements about 'the' Māori worldview are not hard to come by. According to such statements, the entire cosmos comprises a network of relations of kinship and alliance that includes all beings and all things – people, plants, animals, and the elements. The primal parents of this plethora of forms, each of which possesses its own *tikanga* or natural function, were Ranginui and Papatuanuku, respectively sky and earth. These days, many Māori intellectuals will not only draw hard and

fast distinctions between indigenous and non-indigenous worldviews but argue that conflicts over the meaning of land tenure and land rights are grounded in differences between 'spiritual' and 'material' attitudes toward nature. In the words of one notable Māori scholar, Māori people do not see themselves as separate from nature, humanity, and the natural world, being direct descendants of Earth Mother. Thus, the resources of the earth do not belong to humankind; rather, humans belong to the earth. While humans as well as animals, birds, fish, and trees can harvest the bounty of Mother Earth's resources, they do not own them. Instead, humans have 'user rights' (Henare n.d.: 202).

A year after the introduction of GM technology to New Zealand in 2003, I met Manuka Henare in Auckland, and asked him how many Māori, in his view, embraced the 'traditional' belief about not intermingling the genes of different species. I took care to explain that I was not calling these beliefs into question; rather, I was curious to know to what extent these beliefs were politically and situationally, rather than culturally, motivated. Did people hold these beliefs to be true because they simply could not comprehend the world in any other terms, or did they espouse these beliefs for the sense of solidarity and common cause they provided in the face of a dominant Eurocentric and allegedly 'scientific' worldview which they felt they did not own or understand?[3]

Manuka made two points. First, he observed that relatively few Māori were radically opposed to genetic engineering on a priori cultural or cosmological grounds. However, most will speak against it, saying no at first, because they are wary of being railroaded into giving their assent to something that may prove later to be to their detriment. People are conservative and cautious, Manuka said, because Pākehā have ridden roughshod over their intellectual and cultural property rights in the past; their inclination is, therefore, to go slow, to wait and see how things work out, how the land lies, before rushing into anything.

Manuka's second point was that Māori attitudes to genetic engineering are context dependent. He described to me a Māori gathering at which he asked people to raise their hands if they were diabetic and using insulin. Manuka was not surprised when a large number of people raised their hands. He then asked how many people were against genetic engineering. All were against it. Manuka then told his audience that insulin was produced through genetic engineering. How many people, he now asked, would continue using insulin? All said they would. If it is a life and death issue, Manuka said, one will set aside one's ideological objections to genetic engineering.

This kind of pragmatism struck in chord in me, for I had long been critical of the view that the way human beings live their everyday lives is wholly determined by the views they espouse or the beliefs they hold. In my view, it is facile to claim that our

[3] *Conferatur* Mita Ririnui, chair of the Labour Māori Caucus in 2001, who pointed out that to "interfere with another life-form is disrespectful and another form of cultural arrogance." See: http://www.biotech-info.net/NZ_yes.html.

worldviews so deeply penetrate and permeate our consciousness that our actions can be explained simply by reference to them. The immense variability in commitment to doctrine is strong evidence that doctrine does not determine experience in any straightforward way. Moreover, beliefs are more commonly post facto rationalisations than a priori determinants of action. And human beings are motivated by many imperatives apart from belief, even though they cannot always say what these imperatives are. That is to say that our existential *situations*, individual *biographies* and political *interests* also find expression in the ideas we draw upon, the symbols we use, and the beliefs we espouse.

7 Conclusion

In Anne-Christine Hornborg's anthropology of religion, an ethnographic sensitivity to intersubjectivity and relationality is consistently evident. While her contextual descriptions of Mi'kmaq 'spirituality' resonate with Māori and Warlpiri worldviews, they also bring home to us the difficulty of finding a vocabulary for cross-cultural analysis that escapes the implicit bias of 'our' Judeo-Christian heritage and that avoids reducing human experience to the symbolic terms with which it is articulated. Whether a people identify absolute value with a deity (*deiwos* derives from the root *diw/dyu*, meaning 'the bright sky' or daylight), with Mother Earth, with prized possessions, or with abstract ideas, the source and consummation of all these terms would appear to be family and community (Hornborg 2011). That these basic existential realities have informed Anne-Christine's life and writing is, I feel, the moving spirit that has brought me and others to write in praise of her teaching, collegiality, and friendship.

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Chapter 4: Subsumed Rituals[(5)]

The Intrinsic Implications of Divination and Powerful Things among the Eastern Penan of Malaysian Borneo

Mikael Rothstein

1. Introduction[1]

The Eastern Penan of Malaysian Sarawak, central Borneo, without doubt constitute one of the world's least ritualising groups. Intricate rituals such as initiations, rites of passage, larger sacrifices, calendrical feasts, yearly rallies, and other spectacular events are absent. Only death is trivially marked. The Penans' rituals are, in contrast, inconspicuous and, at first glance, insignificant. Traditionally, and until recently, the Penan lived as nomadic hunter-gatherers, and their portable culture never allowed for larger ritual systems to evolve. Their cultural ways, social as well as material, have, also with respect to religion, been shaped by their nomadic set of circumstances (Rothstein 2016: 245f.). This fact led early observers to the conclusion that the Penan – in accordance with the evolutionary assumptions of the mid-nineteenth century – were without religion altogether. This is certainly not the case, and a slight change of perspective reveals that the Penan are in fact producers and users of rituals that are not easily seen, but copious and crucial to their everyday lives. In this chapter I shall address two ritual phenomena and show how they, despite their muted nature, are essential and in fact all-encompassing systems; a complex of avian divination known as *amen juhit* ('bird sign'), and the multifaceted use of a class of amulets known as *sihap*. As we shall see the application of both lead to the same; an ongoing, and in effect permanent ritualisation of the individual, the group, and, in a way, the world. What

[1] I am happy for this opportunity to commend professor Anne-Christine Hornborg for her significant contributions to the history of religions, but also for being a warm and supportive colleague. Her never failing enthusiasm and scholarly engagement are exemplary, and it is a pleasure to offer a few new lines about rituals in her honour.

When nothing else is indicated, all data have been obtained during my fieldwork among the Eastern Penan, whom I have visited every year in Sarawak from 2005 until 2019, when the COVID-19 pandemic prevented further investigations *in situ*.

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is at first glance a case of minimal ritual use, turns out to be quite the opposite as the principle 'follow the birds and carry your amulet', sets the scene for a continuous, albeit unnoticed ritualisation, as the rituals in question, so to say, hide in plain sight by being part and parcel of processes that are not (by way of standard definitions) religious. Thus, we may tentatively talk of various types of subsumed rituals, and add a bit to ritual theory.

2 A Brief Ethnographic Sketch

The Eastern Penan (distinguishable from the neighbouring Western Penan) inhabit northeastern Sarawak (in East Malaysia) and the south of Negara Brunei Darussalam (Brunei), on the island of Borneo. Presently they number around 9,000. Until the early part of the twentieth century, when the Penan probably numbered less than 1,700 individuals (Leach 1950: 48, 56), they were mostly nomadic, small-scale, immediate-return hunter-gatherers. They would travel to forage over areas of around 100–220 sq. km, in egalitarian groups of between twenty and fifty individuals of all ages, generally comprising three generations. A temporarily located camp would typically be situated on a ridge top, within what the Penan would describe as *tana' pengurip*, that is 'the place where one lives'. There has been a steady decline in nomadism among Eastern Penan and this became more rapid with the massive increase in deforestation from the 1980s until the present day. While the Penans' lifeways are changing, their continued strong relationship with the rainforest remains, as they retain much traditional knowledge and awareness with regard to plants and animals (Voeks 2007), and the language to articulate this (Sercombe 1996). The Penan have no religious authorities. Some people may have greater expertise than others in various ways, but even if an individual is particularly skilled in divination or the ability to communicate with spirits, this does not make him or her an absolute authority let alone a person with socio-religious power. Religious competences are distributed more or less evenly among members of a Penan group, reflecting the general egalitarianism of their society. Thus, when considering the bird oracle and the use of *sihap*-amulets, we are dealing with phenomena of importance to all members of society and religious traits that are, in principle, managed by everyone.

3 The Bird Oracle: *amen juhit*

Elsewhere I have offered an in-depth discussion of the Penans' bird oracle. What follows here is a brief sketch of how the system works (paraphrased from Rothstein 2016: 259–279 and 2019: 624–625).

Bird omenology is widespread throughout Borneo (Kershaw and Kershaw 2007; Metcalf 1976) but the nomadic foragers have a different approach compared to the

farmers. While farmers instigate questions to the omen birds in simple or elaborate rituals, the Penan will do nothing actively but simply await the arrival of divinatory signs when in need of guidance, or respond to them when they appear without notice. The *amén juhit*-system is based on spontaneous or improvised readings and therefore impossible to plan or control. The system's construction is simple: Sounds and movements from a limited number of bird species are observed and acted upon according to a fixed protocol, thus regulating timing and direction of human movements in the environment. If the bird is seen flying in one direction, the hunter has to pause. If it moves in the opposite direction, he can proceed. Seen several times in a short while the bird may indicate stop until next dawn, and if particular bird sounds are heard, yet another meaning is deduced. One set of information is inferred from one particular species, another set of instructions from another. Some foretell bad things, others the opposite. The precise time, morning or evening, when birds are seen or heard also has divinatory significance. Violating or ignoring the signs manifested by the birds will cause problems of different kinds: People may be sick or even die, trees may fall, thunder may break the heaven, children may be lost, poisonous snakes may strike, and all sorts of sinister assaults from bad spirits may occur. People, consequently, are adamant to respect the oracle. In fact, it is impossible to understand the *amén juhit*-system detached from the complex of taboos, *kilin*, which puts an emphasis on the importance of the oracle. To be brief, the timing of hunting trips, nomadic progress through the forest, the placement of camp sites, direction during hunting and foraging etc. is to a very high degree determined by the bird oracle. In essence avian divination is framing the everyday lives of the Penan, which is why its importance cannot be underestimated. The system fulfils several purposes, and, among other things, I have suggested that it serves as an ecologically stabilising factor as it prevents foraging from being too targeted and thus saves various resources from being exhausted (Rothstein 2019: 626f.). In this connection, however, I wish to pursue another aspect of the system.

When an individual or a group abide by the oracle, the function is not limited to the instance. The oracle's guidance draws a line through time and space and determines how people move or act during one or more days or even weeks. The oracle not only tells people what to do, or how to do it. It creates a condition or effectuates a state of affairs. Given that the bird oracle is consulted on an ongoing basis, its efficacy never pauses. Any given time and most events are framed by some kind of avian divination, and all decisions, in principle, are structured according to the signs provided by the *amen juhit* system. The omen birds do not appear all the time, but it would be very strange if a day transpired and nothing at all was seen or heard.[2] This leaves the Penan under

[2] Out of circa 380 potential bird species in the larger range of the Penan, less than 7% are used for divinatory purposes (around twenty-five species), and among those only four or five species are encountered on a regular basis (Rothstein 2016: 271). This allows the oracle to work in balanced ways, as the relevant birds are not encountered all the time. As it appears omen birds have, in all likelihood (even if unconsciously), been selected on the basis of special properties that differentiates them from most birds. They appear to be liminal elements within the category *juhit* (Rothstein 2016: 271–276).

permanent influence of the of the bird oracle. The observation of the omen birds, and the interpretation of the sounds they produce, do not intrinsically constitute rituals, but they are ritualised procedures without which the birds' movements and utterings would reach the Penan devoid of meaning. By ritual procedures, in this context, I mean ways of deliberately directing the attention to certain things, consciously run a certain interpretation, and deliberately act according to the result.

It has been quite difficult to determine whether the *amen juhit* system implies intentional agency or not. It has been established that omen birds, among the sedentary rice farmer in central Borneo, are messengers from the spirit world and thus emissaries with no real will or power of their own (Metcalf 1976: 98). The *amen juhit* of the Penan, however, seems to work independently from any intentional or wilful god or spirit. I have asked what beings that may send the birds, but the premise is wrong and the question therefore refuted. The omen birds reveal hidden knowledge, not because they have a deliberate intention of doing so, not because they are bestowed with special powers, but because it is simply what they do. The situation mirrors what ethnographer Rodney Needham stressed in a debate on the efficacy of Bornean trophy heads possessed by the same sedentary groups (not the Penan) mentioned here; that they simply work, not because they contain a certain substance or house a god, rather "the taking of heads secured well-being, and that was that" (Needham 1976: 78; also see Rothstein 2021: 47–50). The Penans' bird oracle simply works, it is a self-sustaining mechanism in no need of further rationalisation or explanation. This is probably why the Penan consider the *amen juhit* part and parcel of everyday life. The oracle, in principle, is always there, it is always on, and apart from paying attention to whatever is divulged, there is nothing to take care of. It would be wrong to say that people do not reflect on messages received, because they certainly do and that is the very intention, but they do not question the system's rationality. The Penan are not into theology. The avian oracle sets a condition, it is a way of the world, and therefore it defines an order which is accepted as one would accept the constraints of social rules. And perhaps the *amen juhit* system is best understood in that context; as a social rule. Abiding to the oracle is to follow protocol.

Amen juhit places the Penan, every member of society and each nomadic group as a unit, in a permanently ritualised condition. The system does not require fixed ritual manoeuvres, but the deliberate practice of paying close attention to certain birds and interpreting their sound and movements, amount to what I would deem implicit ritual action.

4 Personal Amulets: *sihap*

A *sihap* is not a lucky charm or a talisman in any simple sense (for details, see Rothstein 2016: 331–345). It can be made from all sorts of materials: Animal and plant parts, human hair, pieces of utensils, cloth, metal, minerals, and many other

things. Sometimes it is made of one material only, but very often different components are united, literally glued together with resin and blood from butchered prey, and gradually formed into a small lump. A potential *sihap* arrives and cannot be sought after. It seeks out its coming owner and, in a way, offers its services. One will rarely be in doubt when this happens. A *sihap* is always non-typical, oddly shaped or paradoxical one way or another and will reveal its existence in surprising ways. A gekko's tail, for instance, would fall into a man's lap, a monkey killed with a blow-pipe may have a strange tooth, an edible root growing in a strange place may have the shape of a hand, a stone found in a river may have a hole in the middle, or a dead deer found in the forest may have an extra antler. Once the finder takes the odd item into possession it becomes a *sihap*. The object, due to its liminal nature, is initially a *potential* amulet, but once a person engages with it, it starts unfolding its powers.

Everybody in a nomadic Penan group will possess one or more *sihaps*, and it is difficult to imagine a Penan without. I have collected numerous stories about the marvels of *sihaps* and they can roughly be divided into three categories: Stories of how the owner gains exceptional physical strength and superhuman powers, stories of how the *sihap* brings the owner good fortune, health and success, and stories of how the *sihap* helps the owner avoid calamities. Obviously these themes overlap, but the picture is clear: The *sihap* ensures or supports the owner's well-being. One man told me how he would become tireless if he drank water from a cup where his *sihap* had been submerged. Another related how he would be unable to track down animals in the forest if he did not carry his *sihap*. A woman told me how her *sihap* had saved her from drowning in a river, and she also recounted how *sihaps*, many years ago, had prevented her children from getting lost. People tell how *sihaps* keep sickness at bay, prevent accidents from happening, attract prey, stabilise huts, empower them sexually, serve as pathfinders, and enable utensils and weapons to serve their purposes. And people will always describe when, where and how precisely their *sihap* has been effective.

All *sihaps* are accompanied by such narratives, and the question is if the amulet can at all be imagined without a corresponding story? People will describe how different *sihaps* were physically joined into one, and thereby also combine unrelated stories. I would propose that the lifestory or micro mythology of a *sihap* forms an integral part of the object. It is not simply an item to carry. It is also a kind of memory device, which, thanks to the corresponding narratives, will remind the user of its prior achievements and thus establish notions of the past and generate good aspirations for the future. The amulet's efficacy has to do with the stories told about it.

In a way a *sihap* assumes the role of a social actor. In sociology actor-network theory proposes that human action is influenced by the surroundings, including objects. Humans never operate detached from the environment, and sometimes an object will function as a kind of person and assume agency (Sayes 2014). This is precisely what *sihaps* do. The owner will implicitly view the amulet as a kind of social agent and relate to it accordingly, and the object's efficacy will be taken into account whenever a

potentially dangerous or difficult situation is assessed. Children with no *sihap* of their own will be protected by other kinds of amulets, usually little things tied around their wrists or carried around the neck (jawbones from a tortoise, teeth from various cats, a kind of castanets made from nuts, *et cetera*).

As it appears every member of the group is equipped with a *sihap* (or something similar), and precisely because the egalitarian structure of society integrates everyone into a close-knit social unit, the Penan are permanently shielded by a collective of *sihaps*. This situation is the result not of a deliberate action, but rather the effect of the total incorporation of the amulets into the everyday lives of every member of Penan society, that is the permanent ritualisation of peoples' mode of living. In principle nothing happens detached from the protective power of the *sihaps*. It is difficult to imagine a Penan with no *sihap*, and therefore highly unlikely to encounter a Penan with no magic shielding.

5 Analysis

The fact that the Penans' rituals are comparatively undetectable, initially led to the false conclusion that these were people deprived of religion. Early observers maintained that the Penan had no religion, and it was generally recognised that small scale hunter-gatherers had never reached an evolutionary stage where religion had become an issue (*conferatur* Tylor 1891(I): 421f. and Rothstein 2016: 83f.). In more recent contributions anthropologist Bernard Sellato has written something similar about the Punan, with whom the Penan are often confused: "... the Punan do not show much interest in rituals and religion," and: "I would tend to see the Punan society as secular or skeptical, that is, showing no leaning towards religious behaviour, ritual activity, or cosmogonic speculations" (Sellato 2002: 114–116; Sellato 1994: 162). It could have been said about the Penan as well, but the historian of religions, approaching the issue differently, would disagree. But how should one approach a religious world, to use William Paden's concept, when it remains unforthcoming to the scholar? A few reflections:

In a well-known model anthropologist Harvey Whitehouse proposes a distinction between 'doctrinal' and 'imagistic' rituals (Whitehouse 2000). Rituals in doctrinal mode are well known to everyone in the group and routinely performed, while those of the imagistic kind are reserved for special events and rarely brought into action. Sunday services in a Christian church, or Friday prayers in a Muslim mosque, are doctrinal rituals designed to express and confirm essential teachings and social norms, while imagistic rituals are brought into action during special events such as initiations, crisis management, calendrical occurrences, *et cetera*. The Penan have neither, but in the absence of larger rituals, their everyday lives are teeming with subsumed or implicit ritualisations. I have described the *amen juhit*-system and the use of *sihaps* as examples. But there is much more: For instance, diminutive rituals pertaining to eating express some of the Penans' most important social norms (Rothstein 2016a), as

do the many ritual sequences that form a part of the hunting process (Rothstein 2016: 247–254). Neither of these examples stand out as doctrinal rituals precisely. On the other hand, it is quite clear that hunting and gathering are far from menial tasks of a profane nature, as implied by Durkheim. Hunting *implies* religion, hunting *is* religion as much as it is handicraft and skills. The bird oracle and the use of amulets is in concrete terms part of the hunting process. Also, the Durkheimian expectation that a people, like the Penan, would create collective effervescence during rare gatherings, is ethnographically uncorroborated (Durkheim 1912: 216). In this case the mundane aspects of daily life simply imply religion, and social solidarity is expressed in the very same context; the drama and safety of everyday living. Similarly, when ritual attempts are exerted to appease the raging thunder god, *balei liwen*, these are small scale events rather dissimilar to the imagistic crisis-management rituals discussed by Whitehouse. Funerals come closest, but also in that case only little happens. In essence, observing a range of taboos, people will organise the body on a flat stone, in a tree or on a riverbank, back off, and leave it to the forest to consume it.

While the distinction between 'doctrinal' and 'imagistic' rituals has added to our understanding of what rituals are all about, the model falls short of including brief, discreet rituals and ritualisations such as those found among the Penan. As mentioned by Catherine Bell, "the way European and American scholars generate questions about ritual reflects and promotes basic elements of their cultural worldview" (Bell 1997: 266). In other words, we seem to understand the phenomenon of ritual within a framework defined, or at least strongly affected by, the way rituals are generally performed in our own society. One implicit assumption of particular interest would be, I believe, that rituals are special actions set-aside from other actions, and that religion altogether is also something in its own right.

However, the Penans' ritual reality is, as we have seen, basically different. Rituals and various types of ritualisations are mostly actions imbedded in everyday life. They do not stand out as significant or special events. As a matter of fact, the Penan have no word for 'ritual', 'ceremony' or the like. And no such concept as 'religion' for that matter. Ritual actions are always designated specifically; *peliwa* is an offering to appease angry spirits, *puling* is a brief ritual manoeuvre that may turn a stone into food, *tivai* is a recitation that allows humans to communicate with spirits, *ngelatang* is to cast a curse, *et cetera*, but no generic term that encompasses such activities is available. Offerings, magic, divination, recitations, *et cetera* are considered rational actions along any other practical measure that we would label 'everyday activities'. Religion is not set apart, it is always implicit and never seen as different from other social aspects of life. The Penans' case certainly supports my viewpoint that religion is not primarily constituted by 'special things' as suggested by historian of religions Ann Taves (Taves 2010). They may appear special to us, but in context, that is, among the Penan, they are not. Elsewhere I have used the term 'hyperreligion' to designate the phenomenon, as religion, in this case, goes beyond (*hyper* meaning 'over' or 'beyond') the borders we usually think of, and spills into everyday things: 'Religion' is comparable to a glass

of water. The content is contained, easily seen and easily located. 'Hyper-religion', on the contrary, manifests when the water is spilled and everything is soaked. Nothing is contained, nothing is easily seen, but it is everywhere (*conferatur* Rothstein 2014).

Consequently, we need to approach the Penans' rituals not as something special, not as a distinct social expression different for other social expressions, but as part and parcel of what any member of society would do to make ordinary things work. As a part of the Penans, socio-ecological presence in the forest. The fact that rituals are discrete or subsumed does not mean that they are weak or unimportant. On the contrary, as I shall try to show in the following.

I have distinguished between concrete ritual actions and less concrete kinds of ritualisation. Boundaries are fluid. The art of observing the birds is in itself an action that creates a special situation; the observer becomes engaged in the world more deeply, which enables him or her to act accordingly. The moment of observation, therefore, is the ritual instance where circumstances are changed, but the effect spreads through time and space, and, in intertwinement with subsequent observations, creates a permanently ritualised situation. Each hunter, for instance, will at some point encounter one or more omen birds, and as his hunting success remains an issue for the entire group, the message received has a bearing for everyone. In effect, because the divinatory process affects all members of the nomadic group, and because birds are observed around the clock, society as a whole finds itself under the continuous auspices of the oracle. Similarly, when someone is protected by his or her personal *sihap*, even though the amulet is intimately associated with its owner, society at large enjoys the benefits. The egalitarian nature of the nomadic group, and the socio-ecological obligation for all members to bring home calories, makes the individual hunter one of society's limbs, and his *sihap* one equipment among many to ensure the survival and well-being of the entire community.

This understanding only becomes meaningful if the nomadic group is tentatively looked upon, not simply as a social unit, but as an entity. Clearly the nomadic group is constituted by a number of individuals, but in socio-ecological terms members of the group are so closely knit that it is worthwhile regarding the group as a single organism. This perspective is confirmed by the all-encompassing effects of the bird oracle and the many *sihaps* respectively. When a hunter returns with quarry it is shared equally among everyone, and in a similar way the portents received by the hunter during the chase are in effect aimed at society at large. The avian oracle not only guides the hunter, it guides the hunter in order for him to act on behalf of the group, and the *sihap* that protects or empowers the individual hunter, ensures that every member of society will eat.

6 Conclusion

Rituals of a subsumed or implicit kind, like those described above, are often overlooked. In ways similar to Harvey Whitehouse's 'doctrinal mode'-rituals they do confirm prevalent notions about the world, but as no doctrines are formulated among the Penan, the ideas carried by such rituals are not related to any conscious or formalised belief system. They confirm the order of things in the same way as any practical task or gesture would do. At the same time, however, the discreet rituals seem to encompass the entire world and create a specific condition. The individual, and society as a whole, operate, so to say, under an ontological dome which allows phenomena such as the bird oracle and the amulets to work. My suggestion is that this happens precisely because such rituals, or ritualised activities, are not either doctrinal or imagistic, but, on the contrary, immersed into the very lives of the Penan as almost indistinguishable from any other life-sustaining activity such as eating, sleeping, exchanging information, creating shelter, keeping warm, avoid falling, stay clear of danger, maintaining tools, *et cetera*. Subsumed rituals attain their power not by representing something special, not by standing out, not by creating a wondrous break-through to another world or an alternative level of existence, but by being inserted into the fabric of peoples' everyday lives on the same level as any practical measure to keep the individual as well as society going. They are not doctrinal, and not imagistic. Subsumed rituals focus on the practicalities of everyday living, but the impression that they are not as important as large-scale rituals and spectacular ceremonies is false. My two examples show how the Penan never escape a ritually constructed cosmological sphere: They do not enter sacred space on special occasions, nor do they seek out deities in special places or during special times. There is no place of 'otherness' outside of the single sphere in which they move. The world is inhabited by humans, living and dead, spirits of various kinds, and animals, and the Penan find their place in this reality by continuously, as part of their everyday activities, seeking guidance and protection through their subsumed rituals.

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Chapter 5: Where Is Here?[(6)]

Ronald L. Grimes

A block away there is a plaque tucked away in a front yard filled with so much greenery that the house is almost hidden. Each time I pass, I stop to read, "We would like to acknowledge that we are on the Haldimand Tract, land promised to Six Nations in 1784, traditional territory of the Neutral, Anishnaabeg, and Haudenosauonee peoples."

1. As I Stroll, I Wonder: Who Is We? Where Is Here?[1]

In 2017 the Canadian Association of University Teachers published *A Guide to Acknowledging First Peoples and Traditional Territory.* Twenty-eight pages long, the document is full of opening gambits for arts, academic and ceremonial events. Many begin, "We would like to acknowledge. ..."

I am a neighbour to the plaque's owner. We neighbours love the pieces of land upon which we squat. I tend my front and back yards and say "my," as if I owned this land. I'm not sure what is under my neighbour's yard, but below mine are ritual deposits: thirty-five years of pets, placentas, memorabilia, kid art, toys, and squirrel carcasses. If I had my way about it, my skin and bones would be burned and the ashes buried in the back yard.

To live in Waterloo's Westmount neighbourhood (named after the ritzy Westmount of Montreal), we signed contracts, filled the pockets of lawyers and mortgage companies to purchase our lots and homes. Now we pay property taxes so the region can dump salt on our streets and build a rail system that connects two shopping centres. None of this tax money is mailed as a rent cheque to Neutral, Anishnaabeg, or Haudensosauonee people.

[1] This text was originally published as Grimes, 2020, *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, 6:41, 151–158. Republished here with permission by author and journal.

2 Where Is Here?

In 1650 the Five Nations were at home southeast of Lake Ontario, in what is now New York state. During the American Revolution Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) had to choose sides. Many allied with the British. After the war, they were rewarded for their loyalty to the crown. Frederic Haldimand issued the Haldimand Proclamation in 1784. The Proclamation declares:

> Whereas His Majesty having been pleased to direct that in consideration of the early attachment to his cause manifested by the Mohawk Indians and of the loss of their settlement which they thereby sustained – that a convenient tract of land under his protection should be chosen as a safe and comfortable retreat for them and others of the Six Nations, who have either lost their settlements within the Territory of the American States, or wish to retire from them to the British – I have at the earnest desire of many of these His Majesty's faithful Allies purchased a tract of land from the Indians situated between the Lakes Ontario, Erie and Huron, and I do hereby in His Majesty's name authorize and permit the said Mohawk Nation and such others of the Six Nation Indians as wish to settle in that quarter to take possession of and settle upon the Banks of the River commonly called Ouse [O:se Kenhionhata:tie, in English, 'Willow River'] or Grand River, running into Lake Erie, allotting to them for that purpose six miles deep from each side of the river beginning at Lake Erie and extending in that proportion to the head of the said river, which them and their posterity are to enjoy forever (Filice 2016).

Originally, the Haldimand Tract was a twelve-mile wide strip following the course of the Grand River in Ontario. The original tract of 1784 contained 950,00 acres; now it has shrunk to 46,000 acres – less than five percent of its original size. The shape of original tract resembled a knee-sock, but if you compare that with the deflated-soccer-ball shape of 2015 (which is now Six Nations Reserve), you can imagine what has happened. The story has been repeated over and over in North America.

Between 2018 and 2020 Mary Anne Caibaiosai organised the All Nations Grand River Walk to sing to the water:

> We will honour the Grand River by praying for, singing for, and carrying her with a ceremonial pail. We will follow our beliefs and teachings that water is life; has spirit and without her we would not be here. Our word for water is 'Nibi' and we say 'Nga Zichiige Nibi Onji' – We do it for the water. This walk is not just a walk; it is a ceremony. We are walking to help the water. We believe when we sing for her, offer her good words and prayers, that she will become clean (Caibaiosai 2020).

Ken Wilson, a non-native, walked the Haldimand Tract and said, "I'm making this walk, this performance, because I want to know with my body, with my muscle and bone, the extent of the territory that has been stolen from the Haudenosaunee (or Six Nations) since the tract was reserved for them in 1784" (Wilson 2016).

I walk daily beneath the aging maples of Westmount in Kitchener-Waterloo. While we mow our lawns, rein in our dogs, and barbeque in our backyards, we occupy Indian land. We violate the treaty. We break the law. We walk unethically. We provoke conflict.

Legal fights, sometimes alternating with fist fights, continue today. One of the longest and most violent land-claim disputes in Ontario began in 2006, then re-erupted in 2013 at the Douglas Creek Estates in Caledonia.

I could say about my turf, "I own it," since I bought it. By Canadian law, it is "mine." However, Francis Boots, a Mohawk from Akwesasne, an elder with whom I sometimes work, is teaching us settlers to say, "the land for which I am responsible."

My turf is located in Kitchener-Waterloo, near the middle of the old Haldimand tract. Kitchener was once called Berlin, a German-settled town known for shoe and boot-liner manufacturing. Greb, Oberholtzer, Breithaupt, Kaufman, Berlin Felt Boot, Berlin Trunk & Bag ruled the roost. But 'made in Berlin' would not sell your shoes during World War I, so in 1916 Berlin became Kitchener, named after Herbert Kitchener, a British Secretary of State for War in 1914. My turf was native land, then GermanTown. Now it aspires to become TechHub and MultiCultureLand.

Jack Hawley taught a course at Barnard College, Columbia University. The course was called Hinduism Here (Hawley 2019). Students walk out the front door, look up and down Broadway and ask, where is Hinduism – here, not in India, right here, where we study and work. In the mid-twentieth century religious studies courses would not have started with a place but with sacred texts. Students would have read the Vedas or Upanishads to understand religion over there, in India, not here, where we walk. In the twenty-first century things have changed. Hindus *here* matter. They are our neighbours and friends.

I talk to myself as I stroll the sidewalks of Westmount: "Hey, white man, put your finger on *here*." Then I ask myself, "What should I touch? The ground? My eyes? Head? Heart? Belly?" Wherever I touch as *here*, I also create a *there*. *Here* I am, but some more of me is *there*. I gaze down at my feet. The upper *here* reaches to a lower *there*, the floor where my feet rest, then the foundation, then the ground.

My *here* extends. I occupy space. I need it to breathe. I suck air, puff carbon dioxide. My *here* extends up, down, out. How far? How much air space do I need? I share space with others, but, for the sake of this imagined experiment, let us keep the boundaries tight. Suppose I, a white-man-owner of real estate, pull my wife and children, maybe a dog, under an imaginary canopy. Throw in the lawn – right out to the fence line. But that is it, no more. That's the suburban, white, middle-class *here*. Seal the bubble. The canopy encloses me, my family, my stuff, my property. As a man of moral and economic principle, should I defend this to the death?

But *here* is only for *now*. I am here now. Previously I was elsewhere. Later, I will move to some other place. My kids have flown the nest to Toronto. They live elsewhere. For my family's sake I now need a big *here* that includes parents and kids in a single bubble.

How long will I last like this? Not long. I will suffocate, need food, others to love or have conflict with. If I die here, somebody will take my property, sell it. Then I'll be down *there* in the ground or up in the sky as ash particles. My *here* will belong to somebody else over *there*, on the other side.

This me-and-mine experiment is as foolish as Rene Descartes' "I think, therefore I am." I own my own property, therefore I am – the very definition of sacred space to many settlers.

Another answer to the 'where is here' question is played out in Thornton Wilder's play *Our Town*. Rebecca says,

> I never told you about that letter Jane Crofut got from her minister when she was sick. He wrote Jane a letter and on the envelope. The address was like this: It said: Jane Crofut; The Crofut Farm; Grover's Corners; Sutton County; New Hampshire; United States of America.
>
> GEORGE:
>
> What's funny about that?
>
> REBECCA:
>
> But listen, it's not finished: the United States of America; Continent of North America; Western Hemisphere; the Earth; the Solar System; the Universe; the Mind of God – that's what it said on the envelope (Wilder 1957: 45).[2]

Jane is sick, so her world shrinks – she and her pain constitute the world. The minister's letter intervenes, trying to remap Jane's world outward toward the earth, the universe, and God. Whereas the *me-and-mine* experiment seals me in, therefore ultimately kills me, the *our-town* response imagines lines radiating from *here* to out *there*, infinitely.

The lines run through Grover's Corners, small-town USA, a site of American nostalgia. White North Americans sometimes wish the world were as cosy and safe as life in an imagined turn-of-the-century town. We make pilgrimages to Disneyland to re-inhabit those towns momentarily, but should we use guns to protect Grover's Corners? It is ours, damn it, not yours. 'Don't tread on me'. Who are you to intrude upon our

[2] A more recent view: "From all of this has emerged what some astronomers call our 'long address': We live on Earth, which is in the solar system, which is in the Milky Way galaxy. The Milky Way is part of a small cluster of galaxies called the Local Group, which is on the edge of the Virgo cluster, a conglomeration of several thousand galaxies" (Overbye 2020).

town? We are insiders in God's universe; you are not. Who are you? Where is your place? Over *there*? Surely not *here*. Between us is a wall.

In 1791 the Crown appointed Augustus Jones, a surveyor, to clarify the boundaries of the Haldimand Tract in Ontario. There had been an error in establishing its northern boundary. Jones, not being an indigenous person, decided to fix other mistakes, the curves of the river banks. He drew ruler-straight boundaries rather than follow the sinuous boundaries that the Grand River.

Basia Irland is an artist who once lived in Waterloo but now lives in New Mexico. She began to walk the other Grand, the Rio Grande. It was called the 'Royal Road' by the Spaniards who colonised New Mexico. They followed its course for good reason: without its water, they would die of dehydration. Basia's project, *A Gathering of Waters: The Río Grande, Source to Sea*, traced the 1875 miles of the Rio Grande from southern Colorado to the Gulf of Mexico. She describes the enactment:

> Hundreds of participants put a small amount of river water into a River Vessel Canteen, wrote in a Logbook, and passed these downstream to another person. Connections were made that have been lasting, and groups are working together that never would have met otherwise. In order to participate in this project, you had to physically be at the river and interact with someone else downstream, thereby forming a kind of human river that brings awareness to the plight of this stream that is always asked to give more than it has (Irland 2020).

Here, north of the magical 49th parallel, Ateronhiata:kon (Francis Boots, from Akwesasne) was asked in a video interview, "What do 'they' want?" He knows 'they' mean First Nations people (Grimes 2020).[3] Go to 46 minutes, 10 seconds to hear the question. Then, Francis' stunningly simple response at 46:51, "Good neighbors."

"What?" white folks exclaim, "that's it? that's all?" Francis, I imagine, would say, "Yep, that's it. That's all." Jesus would agree, "Love thy neighbour." Since we all agree – Mohawks and Christian settlers, probably Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs – why the not-so-neighbourly feud over boundaries and land?

I am a good neighbour to the retired lawyer who lives beside me. We make trades. He owns a snow blower and loans it to me during heavy winter snow storms. I shovel his sidewalks when he is at the cottage.

I have no trade agreements with my downriver neighbours who live at Six Nations Reserve. When I ritually recite, "We would like to acknowledge ...," the words sound hollow. On public occasions, after we conclude the recitation, I want to shout, "Bad ritual, really, really bad ritual."

Why is it a bad ritual? Imagine that you are a Catholic and confess, "Father, I confess ..." (make your list of sins short or long.) "... that I stole the land of my neighbour."

[3] This video is part of a larger set of Native Immigrant films (Grimes 2019).

The revered father instructs me, "My son, repent, then make restitution." The next time I enter the confessional, he (always a he), asks, even before I make my next confession, "My son, did you make restitution?" "No, father, sorry." "Sorry? Stop apologising. My son, you have to make restitution, pay your debt, do it better next time. If you don't, your confessions are useless. No one will forgive you. Your debt column will get longer and longer; your credit column, shorter and shorter. So pay up. Give it back. Be a better neighbor."

I bite my tongue to keep from pointing out the obvious: his church also occupies the Haldimand Tract. In a recent email Otiohkwa Shenandoah (Philip Deering), a Mohawk from Kahnawake and friend of Francis Boots, sketched a scene from the Oka trial: "The star witness for the Mohawk was Bruce Elijah. He testified for hours. He said 'We saw you come from Europe. You brought your religion. That's yours. Nobody wants to take it from you. You brought your laws. Those are yours. Nobody wants to take them from you. But we didn't see you bring any land. So, how did it become *your* land?'"[4]

I did not bring any land with me when I moved across the border from the US to Canada. I suppose I could have trucked some dirt across the 49th. But even if I could have hauled my bit of acreage, how far down would that New Mexico land be mine? How far up? Do I own the air above my land? How far down and how far up does 'here' go? And did I really own that New Mexico land? Not really. My ancestors turfed the Comanches from it. Either way – I bring land from the US or buy it in Canada – the land is stolen. How about borrowed – a conscience-salving option?

As a good neighbour to the lawyer next door, I can borrow his snow blower, but can I expropriate his land? Maybe, but then I wouldn't be a neighbour at all. I'd be in prison. I'm stuck. How to become a good upriver neighbour? The question is a koan. It burns the belly, singes the heart, stops easy breathing. From here in Waterloo, how far out does my neighbourhood reach? To Six Nations of the Grand River it is 76 km., an hour and ten minutes by car. How long on foot? By canoe? Depends on age, strength, and wind.

I talk and correspond with a few indigenous friends and students, but what else? The bottom line: I can never repay the debt I owe. I am filled with gratitude for my bit of turf, but even gratitude can seem like an insult.

What else?

Today I would vote to raise my taxes. The region could use the tax money to lease the land I occupy from Six Nations. Despite my good intentions, I am part of an occupying army, wielding dollars. If we want to stop the war, we have to be willing to give up what is sacred to settlers: dollars.

What else?

If those who ritually repeat, "I hereby acknowledge ...," were to express gratitude by singing to rivers and birds and making reparations by leasing native land, those

[4] Philip Deering, Email communication with Ron Grimes.

actions would not make us good neighbours, but they could be the opening gestures of ceremonial respect.[5]

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[5] In past few years institutions have begun requesting forgiveness and expressing gratitude. Some organisations are beginning to list their 'sins': colonisation, expulsion, assimilation, promise-breaking, treaty-violation, the establishment of residential schools. ... The list goes on and on. Few of the ritualised confessions use blatant words like 'murder' or 'genocide'.

On the positive side there is a slowly emerging call for recognising indigenous contributions, hiring native applicants, and a commitment to making sure the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission become real.

On black reparations in the United States (Hannah-Jones 2020).

Part 2: Ritual, Ecology, and New Spiritualities

⊠

Chapter 6: Financial Astrology[7]

Taking Divination into the Heart of Capitalist Economy

Olav Hammer

1. Introduction

How does one become wealthy? One way to do so in the matter of just a few years would be to invest in the stock market. Of course, doing this at random would merely result in losing most of the capital that one had initially invested. A far better way to go about investing, it stands to reason, would be to systematically buy stocks when they are cheap and sell them when the price has gone up, and to repeat this process again and again. By following these elementary instructions, it would be possible with a minimum of effort to convert even a modest initial sum of money into a gold egg sufficient to allow for a comfortable lifestyle and early retirement. Since it all seems so simple, why do all investors not live in luxury villas, spend lengthy vacations in exotic locations, and drive fancy sports cars? The problem with carrying out this seemingly brilliant plan is, of course, that it requires timing the market with pinpoint precision, and while the perfect vision provided by hindsight can make it seem obvious when to buy and when to sell, the track record of most investors when it comes to making accurate forecasts is rather dismal. Most people who try to time the market lose money, and the best recipe for actually making a profit in stocks is to invest broadly, for instance in index funds, and to stay in the market for many years. This rather dull method will not make anybody into a millionaire overnight, but it is a historically proven way to make one's assets grow in the long run.

Of course, if somebody were able to peer into the future, even just a few days ahead of everybody else, they would have a competitive edge over other investors. It should therefore come as no surprise that there are numerous methods for forecasting the fluctuations of the stock market. These methods are conventionally grouped into two large categories. The first is technical analysis, based on the idea that past market data can be mined for information regarding how people cumulatively tend to behave, and that the aggregate result of the actions of very many people who sell and buy stocks can

[7] © Olav Hammer, 2024 | doi:10.1163/9789004692206_008

be predicted with enough confidence that investors who deploy such techniques have precisely such a competitive advantage over novice traders who do not. The second is fundamental analysis, that is, the attempt to evaluate what a particular asset is worth. A basic tenet of this form of analysis is that an asset has an intrinsic value that can be estimated based on such factors as the performance of the company and the state of the economy in general. In a perfectly competitive market, the actual price of the stock will gravitate towards its intrinsic value. If a stock is currently traded at a price that is significantly lower than the best estimate that a trader makes of its intrinsic value, a good option might be to buy that stock before the joint actions of innumerable buyers and sellers on the market have made the price of the stock rise to a level close to its intrinsic value.

The primary focus of this chapter, however, is the perhaps somewhat more surprising suggestion that there are forms of divination – and specifically astrology – that can also be useful for those who wish to predict the rise and fall of the stock market. Just as a natal horoscope can be used by those who are convinced that astrology is a valid way of understanding the character and destiny of an individual, the reasoning behind financial astrology is that assets on a market also, in some metaphorical sense, have a character and a destiny that can be gauged by studying astrological charts. The main question that informs this study is how rituals of celestial divination, grounded in symbolism that has its origins in a premodern era, have been transformed into such a quintessential element of modern capitalist society as a method for predicting the fluctuations of stock prices.

Research into the recent history of Western forms of divination is in its infancy: although there are works that deal with such topics as astrology from antiquity to the early modern age, or the transformation of celestial divination in the period from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century, far fewer researchers appear to have been attracted to doing historical surveys of the divinatory methods of the last century or so. What one does find are often unsupported claims in popular books and on various websites, information that may of course be correct, despite such frequent problems as a lack of references to verifiable sources. Some statements about the recent history of financial astrology are repeated with such regularity that, whatever their veracity may be, they can be characterised as part of an emergent origin myth. The following section of this chapter recounts some of the recurrent claims of these myths, wherever possible placing them in the context of the historical record. The section that follows next provides a thumbnail sketch of astrological symbolism – the nuts and bolts of the divinatory method. Subsequently, a section is devoted to a presentation of how these astrological symbols have been applied to the world of investing, as documented in two handbooks of financial astrology. Finally, the question is posed how financial astrology functions compares to more conventional methods of market forecasting.

2 Founding Myths and Historical Development of Financial Divination

Although even a thumbnail sketch of the history of astrology is well beyond the scope of this chapter, a few pointers to its modern fate are in order. Astrology entered a period of prolonged decline in the second half of the seventeenth century and was routinely relegated to the category of superstition by Enlightenment authors. It only experienced a revival in the nineteenth century, largely as the result of the broader interest of Romantic writers in the occult (On the decline and revival of astrology, see von Stuckrad 2003: 264–286). In Britain, the dormant art of celestial divination was first brought back to life with the publication by James Wilson in 1819 of *A Complete Dictionary of Astrology*. In the US, the revival came later: Luke Dennis Broughton created an astrological milieu in the 1860s.[1] The astrological renaissance gained considerable momentum when it was backed by prominent members of the most important new religious movement of the late nineteenth century, the Theosophical Society. The British Theosophist William Frederick Allen (1860–1917) was instrumental in founding the Astrological Society in 1886. Beginning around 1890, he wrote numerous volumes on astrology under the pen name Alan Leo and interpreted the horoscopes of clients on an almost industrial scale (von Stuckrad 2003: 305–9).

Financial astrology of the kind used to divine the stock market was introduced as an offshoot of this revival but has historical precursors. Rather than being a single, well-defined divinatory system, astrology can be understood as an umbrella term for an array of different concepts and techniques that are based on the belief that the positions and movements of various heavenly bodies correlate with human affairs. Besides the well-known idea that astrology deals with the fate and character of individual people (traditionally called genethliacal or natal astrology), that is, when one interprets birth charts or peruses sun-sign columns in tabloid newspapers, astrological divination has also historically been used in other domains that come close to the idea of determining the ups and downs of the stock market. Horary astrology looks at the astrological conditions that are in place at the precise moment when one asks a question, for instance as one looks through the financial section of a newspaper and wonders whether to buy or sell Apple or Tesla stocks. Mundane astrology deals with such issues as interpreting the charts of entities such as countries and organisations. The latter category can easily be extended to include predicting the fate of corporations.

In the stricter sense of the word, however, stock market astrology is, as noted above, a modern invention. One of its most visible promoters during this period of early revival was Evangeline Adams (1868–1932), who became a major astrological celebrity in 1899 after reportedly predicting that a client of hers was in grave danger, only to have her

[1] On Wilson, see Melton 1985: 280, 297; There were other astrologers in the US before Broughton, but Melton (1985: 282) notes that their impact was minimal, so that it makes sense to regard Broughton as the starting point of an American astrological revival.

prediction confirmed the next day when the client escaped from his room in a hotel that had caught fire (Melton 1985: 287). The story of her successful foray into divination was publicised in the New York newspapers, and Adams was propelled into the role of astrologer of the social elite. In her autobiography (Adams 1926: 127–9), she claimed that she had functioned as the astrological consultant of some of the movers and shakers of the US economy, including the president of the New York Stock Exchange Seymour L. Cromwell (1871–1925) and the fabulously wealthy banker J.P. Morgan (1837–1913). The latter claim is on innumerable websites devoted to financial astrology connected to a quip supposedly made by Morgan, "millionaires don't use astrology, billionaires do." This quote is consistently reproduced without any supporting reference and is almost certainly an apocryphal statement. Karen Christino, a present-day astrologer and author of a biography of Adams (Christino 2019), checked the quote with the staff that manages the Morgan archives and states that she found no corroborating evidence of him having had any interest in astrology. She notes that at the age when Morgan could have met Adams he was already an extraordinarily wealthy man who hardly needed her advice or astrological consultations in order to amass further riches.[2] The only evidence for any link between the celebrated astrologer and the famous tycoon is Adams' own statement, and it can be noted that when she published her autobiography, J.P. Morgan had been dead for well over a decade and there was thus no risk of him refuting her claim. She also purported to have predicted the stock market panic of 1907, but Christino (2019: 91) found no confirming evidence of this. A documented forecast that the market would crash in 1928 turned out to be wrong (Christino 2019: 175), and only by accepting a considerable latitude of interpretation could enthusiastic supporters of hers potentially claim that the crash in the following year was in fact predicted by her. Considering the rather limited nature of the evidence, it would seem that Adams' role as a major founding figure of financial astrology is more a mixture of self-promotion and pious legend than fact.[3]

We are on historically safer ground with another early effort at introducing divination into the world of investing, namely the work of William D. Gann (1878–1955). His use of celestial divination, however, seems to have been rather idiosyncratic when compared to the methods employed by later financial astrologers. Gann, who came from a poor family and had only the most rudimentary education, started trading stocks in 1902. He began publishing newsletters and writing books about the methods he used, and over time he became successful in selling courses on how to become a wealthy investor. His method of timing the market was based on the idea that events recur in cyclical patterns, and that a numerical (and perhaps numerological) analysis together with the study of astrological patterns would allow one to predict market fluctuations with great accuracy. Gann's reputation was bolstered significantly after an interview

[2] Karen Christino, https://karenchristino.com/evangeline-adams/j-p-morgan-and-astrology/. Accessed 19/02/2023.

[3] It might be added that her autobiography (Adams 1926) comes across as a book-length self-congratulatory account of her successes.

with him was published in 1909 in the *Ticker and Investment Digest*.[4] Gann here uses a scientific-sounding language, speaking about a "law of vibration" that allows traders to predict events long before they occur. This is supposedly "the fundamental law upon which wireless telegraphy, wireless telephone and phonographs are based." These rather vague statements were followed by a testimonial by the author of the article according to which Gann was able to make money that he had invested grow tenfold in just a month. Gann did not at that point disclose how his "law of vibration" could be used in practice but would later sell market forecasts based on his method.[5] A small but enthusiastic group of readers of Gann's work continues to look for clues in his texts that might reveal how he actually went about timing the market, and there are websites and books devoted to deciphering the hints that Gann supposedly encoded in his writings. Attempts to eke out a method from his texts range from those that are quite subdued in their references to his more esoteric methods and frame his work as a form of technical analysis, to those that fully acknowledge the more unusual or even paranormal aspects of his work.[6]

Judging from the trickle of publications, financial astrology was until roughly the last two decades of the twentieth century a very small niche. For instance, a modern textbook on the topic lists no more than three titles from the 1930s (Weingarten 1996: 15). One of the few early works in this genre, James Mars Langham's *Planetary Effects on Stock Market Prices* (1932), combines a rationalist discourse that describes astrology as a science with a utopian description of an imminent Age of Aquarius (24–6). Another book from this period is *Astrology and Stockmarket Forecasting* (1937) by Louise McWirther, who in this work attempts to use a variety of astrological techniques, especially the passage of the so-called lunar north node through the zodiac, to forecast such events as market crashes.

Publishing continued at a slow pace over the next decades and a few divinatory innovations saw the light. In the 1940s, the astrologer Donald A. Bradley (1925–1974) invented a method called Bradley siderography, which according to a website devoted to the more arcane aspects of stock market analysis "converted astrological energies into a summation of numerical values serving to create a model of market action."[7] Bradley also published books on financial astrology in the early 1950s, works with titles such as *Stock Market Prediction* (1950) and *Picking Winners* (1954).

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[4] *The Ticker and Investment Digest*, http://gann.su/book/eng/(1909)%20Ticker%20and%20 Investment%20Digest.pdf. Accessed 22/04/2023.

[5] One might suspect Gann of being highly successful at self-promotion, since anybody who had the ability to make profits at this rate would soon become one of the world's wealthiest people and would presumably feel no need to sell courses and forecasts.

[6] For the former, see Smithson 2016, although a suggestion (on p. 7) that Gann's method has something to do with quantum physics does give it a distinct New Age tinge. For the latter, see the websites maintained by the Institute of Cosmological Economics, especially www.cosmoeconomics.com/EZ/ice/ice/wd-gann.php.

[7] Institute of Cosmological Economics, https://www.cosmoeconomics.com/EZ/ice/ice /donald-bradley.php. Accessed 22/04/2023.

The stock market crash of 1987 is cited by Henry Weingarten (1996: 15–6) as a major breakthrough for financial astrology, purportedly because astrologer Arch Crawford predicted the upcoming events.[8] Since then, the number of books, websites, and software tools intended to assist people in search of divinatory means to time the market has increased considerably, even though the use of astrology no doubt remains a minor occupation in the world of finance. A quite impressionistic method, namely typing in 'financial astrology' in the Search field of the Amazon.com site, returns nearly 150 titles, including rather specialised texts such as *Bitcoin Astrology* and *Financial Astrology: The Jupiter-Saturn Cycle for Investors*. Of course, not all books retrieved by such a crude method will actually deal with the topic, and the sales figures for any of these titles are impossible to ascertain. There are nevertheless signs that financial astrology is not an entirely marginal pursuit. In 1995 the well-known business magazine *Forbes* devoted an article to the aforementioned Arch Crawford that painted him and his astrological work in a quite positive light (Hulbert 1995). In 1996 a venerable academic press, McGraw-Hill, published *Investing by the Stars*, a book that has already been referred to here a couple of times, while the equally renowned company Wiley more recently added a book entitled *A Trader's Guide to Financial Astrology* (Pesavento and Smoleny 2015) to its catalogue. These two books constitute the main primary sources for the present chapter.

3 Fundamentals of Astrological Symbolism

Financial astrology is based on the same fundamental symbolism that one finds in other kinds of astrology, and although space precludes a more detailed survey of how astrological symbols are interpreted, a bare-bones introduction to the topic may be useful. Horoscopes are circular symbolic representations of the solar system as seen from the perspective of the Earth. The planets, which in astrology constitute a category that combines premodern cosmological ideas (the Sun and Moon are treated as planets) and more recent astronomical discoveries (Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto are included in the list), are plotted in relation to thirty-degree sectors of the chart known as signs, which are named after but are not identical to the twelve signs of the astronomical zodiac. The circle that forms the basic shape of the chart is furthermore divided into unequal portions called houses. A small number of other points on the chart are also taken into account, perhaps the most important of these being the Ascendant, that is, the degree and sign on the horizon that lies due east at the moment in time that the horoscope is intended to symbolically represent. Finally, it is considered significant

[8] A sceptic might note that Crawford's prediction is cited in books and websites without any supporting references, and that he in the fall of 2020 predicted that Trump would win the election and that the stock market would face tough times in September and October of that year (Fox Business, https://www.foxbusiness.com/markets/wall-street-astrologer-trump -win-gold-rally. Accessed 22/04/2023). Neither of these predictions, of course, panned out.

when two planets or important points are in (roughly) the same position in the chart, are placed opposite each other, form a right angle, a sixty-degree angle, or other angles deemed noteworthy; these are called aspects.

To make this information somewhat less abstract and dense, consider the natal chart reproduced below (which happens to be that of the Swiss psychologist Carl Gustav Jung).[9] The symbols enclosed in the sectors of equal size in the outermost ring are the signs of the zodiac. Near the top of the chart, to take just two examples, are the symbols for Scorpio (distinguishable by its scorpion-like barb sticking out toward the right) and Libra (a very stylised image of a pair of scales). Inside the ring are pie-shaped sectors of irregular size – the houses, numbered from one to twelve – within which one sees yet further symbols, the planets. For instance, at the very top of the chart, inside the sector of Libra, is the symbol for Jupiter, that looks roughly like the number four topped by a curve. The Ascendant is marked by a thick black line marked AC, located on the left side of the chart. The lines that crisscross each other in the innermost part of the chart are the various aspects.

These raw data are what astrologers use to construct their interpretations. The planets represent what might rather vaguely be described as dimensions of human existence, especially (but not exclusively) personality traits. Each planet is typically associated with more than one such dimension. The Moon, for instance, stands for the emotions but also for one's mother. Mercury is associated with such ideas as communication and education. Jupiter is associated with good fortune and the characteristics of one's personality that one finds easy to express.

The astrological signs represent twelve different ways in which the planetary dimensions are expressed. To take the two signs mentioned above in connection with Jung's horoscope, Scorpio is traditionally associated with passionate emotion, whereas Libra is associated with relationships and a quest for justice and harmony. A diviner who sees a chart with Jupiter in Libra might interpret this as an indication that the person whose chart this is finds relationships with others very important or will devote considerable effort to maintaining harmony in their lives. The multiple associations of each element of the horoscope thus allow for a substantial amount of interpretive flexibility.

Houses also have broad meanings that tend to include areas in life where the personality traits are played out: material wealth, one's professional life, intimate relationships, children, and so forth. Even compared to the multivalent planets and signs, the houses are associated with a bewildering variety of symbolic correspondences. Toward the top of Jung's chart is the eighth house (the one where Jupiter is located). This house is associated with domains of life as diverse as sexuality, death, transformation, and the occult. Aspects, finally, are interpreted as symbolising the interaction between planets. An opposition is precisely what the name hints at: two elements of the chart

[9] There are numerous sites online where one can find natal charts of famous people. This particular chart is a cropped version of the chart at https://www.astro.com/astro-databank /Jung,_Carl and is reproduced with permission from the copyright holder Astrodienst AG.

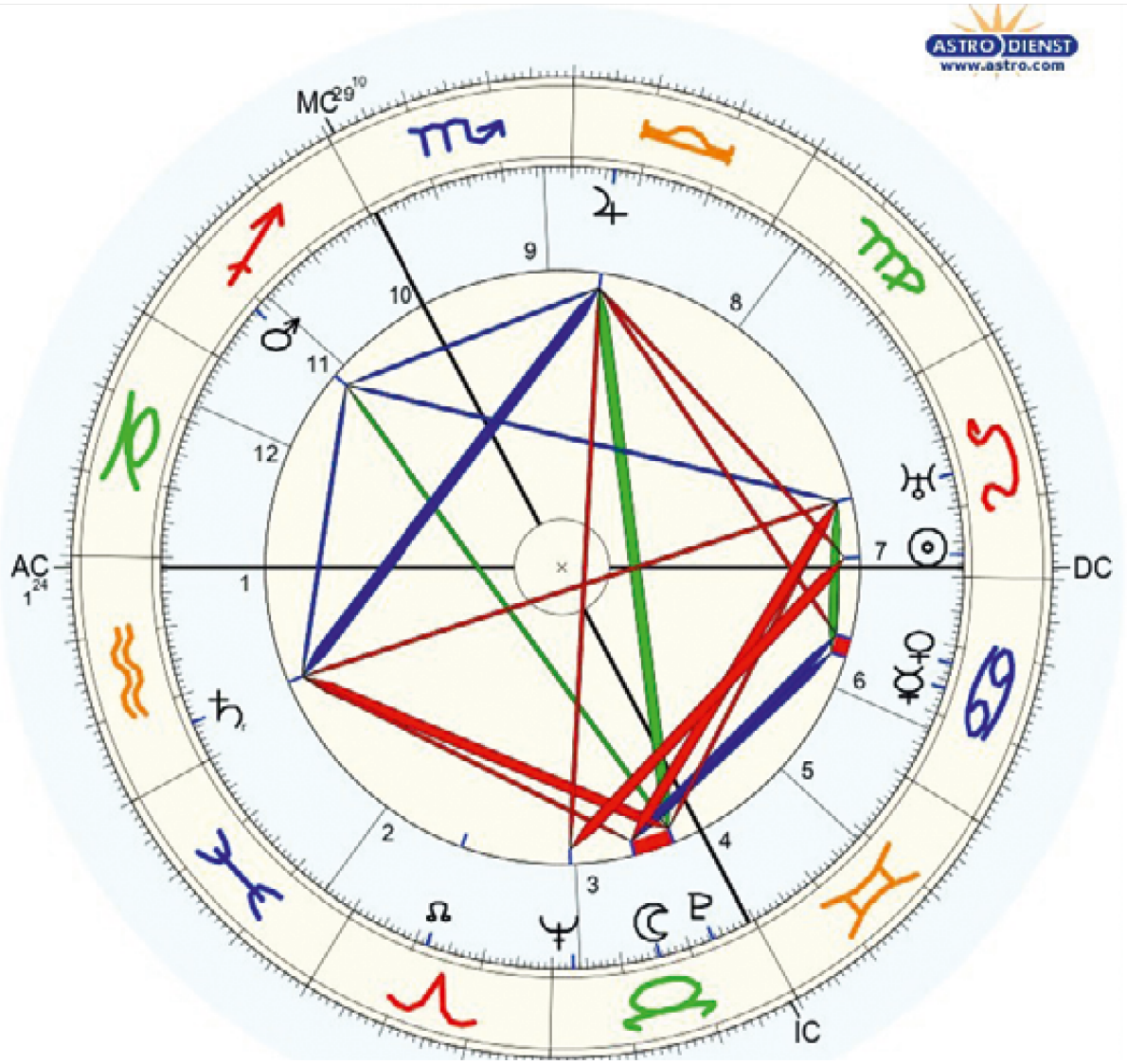
ASTRO DIENST
www.astro.com
MC 29°10
AC 1°24
DC
IC
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12

Figure 6.1

that do not go together easily and thus present a challenge. A 120-degree angle, referred to as a trine, is an easy or 'soft' angle, symbolising two parts of the personality that are readily harmonised.

In any given chart, the combination of these four basic sets of elements with all their many possible associations constitutes a quite overwhelming amount of information that the person performing the reading of the chart will be able to take into consideration and use in a divinatory situation. As in the case of innumerable other systems of divination, the diviner can engage in a conversation with the person whose chart is being read and construct a narrative that makes the symbolic language used in the divinatory ritual feel relevant for him or her. Jupiter in Libra in the eighth house could be interpreted in a multitude of different ways, but if we imagine that we had Jung in person participating in the divinatory session, it would be easy to decide (based on Jung's contribution to the conversation or on the background knowledge about the famous psychologist and his work that the astrologer might have) that it makes sense to think of this as, say, an indication that this was the chart of a man who related to a host of other people and that his interaction with them dealt with the inner, psychological transformations they were going through.

The chart represents a snapshot of the symbolic heavens at a given time. Dynamism enters into the divinatory practice when the astrologer considers how the heavenly bodies circulate through the chart over time and thereby come to form significant angles (conjunctions, oppositions, trines, and so forth) to the places where the planets are located in the birth chart. Such configurations that arise over time, transits, are interpreted as tendencies that play out over the lifetime of an individual. For instance, Saturn makes a very slow movement through the entire zodiac and takes roughly $29\frac{1}{2}$ years to return to the same position where it was at birth. Supposedly, the first return of Saturn signifies a moment in life when many people will re-evaluate their lives, realising that youth has passed.

4 How to Astrologically "Read" the Stock Market

To summarise, natal charts represent in symbolic form the appearance from a geocentric perspective of the heavenly bodies at the time of birth of an individual and are used in divinatory rituals ('readings') that aim to understand the character and destiny of that person. Many of the principles of financial astrology represent a quite straightforward extrapolation of how natal charts are read. In a metaphorical sense, a company or a stock exchange also has a moment of birth, namely when it is incorporated as a legally recognised entity or when its stocks are traded for the first time. By looking at the chart that represents the moment when the Apple or Tesla companies were founded or entered the market, the theory goes, it should be possible to tell how these businesses fare. Transits will by financial astrologers be understood as the situation that the company may potentially be in at any given time and the

direction in which it is heading. In natal charts, as we have seen, Jupiter symbolises expansion, good luck, and similar characteristics, whereas Saturn is seen as a symbol of such things as order and restriction. In the world of the capitalist marketplace, major Jupiter-related events in the horoscope are said to correlate with an optimistic, upward trend and Saturn with the opposite (Pesavento and Smoleny 2015: 11).

In astrology, the planets are said to 'rule' various domains of the natural world and of culture. This is a reflex of the theory of correspondences that has been a main component of not only astrology but was once an integral part of Western intellectual culture more generally, namely a system of classification that postulates that there are links between heavenly bodies, plants, animals, colours, body parts, the four classical elements (earth, water, fire, air), feelings, and so forth. Extrapolating the web of correspondences to the world of business, astrologers can surmise that various planets 'rule' over specific commodities that companies trade in. Weingarten (1996: 36) provides a list of specific commodities that includes precious metals (ruled by the Sun), telecom and media (Mercury), agriculture and real estate (Saturn), and the entertainment sector (Neptune).

Horoscopes can also be interpreted in order to determine the precise moment when a stock can profitably be traded. Pesavento and Smoleny (2015: 10) claim that the faster-moving inner planets (Sun, Moon, Mercury, Mars, and Venus), in particular, trigger events on the financial markets. A conjunction of two inner planets that have positive connotations, such as Venus and the Sun, can signal the beginning of a sharp rise in the stock market (Pesavento and Smoleny 2015: 47). Weingarten (1996: 62) focuses on the outer planets and suggests that a prominent Jupiter at a particular moment would indicate that this is a good time to close a deal, whereas an influentially placed Neptune would be a sign to be cautious.

Not only should one, according to authors in this field, take the astrological influences on stocks, companies, and global politics into account. Investing can come in many shapes and forms, and Weingarten (1996: 50–51) suggests that one's own horoscope can give vital clues as to whether one might be better off pursuing a riskier or safer strategy of asset allocation, and whether one would feel more comfortable having a long-term view of investing or a shorter trading horizon. An investor with a strongly placed Mars will, according to this way of reasoning, be far less cautious than those whose natal charts have a prominent Saturn, and a Mars-ruled trader would thus be willing to make more aggressive trades.

Two things stand out in this very brief survey of astrological symbolism and its use in forecasting market trends. Firstly, just as in natal astrology, each symbol is multivalent, and although astrologers would probably balk at some interpretations, the semantic latitude is considerable. This feature allows Pesavento and Smoleny (2015: 58) to assert that an opposition between Saturn and Uranus in 2008 signalled both the market meltdown that took place that year and the election of Barack Obama as president. Secondly, authors on financial astrology can, as we have seen, stress the need to take many different indicators into account, including one's own chart, the 'natal'

chart of companies, and charts that are said to indicate the trend of the moment. For instance, although precious metals are supposedly ruled by the Sun, Weingarten (1996: 39) insists that relying on indicators based on the position of the Sun in the horoscope of a gold-trading company and checking current transits will not suffice: the astrological indicators of the global financial and political situation and numerous other factors need to be taken into account. Hence, the divination of stock market developments is overloaded with symbols that all need to be interpreted.

Due to these two features – interpretive latitude and symbol overload – financial divination comes across as an internally coherent system with an unassailable and unfalsifiable inner logic of the kind made famous in anthropological literature through such classic works as Evans-Pritchard's study of magic and witchcraft among the Azande. On the one hand, there are always further symbols and more potential interpretations that can explain why the method in some particular instance did not seem to work. A prominent Jupiter that was not followed by a booming stock market could just have been counterbalanced by another set of astrological factors, or by Jupiter not being in a place that 'suits' this planet. On the other hand, some real-world event can always be invoked after the fact to justify that the divinatory technique does, in fact, function as claimed. A Saturn-Uranus combination is considered by Pesavento and Smolenyi to be a sign of an unexpected event breaking up an otherwise conservative order and, as we have seen, they interpret the election of Obama in the light of this conjunction. Of course, if the election had turned out differently, any number of other events that took place that year could have fit the bill.

5 Divination and the Stock Market

The very existence of astrological methods in the world of finance may at first come across as an anomaly, perhaps as the unexpected irruption of an enchanted worldview into a thoroughly secular domain. It is my contention, however, that financial astrology is merely an extension of methods that are commonly deployed by many traders. Quite possibly, it is the connotations surrounding the word 'astrology' rather than any difference in essence between celestial divination and other means of timing the market that prevent such methods from gaining a more secure foothold among traders. Lest the reader be misled by this statement, it should be made clear that what this implies is not that financial astrology is an unjustly marginalised tool that would be useful for stock market traders, but rather that tools routinely deployed by traders in crucial ways resemble financial astrology.

Astrology in general and its financial applications in particular have throughout this chapter been characterised as a form of divination. A perusal of the academic literature shows that this is a surprisingly slippery term. It can be presented in circular terms, as when the author of the article "Divinatory Arts" in the *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* explains that "Divination, in general, is the art of divining the

past, present, and future by means of various techniques" (Charmasson 2005: 313). It can be understood so broadly that it seems all-encompassing. The article on the topic in the second edition of the *Encyclopedia of Religion* (Zuesse 2005) describes divination as "the art or practice of discovering the personal, human significance of future or, more commonly, present or past events," a definition of the word that, if taken literally, would include the act of looking out through the window and, upon observing the grey clouds stationed overhead, concluding that bringing an umbrella would be a wise precaution. Peek (1991), a classic anthropological collection of contributions on the topic, comes somewhat closer to a definition in the introduction to the volume, stating that divination provides "special knowledge" (p. 1) that can be vital when "everyday knowledge is insufficient" (p. 2). The key distinction between 'special' and 'everyday', however, is left undefined, as if these were self-evident concepts.

In order to arrive at a more precise way to delineate divination, one can draw upon the insights contained in a survey article by Amar Annus (2015), who notes that the term has historical roots as a pretheoretical notion, signifying a form of communication between humans and a supernatural domain with, as its purpose, a quest for otherwise hidden knowledge. In antiquity, authors distinguished those kinds of communication that were due to an altered state of consciousness (such as dreams and trance states) from those that involved the interpretation of signs (for example the flight patterns of birds or the visual characteristics of the entrails of sacrificed animals). Astrology, whether financial or not, clearly belongs to the latter category, which is therefore the only one that concerns us here. Since we are dealing with practices that are framed as purely instrumental and as taking place in a secular frame of reference, we can bracket the reference to the supernatural. The other parts of the definition, however, are useful for the present purposes. Inspired by the analysis of divination proposed by Sørensen (2010), one might understand the kinds of divination that are carried out via the interpretation of signs as attempts to gain previously hidden knowledge about a particular domain (for instance, one's financial prospects or whether to move to a different city) by means of a method that is symbolic rather than causally related to that domain (as when horoscopes representing the positions of the planets are used to decide whether to invest or relocate) and where the method of selecting the symbols may even be completely random (as when consulting tarot cards drawn by chance from a deck).

To summarise, it is the symbolic nature of the code that, to use Peek's terms, is the key factor that distinguishes the 'special' knowledge of divination from 'everyday' forms of acquiring information. Symbols such as the elements of the astrological code have a culturally constructed and ultimately historically contingent connection to what they represent. Observing the sky, detecting dark clouds moving in rapidly from the horizon, and concluding that heavy rain is imminent is not an example of divination, since clouds are not strictly speaking symbols of rain, but are causally connected to precipitation. By contrast, observing a Mars transit and deciding that this is the

right moment to add tech stocks to one's portfolio is an act of divination, since the association between Mars and aggressive trading is a cultural convention.

Even this fairly detailed and specific account of what constitutes the 'special knowledge' of divination begs a further question. What signs are 'culturally constructed' or 'arbitrary', as opposed to causally related? For a Freudian psychoanalyst, it may appear to be a well-established fact that dreams provide clues to previously repressed and therefore unknown facets of the personality of a client. For a sceptic, the very idea of identifying repressed Freudian-style desires may seem as unscientific as drawing cards from a tarot deck or consulting astrological charts. In such seemingly perpetually contested cases, who gets to decide what is empirically based knowledge and what is not? Distinguishing divination from other ways of gaining knowledge resembles the classical demarcation problem in the philosophy of science, the task of distinguishing 'pseudo-science' from 'science'. Although it can in many cases seem straightforward to assign specific practices to one or the other category, finding general principles for drawing a boundary may be impossible.[10]

The seemingly intractable issues involved in demarcating the concept of divination may be a major problem if one wishes to construct a watertight terminological foundation for an academic discipline, but it is the very existence of a grey area that allows financial astrology to be treated as a futile and flawed way of gaining insight into the stock market by some and as a useful tool for forecasting market prices by others. Financial astrology occupies the same contested boundary domain as many other and far more widely practiced tools of stock market forecasting and is in this sense not an odd outlier.

Technical analysis, briefly introduced at the beginning of this chapter, is an entire field of stock market analysis that many traders feel is effective and supported by evidence, but others consider to be highly dubious. It is therefore part of the grey area between practices that might unambiguously be regarded as either divinatory or empirically valid. As a thumbnail sketch that admittedly reduces a complex field to its absolute basics, technical analysis looks at the way the market has performed in the past and considers the cumulative effects of the individual decisions of innumerable actors on the market as statistical indicators of how they will react in the future. If a particular stock price rises and a certain volume is being traded, previous statistics of when actors on the market begin to cash in their profits by selling off that stock will give a hint as to when the top of the curve will be reached. Traders typically use a mix of fundamental and technical analysis to guide their decisions. The question is, of course: how well do any such techniques work? To the extent that they do, how much of the success of using a set of forecasting strategies is a self-fulfilling prophecy? A suggestion in an influential channel of publication that it might be a good time to buy the stock of the Widget, Inc. company can lead thousands of small-scale investors to

[10] This claim is in particular linked to the work of philosopher Larry Laudan; see Laudan 1983. For an overview of the issues involved, including a discussion of dissenting opinions, see Hansson 2021.

buy that stock, pushing the price up until various signals cause enough people to sell the stock, driving the price down again.

A study of a sample of Dutch investors who used technical analysis (Hoffmann and Shefrin 2014) showed that they underperformed compared to investors who did not. Another study (Smith et al. 2016) indicated that technical analysis, if it works at all, does so only for an elite group of very experienced professional investors in very specific situations. If these findings are generally valid, using these methods is not only a pointless exercise but generates worse results than refraining from doing so. It is, of course, perfectly possible (again, rather like Evans-Prichard's Azande) to argue that the study merely shows that most investors are insufficiently savvy, or that not all methods of technical analysis are equally effective.

To its supporters, technical analysis is, as noted, not a form of divination but a set of predictive methods. Similarly, financial astrology is by insiders also treated as a way of analysing the market that makes complete sense. The source texts examined here treat the methods they describe as being fully rational and empirically supported. *Investing by the Stars* describes the topic of the book in a completely matter-of-fact way (Weingarten 1996). The heading of the first section does pose the fundamental question "Is There Really a Connection Between the Planets and the Stock Market," (Weingarten 1996: 1) but answers it immediately afterwards (Weingarten 1996: 3) with a resounding "Yes, Astrology." The author notes that astrology is widely used by traders (Weingarten 1996: 3), just as it has been used since time immemorial by people from all walks of life (Weingarten 1996: 4). Apparently, much more does not need to be said, since "Astrology proves without question that we are connected to the universe" (Weingarten 1996: 9). *A Trader's Guide to Financial Astrology* is also generally quite down-to-earth. The authors note that:

> Financial astrology is the study of the link between the movements and interactions of the planets with market behaviour. There are many different ways to look at financial astrology. But no matter how one looks at it, time and time again clear patterns emerge showing distinct market correlations to planetary behaviour.

As for the modus operandi, "The truth is that we don't know how or why astrology works. We just know that it does and we can measure its effects on financial markets" (Weingarten 1996: 9). There are occasional hints suggesting that the context of financial astrology is the world of New Age pursuits, as when the reader is informed that astrology can tell us when the "energies are right" (Weingarten 1996: 2). The energy concept recurs in the following line of reasoning, which one can note starts with a straightforward assertion that astrology works:

> The energy combinations of the planets affect humans, which in turn affects the mass social mood on the planets. If a large enough mass of people participate and interact to form a marketplace, then the planetary behaviour

> can be used as a proxy to predict financial market behaviour (Weingarten 1996: 3).

The contention that "we know" is followed by a passage explaining that it would be quite straightforward to investigate statistically whether astrological indicators do correlate with events on the stock market, but the authors provide no indication that such experiments have ever been carried out. What we do not find in either book are any indications that the authors consider the link between celestial events and financial to be symbolic or culturally constructed.

6 Conclusion

Timing the market perfectly is the ultimately unreachable goal that would enable investors to consistently outperform the statistical average represented by the stock index. Unsurprisingly, numerous tools are available that supposedly increase one's chances of doing precisely that. Financial astrology may be a minor component in the world of investing compared to fundamental and technical analysis, but its supporters have since the early twentieth century claimed that astrological indicators are highly useful in timing the market. The techniques that they deploy are based on transposing to the world of stock trading a set of symbols – in particular symbols denoting planets, zodiacal signs, houses, aspects, and transits – that have their roots in a premodern way of understanding the cosmos as interconnected by a web of correspondences. Firms, goods, and individual stocks are treated as if they metaphorically had a moment of birth, a character, and a destiny, and methods used in divining natal charts are used to gauge where the stock market is headed. The two major textbooks of financial astrology that are analysed in the present chapter treat their topic as a set of instrumental techniques that need no further justification and barely hint at the possibility that financial astrology might be a form of divination rooted in a cosmology based on analogical reasoning. Discursively, financial astrology is placed in the same camp as technical analysis, since both are sets of predictive tools that supporters accept as being empirically valid.

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Chapter 7: Manipulating the Sticks[8]

Reconstructing Aleister Crowley's Use of Yijing Divination

Johan Nilsson

1. Introduction

During the last decade an increasing amount of research has explored the significance of esoteric movements for the ways in which Europeans and Americans have imagined Asian religions, as well as for the westward migration of texts, ideas, and (to a lesser extent) practices originating in Asia (Hammer and Rothstein 2013; Chajes and Huss 2016; Krämer and Strube 2020; Rudbøg and Sand, 2020). Tim Rudbøg and Erik Reenberg Sand have recently argued the role that esoteric movements like Theosophy have played in this regard "is slowly being recognized as being of importance to understanding cross-cultural interchanges in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries" (Rudbøg and Sand 2020: 3). Hammer and Rothstein have asserted that the emergence of Theosophy and its role as an interpreter and populariser of the 'East' in Europe and America belongs to "the short list of pivotal chapters of religious history in the West" (1). While the majority of this research has been focused on the interaction between esoteric movements like Theosophy and south Asian religious traditions, in the last few years, scholars have begun to take an interest in the relationship between western esoteric milieus and East Asia. Although never as widespread as the esoteric fascination with India, the interest in China shown by representatives of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century occult milieu deserves to be considered more seriously than has been the case so far.

China became integrated in some of the influential historical narratives developed in the occult milieu. Theosophists saw the Chinese empire as an heir to the magical tradition of Atlantis, while the French occultists of the *fin de siècle* considered it a successor to the enigmatic pre-historic empire of Ram discussed by Fabre d'Olivet (1767–1825) and Alexander Saint-Yves d'Alveydre (1842–1909) (McCalla 1998: 258–

[8] © Johan Nilsson, 2024 | doi:10.1163/9789004692206_009

286; Saunier 1981). The occult milieu was part of the intellectual context for several of the Europeans who first saw Chinese religion as not only tolerable but as preferable to Christianity.[1] Furthermore, the specific shape of the occult interpretation of Chinese wisdom prefigured some of the major aspects of the interpretation of Chinese spirituality that would become prominent in the twentieth century. Although it was not the only cultural force to wield such an influence, there are indications that the esoteric interpretations of China which emerged during this period influenced how Chinese culture and religion has been portrayed in popular and (to some extent) artistic and elite contexts up until the present time. Those who wish to understand why some movements and individuals in Europe and America took an interest in the religions of other places and cultures, and why they imagined these religions in specific ways, should therefore pay close attention to the esoteric engagement with China during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Research on the western reception of Asian religion in general has repeatedly pointed out that nineteenth and early twentieth century Europeans and Americans who took an interest in religions like Buddhism or Hinduism generally were interested in a narrow selection of religious expressions. Buddhist scholar David L. McMahan has argued that: "What many Americans and Europeans often understand by the term 'Buddhism', [...] is actually a modern hybrid tradition with roots in the European Enlightenment no less than the Buddha's enlightenment, in Romanticism and transcendentalism as much as the Pali canon, and in the clash of Asian cultures and colonial powers as much as in mindfulness and meditation" (McMahan 2008: 5). This form of Buddhism, McMahan points out, deemphasises ritual and myth, redirects spiritual authority to the individual and sees Buddhism as philosophy rather than religion (McMahan 2008: 6–9). According to McMahan, the resulting style or variety of Buddhism is still one of the most common ways of understanding and adhering to the religion in Europe, North America, and, to some extent, globally. A central aspect of this way of understanding Buddhism, and, as we shall see, other religions which were the focus of interest by Europeans in the late nineteenth century, has to do with the question of textual bias. A number of scholars have maintained that European thinkers during the nineteenth century – early academic scholars of religion among them – privileged textual cultural expressions in their attempts to create global, non-confessional ways of understanding religion. Religious scholar Richard King claims that this textual bias is visible, among other things, in the tendency of early scholars to canonise specific texts as the true core of the religions they came into contact with. This, King argues, often gave an illusory sense of theological coherence to the religions studied in this way. It also led European discourse on religion to downplay or express distaste for its practical, organisational, or social dimensions (King 1999: 62–81).

Some relevant criticism has been levelled against this perspective. For one, some of the religions studied by nineteenth century European thinkers obviously really did

[1] Like Aleister Crowley and, to some extent, Albert de Pouvourville.

privilege texts, although not always in the same ways as the European intellectuals who studied them. Furthermore, it is important not to forget that significant research on ritual traditions, *et cetera*, was carried out during the period. This was, after all, the era which saw the emergence of anthropology. In sinology, scholars like J.J.M. de Groot (1854–1921) produced detailed and erudite studies of subjects like ancestor worship, demonology and feng shui. This being said, textual bias remains *a* productive explanation for how westerners came to interpret non-Christian religions in certain ways during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. As I have argued elsewhere, this is very much the case in the understanding of Chinese religion within (mostly) European and North American esoteric movements in the early twentieth century (Nilsson 2020: 266–279). Focusing on Daoism rather than the Confucian tradition which had been the focus of almost all European interest up until this point, esoteric writers generally selected a small number of texts as the core of that tradition, while filtering out things like gods and rituals. (Paradoxically this was done by a cultural movement that actually cared – sometimes deeply – about gods and rituals.) The reason why the *Daodejing* was sold in New Age bookstores for most of the twentieth century and remains most Europeans and Americans only exposure to Daoism, is partly explained by this process of reception. As Rudbøg and Sand argue: "Asian traditions became so tied up with esotericism in the twentieth century, and popularly so, that the wider public often cannot distinguish these traditions, and they have certainly in this mixed form become occulture – that is, normal and mainstream" (3).

Even though textual bias is a good overall characterisation of late the nineteenth and early twentieth century interest in Chinese religion, there are compelling exceptions to this general trend. One such example is the creation of divination rituals influenced by the Chinese *Yijing* within one early twentieth century esoteric movement, Aleister Crowley's Thelema. Although embedded in a broader context of esoteric interpretations of the *Yijing*, Crowley's creation of a form of *Yijing*-based divination is significant in several ways: (1) It is one of the first known, well-documented examples of someone adapting a *practice* of divination connected to the *Yijing* to a worldview with historical roots in Europe; (2) it did not remain the eccentric preoccupation of a single person, but became the basis of a *community of practice* which has continued to influence ritual techniques within the new religious movement of Thelema to the present day; (3) it is, as I have already argued, an exception from the general disinterest in ritual practice among esoteric interpretations of religions with south or east Asian roots. It is not the only such exception – some esoteric adaptions of yoga come to mind – but it still merits attention.

In this chapter, I will explore a form of divination created by Aleister Crowley in the 1910s and 1920s and practiced until his death in 1947. Applying insights from the field of ritual studies to a rich material consisting of printed sources and archival material, I will investigate the context which offered the building blocks and impetus for the creation of this form of divination; I will reconstruct the technique and structure

of this ritual procedure; and, finally, I will discuss its potential consequences for the notion of textual bias in the esoteric interpretation of Chinese religion.

2 The Yijing in European Esotericism

Historically, the *Yijing* has travelled across a number of cultural and religious boundaries. In east Asia its influence emanated across the sinosphere, among other things strongly influencing Japanese intellectual history (Ng 2000). The European engagement goes back to the early Jesuit missions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, a new wave of esoteric interest in the *Yijing* emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century. In some ways the text was intimately connected to the occult environment, and several of the key texts of occultism contain some references to it. Lévi's *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie* even contains some illustrations of the trigrams taken from the *Yijing* (See for example Lévi 1861: 141). The text was, in fact, often seen as an important link in occult historical narratives, where it connected a primordial tradition of ancient wisdom, in which almost all early representatives of occultism believed, to historical expressions of Chinese culture. René Guénon, emerging from the context of French *fin de siècle* occultism, was building on these ideas when he saw in the *Yijing* an expression of the perennial Tradition (Guénon 1932: 53f.). Even among earlier occultists, the text was often identified as the most central vehicle of universal esoteric wisdom within east Asian religion (de Pouvourville 1905: 486–487) and some occult authors, like Lévi, hinted that it contained divine revelations. The influential post-Levian French occultist Papus (Gérard Encausse) called it "a symbolic and initiatory summary of all ancient occultism" (Papus 1889: 111). Some saw it as an expression of the *esoteric* current within Chinese culture, parallel to Confucianism which was often identified as *exoteric*. When it comes to the content of the *Yijing*, occult writers are generally in agreement that it is connected to occultism, magic (Blavatsky 1888: 441), divination (de Pouvourville 1904; Rohmer 1914), the esoteric (Papus 1889), and the teachings of initiatory societies (de Pouvourville 1896). The subjects are, however, rarely explored in any detail in relation to the *Yi*, one exception being a type of sexually polarised ontology which is often identified as part of the core message of the text.

The occult interest in the *Yijing* more or less coincided with a renewed wave of interest in the text within sinology and the academic study of religion, as well as in some more erudite missionary circles. A number of translations and works discussing the text were published during the second half of the nineteenth century. Although some Latin versions of the *Yijing* circulated before that time, these works represented the first translations accessible to general public. Some examples include James Legge's English translation published in 1882 and the Paul-Louis-Felix Philastre French version, published 1885–1893 (Shchutskii 1979: 27–28; Smith 2012: 182).

Among academic scholars, the *Yijing*'s connection to divination did not draw much interest. Some writers, like the scholar Terrien de Lacouperie, influenced by comparative philology, argued that the text had originally been an Akkadian work on political theory that had migrated eastward. Among his supporters was another translator of the *Yijing*, Charles de Harlez, who similarly denied that the text's ultimate meaning was connected to religious or divinatory matters. James Legge – who is credited by sinologist Norman J. Girardot as the first "Western scholar to produce an intelligible rendition of the complete work" (Girardot 2002: 366) – similarly focused on other aspects of the text than its connection to divination, preferring instead to explore what he saw as its historical and ethical content (Tze-Ki Hon and ☒ ☒☒ 2005). In the periphery of the debate were authors like the missionary Thomas McClatchie who argued that the *Yijing* was connected with a pagan phallic cult with roots in the near East.

Willingness to tone down the divinatory associations of the *Yijing* was, unsurprisingly, less common within the occult milieu. As we have already seen some examples of, occult writers who mentioned the text generally understood it as, at least in part, a manual of divination. Even some figures like Albert de Pouvourville, who saw divination as one of the lesser subjects treated within the text, nevertheless made clear that the topic was a traditional part of the teachings of the *Yijing*. Here, however, we must make an important distinction. Even if the interpretation of the *Yijing* as a manual of divination was relatively uncontended within the western esoteric environment, with the exception of Aleister Crowley we have few documented instances of individuals actually *using* the text for this purpose. It is not unlikely that further examples of this remain to be discovered, but, at this time, the development of a form of practice from the *Yijing* has to be seen as a novel development in the European esoteric reception of the text that occurred within Crowley's circle.

3 Aleister Crowley and the Yijing

By all accounts, it was Crowley's journey through the south of China and the north of French Indo-China in the winter of 1905–6 that aroused his interest in Chinese culture (Nilsson 2013; Nilsson 2020). Later, he would write several romantic accounts of his travels claiming that he was spontaneously attracted to the landscape and culture he encountered on his journey. "[T]he spiritual atmosphere of China penetrated my consciousness," he declared in one of these accounts (Crowley 1995: 4–5). References to Chinese texts start to appear in works by Crowley soon after this period. As was the case with most occultists, he almost exclusively focused his attention on the *Daodejing* and the *Yijing*. In 1907, he wrote the *Liber Trigrammaton sub figura XXVII* which contains a series of symbols partly consisting of trigrams from the *Yijing*, with comments in English.[2] The same year saw the publication of the satirical essay "Thien

[2] First published in *The Holy Books volume III* (1909/10?) (Kazynski 2010: 175).

Tao" (Crowley 1990 [1907] 53–68) where the main protagonist, Kwaw (later used as a pseudonym by Crowley himself), is said to have "reduced the Universe to the Yang and the Yin and their permutations in the trigrams of Fo-hi" and "united with the great Tao" (58). In 1918 he wrote his own paraphrase of James Legge's translation of the *Daode jing*[3] and Chinese subject matter appears frequently in his works, even if it is often dealt with in passing. His writing reveals him to have been attracted to notions of cosmogony and non-action which he associated with Chinese religion. It was not until the late 1910s when these interests were combined with a fascination for a certain kind of ritual practice associated with the *Yijing*.[4]

While *Liber Trigrammaton* was published during Crowley's lifetime, most sources related to the practical dimension of his divinatory ritual techniques were not. Several of these sources survive as typescripts in archives like the Yorke collection, however. Of particular interest here are the "Shih Yi," the "Yi-King," and "What is the Yi King?"[5] Furthermore, some published works, especially *The Book of Thoth*, although not themselves primarily dealing with the *Yijing*, do contain highly relevant information. Crowley's diaries also include scattered reflections on divinatory techniques as well as a large number of discussions of the correct interpretations of specific divinatory outcomes.

4 Crowley's Ritual of Yijing-Divination

Most of the elements of the ritual divinatory technique used by Crowley are attested to in more than one source. Several individuals who were part of the Thelemic movement claim to have witness him perform divinatory rites.[6] We also have comments on technique from Crowley's diaries, and scattered information throughout his published works. Ronald L. Grimes states that ideally "[a]ny description [of a ritual] should make explicit whether its source is an actually performed rite, a rite account produced by an observer, a ritual exegesis produced by a participant, or a ritual manual that prescribes what ought to happen in a ritual enactment" (Grimes 2013: 20). In this case our sources represent the last three categories, although we do not have

[3] According to later accounts, Crowley was frustrated with what he termed Legge's lack of "sympathetic understanding" and believed that his own perceived familiarity with spiritual experiences would allow him to better grasp the meaning of the text. Crowley discusses the writing of his paraphrase and the circumstances that led up to it in *The Confessions* and the introduction to the *Daode jing* (Crowley 1898: 837–840; Crowley 1995: 10–11).

[4] During this time Crowley also renewed his interest in the use of opium, a practice which he did associate with Chinese religion. He was not alone among occultists in this regard. Although of some interest as a ritual practice attributed with spiritual significance by some of its practitioners the question of opium smoking is not completely irrelevant in the present context. Space, however, does not permit me to explore the subject here.

[5] All three exist as typescripts in the Yorke collection, NS 111.

[6] Among them are Jane Wolfe, Kennet Grant, John Symonds, and Grady McMurtry.

any step by step instructions which would give us the definitive ritual structure. Such instructions have been published as a part of Crowley's *Yijing*-related texts after his death, but are almost certainly later interpolations.[7] This does not make them or other later technical instructions irrelevant, however. Although my main objective here is a discussion of Crowley's original ritual technique, I will, to a certain extent, refer to the later developments of these techniques within a broadly defined Thelemic movement. Using Grimes' distinction between *ritual* and *rite*, I will primarily attempt to reconstruct Crowley's preferred divinatory practice or *ritual* (as near as the sources allow), illustrating aspects of this by specific *rites*, or individual instances of ritual performance.

What was the basic components of Crowley's ritual performance of the practice he himself called *Yijing-divination*? It seems that it could begin by the invocation of a god. (Presumably the god should be one that was considered appropriate to the situation in question.) Crowley's diaries confirm instances of invocation in this context, but they are very few and do not indicate that any invocations preceded most instances of divination. The performance of an initial invocation is, however, explicitly called for in the instructions published as a part of later editions of Crowley's *Yijing*. Nevertheless, if included, invocation in this context was likely a brief affair, perhaps consisting of the creation of a mental image of the god or goddess being invoked. Following this, the diviner should mentally articulate a question or visualise the situation into which inquiry was made. Crowley's diaries preserve a large number of such questions. These give us a detailed insight into the many different situations in were divination was thought to be useful. Crowley posed questions about the outcome of specific actions, about his relationship to other people, about what a certain day had in store for him, about the best way to construct a novel, the most efficient technique to smoke opium, or the most correct way in which to interpret a text (Crowley 1989: 890; Crowley 1996: 22, 146; Crowley 1972: 274).

Following the formulation of the question, the ritual required the manipulation of certain ritual tools. Crowley primarily used a set of specially prepared sticks. These are mentioned in his diaries. He writes, for example, of "manipulat[ing] the sticks" and mentions that one day the "sticks" fell "half out of" the book in which he kept them (Crowley 1972: 98). Crowley's ritual sticks, although never ascribed any specific powers, have been the object of a certain amount of fascination by later adherents to Thelema. A set of divinatory sticks survived Crowley and passed through the hands of a few of the representatives of the later Thelemic movement. In one of Gerald Yorke's letters to Crowley's successor in the O.T.O., Karl Germer, from the year following Crowley's death, we learn that "Frieda [Harris] has taken [Crowley's] Yi King sticks" (Yorke 1948, 99). The sticks then passed into the hands of John Symonds, Gerald

[7] None of the *Yijing*-related typescripts in the Warburg institute contain these instructions. In recent years, claims have surfaced which maintain that these were written in the 1960s for a small 1968 edition of "The Yi King."

Yorke, Karl Germer, and Grady McMurtry (Symonds 1997; Yorke 1948, 99). Some of the people who had the opportunity of studying them have left descriptions of these tools in writing, although they do not always completely match up. According to John Symonds and Kennet Grant they consisted of six strips of tortoise shell one by five (or six) inches in size.[8] In contrast, Grady McMurtry describes them as "either [of] mahogany or teak or stained dark to look so" (McMurtry 1979). Both agree, however, that one side of the sticks indicated an *unbroken* line (yang) and the other was marked (possibly by nail polish)[9] to indicate a *broken* line (yin) (McMurtry 1979). If the sticks were indeed made of tortoise shell, this may have been a conscious reference to the *Yijing*. In his edition of the text, Legge notes that the expression "the tortoise shell and the stalks" was a term for divination and points out that the *Book of Documents* states that "'doubts were to be examined' by means of the tortoise shell and the stalks" (Legge 1882: 20, 371). He does, however, also argue that the expression signifies different techniques of divination and makes it clear that "the tortoise-shell had nothing to do with the use of the Yi" (371).

If we can be certain that Crowley often used sticks to obtain specific hexagrams, what can we know of his specific technique? Grady McMurtry has described seeing Crowley use the sticks. "The way Crowley used them," he writes, "was to shuffle them (with his eyes closed) then take them one at a time and, holding each one upright with his right forefinger (eyes still closed), get a signal and lay it down either right or left. First stick down is the bottom line" (McMurtry 1979). A hexagram, in the present context, consists of six horizontal and parallel lines, placed one over the other. The lines can be either broken or unbroken. In Crowley's ritual technique, each stick being thrown (or laid down) signified a line, which was seen as broken or unbroken depending on which side of the stick was turned upwards and visible when it landed. Together the sticks indicated six lines, and thus a hexagram was formed. According to McMurtry the first stick to fall constituted the bottom line.

If the process of obtaining a hexagram is fairly simple and straightforward according to this technique, interpreting the result was a different matter. Diaries reveal that this was in part done by consulting and interpreting the passages in the *Yijing* often called the *judgments*. The importance of the judgments in Crowley's divinatory practice is underlined by the fact that his own versions of the *Yijing* are focused on these texts. Most of the text in the "Shih Yi" and "Yi-King" typescripts consist of paraphrases of Legge's translation of the judgements. Since the judgments are complex and enigmatic, interpreting the meaning of a hexagram in such a way that it would yield a meaningful answer to the question posed by the diviner was a difficult and open-ended process.

[8] According to John Symonds who came into possession of the sticks a short time after Crowley's death they were six inches. He writes "Among his pens, pipes, drugs etc., which came into my possession on his death, were his flat inch-wide and 6-inches-long tortoiseshell Yi King sticks, on one side of which was a broken line and on the other an unbroken line" (Symonds 1997: 251).

[9] According to McMurtry "The divided side (looks like red nail polish to me) is the female (Yin, receptive) side" (McMurtry 1979).

The number of possible answers was almost unlimited. For example, on the 7th of August 1923, Crowley posed the question of how he should proceed in getting his autobiography published. After divining, he received the 26th hexagram (Crowley 1996: 120). In Legge's translation, part of the judgment for this hexagram reads "a carriage with the strap under it removed" (Legge 1882: 112). Crowley interprets this as an advice recommending him to "[g]et rid of existing contract, & prepare a new one" (Crowley 1996: 120). The judgement goes on to say: "The third line, undivided, shows its subject urging his way with good horses." Crowley comments: "Obtain go-ahead courageous & spirited publisher" (Crowley 1996: 120).

Parallel to the use of the judgments, the interpretation of hexagrams could also be done through their attributions to a system of correspondences based on Crowley's development of late nineteenth century European ceremonial magic. He gave each trigram (that is, each half of a hexagram) a correspondence to the one of the following principles: lingam, yoni, sun, moon, water, fire, earth, and air. Each hexagram combined two such correspondences and its meanings could thus be assigned from the associations these correspondences carried in Thelemic esotericism, and, to a certain degree, in a wider environment of late nineteenth and early twentieth century ceremonial magic. For example, on the 4th of October 1920, Crowley, while divining for his friend Jane Cheron, posed the question: "Describe the nature of the dangers that threatens her"? He received the 58th hexagram, *dui*, water of water. Crowley interpreted this as "[d]esire, pleasure, laziness, inconstancy, mistaking images for realities. Generally speaking, then, the Water Forces" (Crowley 1972: 98, 274). Significant for this type of interpretation was the fact that it made possible the partial integration of the hexagrams with the Tarot. In Crowley's version of the Tarot, which could also be used for divination, the court cards were given elemental attributions similar to those of the hexagrams (excluding the non-elemental attributions lingam, yoni, sun, and moon). This means that (some of) the hexagrams could be further elucidated by being compared to (some of) the Tarot cards. In the above example, the 58th hexagram was related to the Queen of Cups. A diviner following Crowley's method could thus bypass the judgments and interpret the results through the Tarot, which was likely more familiar to a significant part of his followers.

Although likely not a part of any official curriculum, we know that some of Crowley's followers were taught, or at least picked up, his divinatory techniques. One instance of this can be found in the diaries of Jane Wolfe, who stayed at the Thelemic community in Sicily, the Abbey of Thelema, in the early 1920s. In her diaries Wolfe mentions seeing Crowley throwing "the sticks" soon after arriving in Sicily (Wolfe 2017). Later, it is clear from her diary that she herself is performing a similar form of divination, although we are given almost no clues as to the technique. On April 15th 1921, for example, she writes: "I ask Yi 'Shall I have my Retirement in May?' And receive [hexagram] XIII" (Wolfe 2017: 156).

The interest in Crowley's interpretation of the *Yijing* and associated divinatory techniques is further suggested by the many publications of his paraphrases of the

text carried out by his followers. This is not the place for a detailed exploration of the publication history of these texts, nor the tracing of the historical development of Thelemic Yijing-divination. Some examples deserve a mention, however, in order to illustrate the continued interest in this type of divination expressed by groups and individuals influenced by Crowley. Among these publications are the 1971 edition of the "Shih Yi" by Thelema publishing, the "I Ching" by Level Press (possibly also published in 1971) and the 1995 "Yi King or the Book of Changes" by Pangenetor Lodge Publications. Furthermore, that the literature on the *Yijing* inspired by Crowley was not limited to republications of his writings can be seen, for example, in the writings of Louis T. Culling, who published works like *The Incredible I Ching* (1965) and *The Pristine Yi King* (1989). These books, although clearly and explicitly building on Crowley's works, contain many innovations in relation to the technique described above.

5 Concluding Remarks

It is obvious that some esoteric movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, lacked the disinterest in, or disapproval of, ritual practice that scholars like Richard King and others have seen as a tendency in the European understanding of religion of the time. Crowley's thinking and practice was in large part shaped by his training in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, which, largely because of its Masonic roots, was a decidedly ritual-heavy type of esotericism. Crowley's rather textualist and philosophical understanding of Chinese religion is consequently difficult to account for by reference to any deep-seated distaste for ritualism. Instead, it seems more likely that he was simply guided in that direction by the type of sources he had at his disposal. It is, in fact, quite easy to imagine a counterfactual scenario where Crowley would have been fascinated by Chinese internal alchemy or some tradition of meditation. His interest in the *Yijing* seems to strengthen this assessment. Clearly, because of his lack of relevant language skill and deeper exposure to relevant ritual performance, any practice Crowley engaged in with regard to the *Yijing* would have to be built from what little information he could extract from writings of sinologists. It could then be developed and expanded by parallels to familiar techniques; in this case the Tarot. This suggests that European and American ways of understanding the 'East', their Orientalism, to use the term, was not as coherent or homogenous as is sometimes suggested. Part of the textual focus apparent in the early esoteric interpretation of Asian religions likely proceeded from a matter of practical necessity rather than from deeply held values and norms.

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Chapter 8: The Sounds of Silence[(9)]

A Study of Minor Ritual Acts of Silence in Dark Green Spirituality

Ive Brissman

1. Introduction

"Silence is not the absence of something but the presence of everything" (Hempton 2009: 2). Silence is complex and begs the question: how we can approach silence from a scholarly perspective? Silence is beyond words, and a wordy approach to silence is almost a contradiction. In this article I will approach practices of silence from the perspective of ritual studies. I have studied what I refer to as reflective practices in Dark green spirituality, which in simple terms are practices that stimulate, encourage, and enable refection, particularly in relation to nature and ecological concerns, and these often include silence in various forms.[1] Reflective practices may be sharing circles that offers conversations on the challenges of living in times of climate change (and I will present these further on). Reflective practices are organised in workshops and show a great variety in how they are done: forming circles, sharing circles, meditations, walks in nature, storytelling, or tutorial talks. In various ways these workshops focus on themes of environmental concerns. Although I do not describe these practices as rituals in a general sense, one aspect that is re-occurring seems to beg the question for some considerations, and that is *the practice of silence*. I have spotted various examples of silence in these workshops: For example, an often-occurring practice is how silence is kept for a few minutes in the opening and the closing of a sharing circle. Such short moments of silence are combined with other practices in these workshops. Silence is flexible when it comes to its duration: it may last for only a few minutes, it may last longer, for example during retreats, where it may be extended to considerably longer

[1] In my thesis *Wild Enchantments in the Anthropocene*, I studied Dark green spirituality in the period between 2009–2015 set in a British context. Dark green spirituality is an alternative spirituality (Partridge 2005) that is characterised by ecological awareness (Morton 2016). In the fieldwork, which I conducted in relation to my thesis, the cases presented in this article are from the field work I then conducted. Although I choose not to make use of rituals as a theoretical tool in my thesis, in this article I focus on the practice of silence where perspectives from ritual studies can shed light on previously less explored details from my field.

periods, which may last for days or even months. In this article I focus on shorter moments of silence, and how these are part of practices and workshops. Here silence comes in various forms: (i) silence that last only few minutes in the opening or closing of the circle, (ii) silence that is part of the practice, for example during a walk, or (iii) silence that last more or less the whole workshop in a meditation. Although there are variations in the duration, silence is distinctive and worth attention from a perspective that deepens the analysis; therefore I turn to ritual study. To approach practices of silence from the perspective of ritual study I found Anne-Christine Hornborg's article "Interrituality as a Means to Perform the Art to Building New Rituals" to offer valuable insights and theoretical tools (Hornborg 2017).

2 Interrituality: Ritual Creativity and Minor Ritual Acts

Ritual creativity has been the centre of scholarly attention since Catherine Bell's new paradigm in ritual studies turned the attention to the social construction of rituals (Bell 1997). Hornborg contributes to ritual studies in the introduction of the concept 'interrituality' which addresses this social construction and sheds light on the creative aspects of rituals. In analysing the construction of rituals, it can be assumed that a ritual consists of several parts, which are composed to meet the need of that occasion. Rather than a repetitive pattern according to a tradition[2] is more often the case that rituals give proof of a large amount of creativity. Especially in alternative spiritualties (Partridge 2005; Partridge 2006), which are less dependent on traditions, creativity is central in the performance of rituals. André Droogers (2004) takes the creativity a step further toward playfulness, as he claims that ritual creativity helps to create an alternative reality.

Shifting the analytical question from how rituals are performed to how they are constructed turns our attention from tradition and repetition to creativity and innovation. Bell's performative perspective on ritual has received criticism from the anthropologist Ronald L. Grimes (2010) who claims performativity is too inspired by theatre criticism.[3] Rather than develop theories on rituals we need to consider specific cases, according to Grimes, and my contribution here is to offer accounts of one such specific case: the ritualisation of silence. Bell's new paradigm shifted the attention from the outward to the inward, from how the rituals define community and society in terms of the self rather than the self in terms of the community. The new rituals that Bell describes are individual-centred and distinct from more liturgical rites. In this perspective

[2] By tradition, the study of ritual has been focusing on ritual as the performance of texts, and as part of religious traditions according to a canon or liturgy. Rituals can be seen as dramatisation of texts or as the performance of texts. Ritualisation focuses on the performance of rituals, but also assumes that these are socially constructed.

[3] Similar criticism is formulated by Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw (1994).

individuals are co-creators of rituals (Bell 1997: 241). To address this Hornborg examines ritual creativity and inventions in terms of 'interrituality' which means "borrowing *minor ritual acts* or elements including objects found in other rituals" (Hornborg 2017: 17, emphasis mine) and she elaborates how these minor ritual acts become important building blocks in new ritual performances.[4] She defines 'interrituality' as a means to perform the art of building new rituals.

> To invent a ritual is not a matter or only picking acts or elements from ones imagination and putting them together; it is a question of careful choices of acts which are already given and defined as "traditional" practices. These already known acts (or utterances) from other rituals are rearranged within a new frame. ... By reusing these already familiar acts as building blocks it is also easier to introduce new ones without disturbing the sense of the ritual being "traditional" (Hornborg 2017: 17).

Although inventing new rituals allows much creativity to be successful it cannot be done totally freely. In picking acts (or elements) to create something new "already known act" has a clear advantage, and these may quite easily be rearranged in a new frame. In this article I will discuss how practices of silence works as such familiar building blocks. Although ritual study contributes to my field, there is a problematic issue in the ritual approach to practices of silence: Roy Rappaport defines rituals as "the performance of more or less invariant sequences of *formal acts and utterances* not entirely coded by the performers."[5] At first glance utterances and silence seems incompatible; however, I will find a way out of this paradox and discuss how utterances are possible to combine with practices of silence, and how silence and rituals can address forms of communication that is beyond the realm of words.

3 Minor Ritual Acts of Silence

Interrituality refers to how rituals are constructed by using and reusing "already familiar acts as building blocks" (Hornborg 2017: 17). She refers to these building blocks as *minor ritual acts* (Hornborg 2017: 17, emphasis mine) and I make this more precise as *minor ritual acts of silence*. In these minor ritual acts of silence, silence is proclaimed and general for all participants, and for participants it is a familiar and recognisable as a spiritual practice. I discuss how the minor ritual acts of silence form

[4] Hornborg notes, the discourse on rituals has been much occupied with rituals as part of traditions as seen in the anthropologist Roy Rappaport's approach, however, traditions might mislead scholar to see rituals as static practices rather than creative practices. From a social constructionist point of view, traditions are of course far from solid bedrock, but equally constructed socially. Consequently, Hornborg asks: is ritual invention an oxymoron? This might be more of a conceptual query because from a scholarly perspective we still need tools to study how invention is done.

[5] Emphasis mine.

part of various workshops, and I choose *not* to approach the workshop as a whole as a performance of a ritual, nevertheless, the distinctive part of keeping silence can be seen as a minor ritual act. The term 'interrituality' helps me to explore how minor ritual acts of silence form part of these workshops, how they are created and socially constructed, and how they can be analysed, in consideration of these creative aspects of ritualisations of silence. Hence, I precede from my descriptive accounts to answer the following analytical questions: (*i*) What can minor ritual acts of silence say about the value of silence? And (*ii*) How can minor ritual acts of silence further our understanding of ritual creativity? In presenting examples of minor ritual acts of silence from my field I give accounts of two types of workshops: the first are done indoors, the others are done outdoors in various settings in nature.

4 Forming Circles of Silence and Sharing

What I refer to as minor ritual acts of silence are part of various workshops such as sharing circles. In the field when you are participating in practices and workshops minor ritual acts of silence may escape your attention. There is a risk that these silent moments are seen as moments when nothing happens, however, to see silence as unsignificant would be a mistake. I have participated in many sharing circles, and I draw from several circles as part of various workshops to serve as an introduction to this practice. Forming a circle can be done in various way, indoors as well as in nature. Sitting together in a circle does not give precedence to anyone as the participants face each other and can see each other's faces. The person who is sharing can address all the participants in the circle equally, and the roles in the circle shift. The circle is based on reciprocity, there is an intimate relation between sharing and the sense of community.

Sharing is an interplay between listening and speaking, and participants shift their roles as they take it in turns around. Sharing is done together, there is an exchange of experiences and reflections. Sharing is often described as a gift that you give and receive. To listen and to speak are equally important in the circle. Therefore, these practices are a form of co-creation, as the participants together adjust and decide how to perform the practices according to the preferences on that particular occasion. The facilitator invites the group to participate, but there may also be smaller groups where the participants organise the circle themselves.

The Silent Circle is a practice that comes in many versions, but the distinctive feature is that participants form a circle and that they are silent for a while before starting conversation, a session, a workshop, or simply before class. There is a moment of silence in the beginning and in the end of the circle. The silence may last a few minutes, it may be longer like a short meditation, according to the need of that occasion. Thus, silence works to open or close the circle, and this is done to tune in to the moment, to each other and the place. From this general introduction I precede to give accounts

of specific workshops. At one workshop I participated in the facilitator presented *The Silent Circle* as a practice that he/she first had come in contact within the Quaker tradition. Quaker meetings could take the form that the community sat together, in silence, for up to one hour. When the hour of silence had passed, anyone who felt that they wanted to speak could speak freely about whatever was on his/her heart. The other participants would listen without interrupting, and when the speaker had done his/her sharing, someone else would follow, or if no one wanted to share, there would be silence again. However, at this workshop, the silence was modified to last only a few minutes, and this was the common procedure in most of the workshops I participated in. The circles started with a few minutes (a maximum five) of silence, before the circle was open for conversation. At the end of the circle there was again a few minutes of silence. This show not only how the workshop was modified, but also taken from the original Quaker context to a new workshop – where the silence lasted for a few minutes at the beginning and the end. At the beginning of the workshop the facilitator then introduces the silence with saying "we start with a few minutes in silence" and similar in the end of the workshop "we end this circle with a few minutes in silence."

A further example of how silence is practiced is the workshop I call *Take Your Question to the Field and the Forest*. This workshop consists of three parts. First it starts with a few minutes of silence, before a sharing circle which likewise ends with a few minutes of silence, like the examples presented above. Secondly, the silence continues as everyone is given a paper to write down the question that they formulated and see as the most urgent question for them. The paper where the question is written is then pinned to the wall so that everyone can take part of each other's question, still in silence and without commenting on each other's questions. The third part of the workshops is a silent walk, in order to take the question with them for contemplation. Thus, the instruction at the end of the workshop "to be in silence and take the question to the field and the forest" indicates that these are personal questions, they concern everyone's personal engagement, and they are based on emotional, existential and ethical aspects. Hence, to *be in silence* is different from simply being silent (as when someone hushes you or asks you to shut up for a moment) because being in silence is a conscious choice of being in the moment and giving space for something new to emerge. Thus, being in silence is a contemplative mood that helps and stimulates reflection. Silence – or minor ritual acts of silence – is a distinctive part of *Take Your Question to the Field and the Forest*. The workshop opens with silence and ends in the instruction "to be in silence and take the question to the field and the forest." This highlights the role of silence in relation to questions and answers, and that looking for answers beyond the shallow might be beyond words: silence is a distinctive tool for reflection. It is further notable that this workshop starts indoor, with a silent circle but ends in a silent walk in the fields and forest.

As seen in this account, minor ritual acts of silence are distinctive in sharing circles where silence in combined with a circle where participants share their views, their experiences, or worries with their co-participants in the circle. The sharing circle may have

a chosen theme, and in my material these concern environmental issues set within a spiritual discourse that allows emotional, existential, and ethical perspectives. Here minor ritual acts of silence come together with conversations that are seen as particularly urgent and 'deep'. Being in silence is a distinctive feature in the reflective practices that I have studied:[6] Silence is flexible: it may last for a few minutes, it may be done together while forming a circle in a room, and silence may be kept during a walk in the landscape. Therefore, minor ritual acts of silence are easily integrated in various workshops, walks, meditations, sharing circles and other more creative workshops. In most cases the act of being silent is accomplished with a certain bodily position. It is common that when silence is proclaimed, participants adjust their body position to sit more comfortably, often to sit in a more symmetrical position, as common in meditation. For example, by placing their arms at the armchair or on their knees or straightening their back, taking some deep breaths to relax. If the silence includes the practice of holding hand together in the circle, participants reach out their hand to take the hand of the person next to them in the circle, on either side. The majority tend to close their eyes during the moment of silence. Participants who are used to practicing silence and mediation tend to go into silence more actively than those who are beginners, who sometimes seems to wait and be somewhat uncertain of what to do.

In my examples of minor ritual acts of silence there is a common feature: the few minutes of silence are kept in the beginning of the workshop as well as in the end of it. In the beginning silence is proclaimed as a facilitator/the person offering the workshop gives the instruction that silence will be kept, perhaps by saying: "Let's begin with a few minutes of silence," and at the end of the circle "we close this circle with some minutes of silence." These instructions to go into silence can be seen as formal acts of utterance; although these address silence they are not acts of silence. Rappaport poses utterances as central in the performance of rituals, and as noted above, this might be difficult to combine with practices of silence. What is the role of this instruction, or this utterance? It initiates silence, but the utterance proclaiming silence is not itself an act of silence.[7] What is done and said is contradicting each other, however, set in a model; the formal act of utterances preceded the minor ritual act of silence. Proclaiming silence initiate the minor ritual act of silence, but the actual silence starts first after the utterance, as the participants begin to maintain silence and no more words are uttered. And when the circle is closed, the first utterances are done when the circle is ended. This escapes the paradox but there is something more to it because utterances are not the only form of communication available. Bell writes:

[6] For further examples and discussion see Brissman 2021.

[7] It can be seen as an example of what the philosopher Jürgen Habermas refers to as a performative contradiction. In this Habermas discuss rational discourse: if someone want to criticise rational discourse the person has to follow the rules of the very logic that they want to criticise and are then trapped in a contradiction between what is said and done.

> (R)ritual is a medium of expression, a special language suited to what it is there to express, namely, internal spiritual-emotional resources tied to our true identities but frequently unknown and developed (Bell 1997: 241).

Bell takes ritual beyond the narrow ranges of utterances; *au contraire*, rituals have rich repertoire of ways of communicating, beyond the mere word, as "a medium of expression and a special language," and it is possible to include silence in the understanding of religious language, because silence speaks, and silence can be the inspiration for creating new rituals. To practice silence, or what I refer to as minor ritual acts of silence is of course not unique to my material. The political scientist Lucy Sargisson (2012) finds similar practices in her study of the Findhorn community in Scotland. Sargisson studied a tree planting project, but before the actual work of planting tree started the group of tree planters joined in a circle in a few minutes of silence to tune into the place, the trees, and the work they were doing (Sargisson 2013: 134). She refers to such short moments of silence as "attunement" which was also how the participants in the practice called it. Attunement means to be in silence for a moment; to silently tune into the place, the people and the mood of the moment. Attunement can be compared to how musicians tune their instruments before playing the music. Attunement may be seen as a way of approaching in silence, and my next example, a walk toward the silent wood will give a further illustration of approaching in silence.

5 Approaching in Silence: Visiting Wistman's Wood

During my fieldwork I participated in a pilgrim walk in Dartmoor, Devon, UK. For the sake of analysis, the walk can be separated into distinctive parts. When it begins, the walk on Dartmoor outwardly looks like an ordinary ramble across the moorland. The walk is approximately seven miles, and from the starting point to the wood maybe three miles. After stopping for a short rest, as the walk continues towards Wistman's Wood, a meditative walk follows and the participants are instructed to focus on being present at this place. Conversations are restricted, with the instruction: "If you do talk to each other, talk about this place, and what you see and sense while you walk." The meditative walk leads towards Wistman's Wood. After almost one hour of walking Wistman's Wood is seen ahead as it stands out as a green forest-island in the open moor. Just outside the wood on the hillside, by the river, the group takes another break, and the story of Wistman's Wood is retold, which according to the local lore once was a sacred place for the druids. What is happening here is that the story is told at the place, and it is worth noting, because the instruction of the meditative part was exactly to talk about *this place*. The telling of the story of Dartmoor and of Wistman's Wood, just by the wood, at the site where everyone is present at that point, continues the meditative practice of being present. To enter the wood, and to do so in

silence, furthering the dramaturgy, for those who prefer, the walk continues into the wood, but while being in the wood *silence* must be observed. Consequently, the pilgrim walk towards Wistman's Wood follows a dramaturgy where the parts of the walk, the practices performed, form a successive and conscious movement towards silence. The ritualisation of silence that is part of this workshop works in the design of the walk as a spiritual practice, a pilgrim walk, and it helps to create and cultivate a sense of 'sacredness' in relation to Wistman's wood. Hence, the approach to silence in not only a movement in the landscape: it is also a gradual move towards being in silence. At first the instruction during the walk is to avoid speaking, if you do, the restriction is to speak about the place where you are present. After entering the wood, silence must be kept – you must be completely silence as long as you are in the wood. Thus, the pilgrim walk is a meditative and conscious approach towards the sacred wood, and parallel, a gradual approach to silence. It is distinctive that silence is coordinated with entering the sacred wood, it emphasises relation between silence and the sacred.

6 Silence and Soundscapes

When silence is kept, particularly in an outdoor setting, this is not equal to the elimination of all sounds. The sound in the place forms the soundscape and creates the ambience of a landscape. Those who visit Wistman's Wood on a sunny day in June would find it a mesmerising place, but at some other time of the year or time of the day they would find that it has a very different character. Think of a dark night in November, a pale moon is shining, dark clouds are torn by the wind, and as they cover the moon, the moor is left in total darkness. Think of the uncanny sound of the howling wind, and maybe the cry of an owl is heard far away. My impression of the place, like that of other participants, is shaped by the conditions that prevailed when we visited. So, let us once again think of a sunny day in June. The moss on the stones is a deep green carpet that covers the ground, the greenery of the trees flickers in the soft wind, the interplay between light and shadow is painting a chiaroscuro that seems to bring magic to the place. The running water in the river can be heard, birds were singing, however, on this occasion, there was some other music because one participant had brought a flute and sat playing on a stone. The music of the solitary flute emphasised the sensuous experience of listening and the soundscape helps to create what the anthropologist Tim Ingold (2000) refer to as the ambience of the place.

Among those that entered the wood on this occasion there was variation in what they did and practices were performed according to each person's habitus in relation to that particular field. While some meditated in lotus position, some strolled alone, someone else climbed a tree. Hence, in entering the wood there is no fixed set of practices that decides what you can do and cannot do (if you do not go to excesses and disturb others). Nevertheless, there is a shared attitude to the place, and that is that you should be respectful, which can be done in various ways, but maintaining

the silence is the distinctive feature here. In this silence is a sign of respect, to be in silence is to allow the soundscape and other voices – that is other than the human voices – to be heard. There are no general set of practices, movements, or body poses that those who enter the wood are entitled to perform. Each person can do what they prefer, but the postures performed are within the frame of paying respect to the wood and observing silence. Entering Wistman's Wood was done in silence, and, for obvious reasons, I was not able to talk to anybody during the time in the forest, but afterwards it was possible to have some conversations about it, and then several participants made comments on the flute music. They testified to how much they had appreciated the flute music. Many emphasise how the music resonated with the place, as one described the flute music played as "just perfect in that place," that is the sound of the flute resonated with the sounds of the wood rather than overrode them. Many expressed their gratitude to the flutist because the music had added much to their experience of the place. The music added a sense of magic to the place, it became a vital part of the experience of the participants, and it illustrates how certain sounds are compatible with the perception of 'quiet' places. It is notable that no one saw the music as being in conflict to the instruction of being in silence. On the contrary, the music did add to their experience of being in silence. What the music adds to the experience is that it *emphasises the soundscape*.

Eco-musicology is the study of the relation between music and ecology. The eco-musicologian Mark Pedelty suggests that to study music ecologically it is necessary to consider connections between sound, people, and place (Pedelty 2012: 10). Music is not separate from its context, and "music helps define who we are and mediates our imagination of place" (Pedelty 2012: 12). Acoustic music, particularly string and wind instruments, such as flutes, are considered more ecological sounds. Songs and music are not exclusively humans making sounds, it includes the sounds of the wild, and the soundscape. The soundscape is more than the music; the birds, the soft wind in the trees, or the murmuring water in the river passing by. The larger-than-human-world includes those who speak with a different tongue and logic than the human language. The solitary flute in the wood, the tune played, did not drown out the other sounds of the place; it formed an ensemble with the various voices of the larger-than-human world. There is an intimate relation between songs and enchantment, and as the philosopher Jane Bennett (2001) notes, the etymology of 'enchantment' is to en-chante, that is in French *chante*.

7 Silence and Deep Listening – beyond the Realm of Words

So far it is clear that *the role of being in silence is to stimulate listening*. Workshops bear witness to a large amount of creativity, and despite the differences in design

and performance silence is a common feature indoors as well as in an outdoor setting. Opening with a short moment of silence and meditation are done to tune into the place, the participants, and the mood of the moment. Sargisson refers to these moments of silence as attunement (Sargisson 2012: 115–116),[8] I refer to them as minor ritual acts of silence. Especially in an outdoor setting, or in nature, these ways of working with silence offer explorations of shifting sensibilities and transformative encounters which are important features in the cultivation of enchantment. To be in silence is based in an ambition to find alternative ways of experiencing and interacting with the larger-than-human world and exploring the wild mind. This concerns our being in the world, how we *relate* to each other, and to the other-than-human world, in a relational perspective. A further thing to add regarding wild enchantments is how these practices *offer tools for bridging the gap between humans and the larger-than-human world*. By including holistic perspectives, enchantment relates to the full emotional register to give a renewed understanding of the many ways we relate to the larger-than-human world. The focus is on silence and listening feed imagination and leads further to communication – beyond the realm of words.

I have made various accounts of minor ritual acts of silence: sharing circles, meditations, the meditative walk, and a visit to Wistman's wood. Such ritualisation of silence is proclaiming a certain code of conduct: not only to keep quiet, but to be in silence, and to appreciate silence. As one participant said, "Being in silence stills you, you become part of the landscape." However, in allowing silence to take part of conversations in sharing circles allows us to get rid of the dichotomy between speech and silence. "Silence is where we learn to listen" as one participant said, and someone else said "Silence is to wait for a while and be still." Indeed, listening is fundamental to communication, and deeper understanding. To practice silence, encourage reflection on whose voices are heard and whose are silenced. To actively be silent emphasises the role of listening and listening to other voices; those who speak with a different tongue and logic than the human language. The philosopher Donna Haraway (2016) addresses the need to rebuild quiet places and to make kin with other species. This kind of quiet places encourage listening can be referred to as *deep listening*. This concerns the stories told or untold, those whose voices are heard and whose are silenced, and it emphasises the role of listening to a multitude of voices. When listening to the sounds and voices other than human, words are no longer the only means of communication. Deep listening means to listen to voices who speak with a different tongue and logic: the larger-than-human world, the long-gone ancient world, and even for those to come – the voices of yesterday and tomorrow.[9] Listening to these voices is in the core of ecological awareness.

[8] Sargisson draws on her study of the Findhorn community in Scotland.

[9] This approach to stories is an alternative to Western literature, with its focus on the author as a unique artist producing the story from his/her individual or inner life. The use of local lore and mythology can be seen as a form of recycling of old material, the telling is a re-telling, a continuous creative reworking process, where contemporary issues of the Anthropocene can be expressed. The

8 Rebuilding Quiet Places – Silence and Ecological Awareness

Haraway set the task to make kin, "to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places" (Haraway 2016: 1). These quiet places are not only human places. Human voices and the sound of the human civilisation too often dominate the soundscape, therefore, being in silence or rebuilding quiet places means to be open for a less human centred world. As noted, silence is not to be mistaken for the absence of sounds. Silence helps to modify dominating voices, to give space for other voices than the human voice. The stories of the Anthropocene are, according to Haraway, not exclusively human stories. Listening, telling, and activating a particular story is, in the words of Haraway, to make something absent present (Haraway 2016: 131).[10] Rebuilding quiet places means to get beyond the human noisiness, where the human voice and sounds dominate the soundscape. The soundscape[11] not only refers to what is producing the sounds, what circumstances give rise to the sounds, such as a rain falling, to consider soundscapes makes it possible to listen to places. Listening to the water in the river, the summer wind or flute music are sensory experiences, which are part of the experiences that are seen as the soul of a place – the *genius loci*. The combination of soundscape and ecology describe new ways of evaluating the living landscapes and environments of the world, mostly through their collective voices, but also how noise pollution affects humans and other species (Pedelty 2012: 6).[12] Noise pollution is sounds produced by humans which affect the larger-than-human-world. The soundscape, the component of the acoustic environment that can be perceived by humans, is the subject of study in various disciplines, such as wildlife ecology where the study concerns acoustic ecology or soundscape ecology.

Today's environmentalism gives increasing attention to sound pollution, for example, the sound of industry may disturb the mating songs of animals. In the industrialised world silence had become rare and there is a need of silence in sustaining environments (Hempton 2009: 2).[13] The sound ecologist Gordon Hempton sees silence as an endangered species. Granted, wild rivers and hurricanes can produce deafening sound but most of the non-human world is relatively quiet in comparison with human

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mythic frame offers symbols, language, characters, and deep time perspectives of geological and ancient records.

[10] Haraway places animal companions and humans together in situated naturecultures, in becoming with. The becoming with the dance of relating or rhythm of conjoined process are. expressions of how naturecultures come about in coexistence. It is a "practice of companions" (Haraway 2008, 25).

[11] The term 'soundscape' was coined by the Canadian composter and naturalist R. Murray Schafer in the late 1970s. He saw it as the multiple sources of sounds that reach the human ear.

[12] Soundscape studies pioneer Murrary Schafer created structures in landscape that combated noise pollution and inspired sustainable orientations.

[13] *One Square inch of silence* is also a project to preserve silence in in Hoh Rain Forest, one of the quietest places in the US.

soundscapes. Our adaptation to noise has radically transformed human consciousness, and it has made it more difficult to appreciate the subtler sounds of nature and preserve the nonhuman ecosystem. The lack of silent places and moments has damaged the sensibility of modern man who is "Being unable to hear subtle sound is a predicament of living in industrial civilisation" (Pedelty 2012: 68).[14] In contrast to this numbness, Hempton sees silence as a meeting place:

> We have reached a time in human history when our global environmental crisis requires that we make permanent life-style changes. More than ever before, we need to fall back in love with the land. Silence is our meeting place. It is our birth right to listen, quietly and undisturbed, to the natural environment and take whatever meaning we may. Long before the noise of mankind, there were only the sounds of the natural world. Our ears evolved perfectly tuned to hear these sounds – sounds that far exceed the range of human speech or even most ambitious musical performances (Hempton 2009: 1–2).

Thus, silence is a meeting place where the noisy humankind learns to listen. Hempton contrasts the noise of man to the natural sounds, and he defines 'quiet' as presence, rather than the absence of sound; it is the absence of noise: "Silence is a sound, many, many sounds" and being quiet is a "think-tank of the soul" (Hempton 2009: 2). Silence and listening are emphasised as a way to reform the noisy mankind and to practice a more respectful approach to the larger-than-human-world.

9 The Value of Silence

Silence is found in many religious traditions and practices, it is part of meditation, contemplation, rituals, and sometimes – secrets and vows of silence. Here silence is seen as positive, it is voluntary silence, not the oppressive silence which is based in force. Being in silence is a powerful tool to go into mediation, contemplation, reflection, reverence: moods that can be seen as enchanted and spiritually significant. My ambition here is to say something about silence in the material I have presented, in relation to dark green spirituality. To give a more general view of silence is beyond the scope of this article. A distinction that is helpful is between transcendental and immanence. In simple terms, in transcendental religiosity silence is seen as method to reach beyond the world. The spiritual practices I have studied in dark green spirituality are characterised by immanence, and here silence helps to form an intimate relation to the world, or more

[14] The study of soundscape includes listener's perception of sounds heard in an environment and acoustic communication. How do humans interact with their environment through listening? Barry Truax (2001) finds a paradox: "we live in a visually dominant culture that is saturated with technologically based sounds, much if it we take for granted or ignore, and the model for understanding our

precisely, to the larger-than-human-world. Practicing silence explores moods beyond the realm of words, a sensibility, to be observant and receptive, and to experience enchantment. Bennett sees enchantment as a mood, a moment of being spellbound, even a sense of bliss, moments of enchantment may be short but deep, nonetheless, they can be fostered and cultivated (Bennett 2001: 4–5). Being in silence is way to cultivate enchantment. *Being in silence* is a shift of sensibility, to deep listening where silence is not the opposite to communication, rather a vital part of communication, and a precondition for deep and reciprocal communication in relation to the larger-than-human-world. A common feature in the various forms of silence is that they *encourage reflection* and being present.

There is a strong coordination between silence and spirituality. Minor ritual acts of silence emphasise that the workshop is a spiritual practice. Such spiritual practices offer models for coping and working with emotions and existential and ethical matters in relation to the environmental crisis. This is not that all the hardships disappear, in a magical sense, but that one can handle and cope with the challenges. "Silence is where we learn to listen" one participant said. To allow silence to be a part of conversation means that the dichotomy between speech and silence is rejected. Being in silence is central in the art of listening. It is fundamental to real communication and deeper understanding and is equally important in encounters: both with other humans and with the larger-than-human-world. Therefore: silence is positively valued because it teaches participants to listen more carefully and to allow all voices to participate in communication, and it include the voices of the larger-than-human-world. Furthermore, silence is seen in relation to listening as shifting roles: being silent means switching to another form or communication, beyond the spoken words, where words are the only mediator, silence means switching to other sensibilities – beyond the realm of logos. Bell takes rituals beyond the narrow ranges of utterances as rituals have a rich repertoire of ways of communicating, beyond the mere word, as "a medium of expression and a special language" (Bell 1997: 241), and I include silence as part of that "special language" because silence is not numb, silence speaks, and can, following Hornborg, form the building block to create new rituals. It is worth emphasising that silence and the skill of listening are preconditions for communication.[15] Silence *and* listening are equally vital parts of these circles. While silence is related with communication it is also contrasted with noise, and in an ecological discourse, especially noise pollution. The novelist Sara Maitland (2009) writes in *A Book of Silence* "'Noise pollution' has settled down into the ecological agenda nearly as firmly as all the other forms of pollution that threatens our well-being and safety" (Maitland 2009: 2) and Lucy Sargisson sees

predicament are conceptually and not perceptually based" (Truax 2001: xxi).

[15] Scholars outside religion discuss silence with perspectives that can contribute. Silence, and listening are part of communicational skills and it is part of social life, and the sociologist Richard Sennet (2013) notes: "Listening well requires a different set of skills" (Sennet 2013: 14), and this set of listening skills is not only relevant for the receptive part of the communication, but equally on behalf of the speaker. Listening skills are distinctive for musicians: silence is part of every piece of music.

our contemporary attempts to think about the environment as being characterised by what "amounts to the failure to listen" (Sargisson 2012: 127). Maitland notes: For most of us, for most of the time, communication 'means talk', but such an understanding of communication excludes other voices, languages, and means of expressions. Haraway emphasised the need for quiet places and places where the human voice no longer dominates (Haraway 2016: 1). Being in silence and restoring silence means to be open for a less human centred world. Silence helps to modify dominating voices, to give space for other voices than the human voice. Listening is to make something absent present (Haraway 2016: 131).[16] Quiet places, and practices of silence opens for voices previously unheard, ignored, or hushed, voices that are small, soft, strange, or simply that fall outside the range of the human ear.

What can be said about the value of silence? Silence is *relational* as it establishes a sensible relationship to other beings, to humans, to other species, and to the larger-than-human-world, and it is *activ*e because listening, and being present are actively done, and it is *transformative* as it offers a method to modify dominant voices, to learn to listen, to enable encounters, and to enable deep communication. Minor Ritual acts of silence break off and replace the everyday noisiness with the subtle, the sensible attitude, and it initiates a shift of attention. The ambition to listen to other voices is part of the political discussion of representatively, and whether nature can have a voice or how we listen to nature. Therefore, the relevance of the practice of silence resonates into green political thought.[17]

10 Conclusions

In this article I have answered the following questions: (i) What can minor ritual acts of silence say about the value of silence? and (ii) How can minor ritual acts of silence further our understanding of ritual creativity? As seen, minor ritual acts of silence are far from moments when nothing happens, and to see them as unsignificant would be a mistake. Minor ritual acts of silence may be short, but as noted; small is not equal to unimportant. Silence is not passive, but active. I have found three features in the value of silence. Silence is (i) *relational* as it establishes a sensible relationship to other beings, to humans, to other species, and to the larger-than-human-world, and,

[16] Haraway writes: "The temporalities of companion species comprehend all the possibilities activated in becoming with, including the heterogeneous scales of evolutionary time for everybody but also that many other rhythm of conjoined process" (Haraway 2008: 25).

[17] The political scientist Andrew Dobson (2014) claims in *The Politics of Listening* that politics put too much emphasis on communication but is less concerned with listening. Listening is, according to Dobson, a democratic conversation and "a relationship in which listening, and speaking are accorded equal weight and in which the effort put into each is carefully organised and regulated" (Dobson 2014: 5) Dobson concludes that viewing democracy as a responsive rule effectively erases the distinction between a private and a public virtue in that listening becomes a practice that is integral to the thing we call democracy (Dobson 2014: 4).

(ii) it is *active* because listening, and being present are actively done, and, (iii) it is *transformative* as it offers method to modify dominant voices, to learn to listen, to enable encounters, and to enable deep communication. Thus, silence helps to improve listening skills: Listening means listening to other voices, not only human voices, and listening and speaking are shifting roles of equal importance. The practice of silence means that dominant voices or noisiness are hushed, not that all sound disappears. On the contrary, that the human voice is silent means that other voices and sounds can be heard. Listing to nature may come simply to most of us, if we talk about listening to birds singing, running water, or the wind that shakes the barley. In a deeper sense, listening to nature, or to listen deeply to the larger-than-human-world, means to listen beyond the human-centred mindscape. These are explorations of Haraway's task: to rebuild quiet spaces, to make companions, and to make kin with other species. It means to form an ecological and emotional relation to the larger-than-human-world. Minor ritual acts of silence help to tune in to the mood of the moment, and it is, following Bennett, a way to foster enchanting moods, or in my terms to cultivate wild enchantment. Wild enchantments foster a mature love and deeper sentiments. The ability to be in silence, to listen to and communicate, beyond words, with the larger-than-human-world is the basis for the ecological ethos that is in the core of Dark green spirituality.

In this article I have offered a case for further theoretical understanding of rituals, especially ritual creativity. Although it makes use of features that are recognisable from other rituals and practices, minor ritual acts of silence allow a great deal of freedom and find "a proper balance between the old elements and the new" (Hornborg 2017: 18). In exploring minor ritual acts of silence, I conclude that the power of these is that (i) the practice of being in silence can be modified according to the need of that particular workshop, (ii) it is a familiar practice and remains recognisable, which easily can be introduced and performed in various workshops, and (iii) minor ritual acts of silence hold the quality that it emphasises that these workshops are spiritual practices. In discussing how minor ritual act are incorporated into practices or workshops, I do not refer to the whole practice or workshop as a ritual. Therefore, I take interrituality further to describe how minor ritual acts form building block to create – not new rituals – but new practices and workshops. I think the power of the notion of minor ritual acts is that it brings attention to how rituals may occur in subtle forms; they may be small acts, and this may challenge the notion of performativity, because they may not always be on display. Minor ritual acts may be the moments between the notes. Going to the field with the theoretical tool minor ritual acts at hand can help us to discover and explore the tiny details, we otherwise would miss. As Hornborg notes "borrowing minor ritual acts" will create "a sense of ritual and colour to the invented ritual" (Hornborg

[18] Thus, spiritual practices and rituals are distinct. What motivates me to draw this distinction is that the participants in these circles would not describe what they are doing in terms of 'rituals', therefore, to be sensitive toward my field I choose not to use 'rituals' as a description of these workshops.

2017: 17). From my case I conclude that minor ritual acts of silence emphasise these practices and workshops as spiritual practices, which is not always explicit.[18] To open and end a workshop with a minor ritual act of silence sets the workshop within *a spiritual frame*. Silence contrasts with the everyday noisiness. Minor ritual acts of silence help participants to be receptive, to adjust their senses and sensibility to the mood of the moment. Minor ritual acts of silence are doorways that open and close circles. The metaphor of silence as doorways, catches that, in simple terms, you may go into silence as well as go out if it. This imagery shows that being in silence is to create an alternative space. What occurs in the creative process is what Droogers refers to as an experimenting with an alternative reality: it is the ludic evocation of a simultaneous shadow reality (Droogers 2004: 138).[19] Thus, minor ritual acts of silence allow participants to enter, not just the reign of silence, but the restored quiet place. In this ritual creativity goes beyond the performative in exploring a counter-reality, this counter-reality is not necessarily transcendental or beyond, rather an intimate immanence and sensuous engagement in the larger-than-human world.

Minor ritual acts of silence might be small, but small is not insignificant, rather deep. Minor ritual acts of silence show that silence is a powerful tool: even when it only lasts a few minutes it helps to make a change. Minor ritual acts of silence are not the small moment in-between: silence is not the absence of sounds, nor is it the absence of event. It is the sudden stillness, it is, in the word of Leonard Cohen, the crack where the light comes in.

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[19] Droogers suggest that "contrary to the usual connotation of rituals as solemn and serious occasions, rituals work in their own ludic right." Thus, "Playful and serious are not necessary opposites. Al-

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though it might be performed in a serious manner, rituals represent a playful activity" (Droogers 2004: 138).

Chapter 9: Durga Is Also Living in Sweden[(10)]

Celebrating a Hindu Festival in a Secular Setting

Göran Ståhle

1. Introduction

It is a nice day in the Autumn in Stockholm. The weather is cold and clear. As it is an ordinary weekday, people are going to work and leaving their kids at schools and kindergartens. At the same time, in Kolkata in West Bengal this is a very special day. This is the first day of the celebrations of Durga Puja and the festive season is about to begin. It is warm and humid as the monsoon season has recently ended. Families, relatives, friends, and neighbours are gathering, to offer respect, greetings, and to enjoy traditional food. People are visiting temporary constructions (*pandal*) with images of Mother Durga, and attending cultural performances. There is a distinct joyous atmosphere in the air, a 'pujo feel'.

In an assembly hall belonging to Stockholm Municipality in Sweden, a group of Bengalis are also preparing for the celebrations, but here it is in stark contrast to the everyday life of the surrounding society. Outside the building, nothing noteworthy can be seen, but if you enter you arrive in another world. The hall is dominated by a large construction containing images of the Goddess and her accompanying deities. Preparations for serving traditional dishes that are offered to the Goddess (*bhog*) have been done. Many of the people are dressed in traditional Bengali clothes, the women in sari and the men in *kurta-pyjama*. Several languages are spoken, Bengali, Hindi, English, and Swedish. On the loudspeakers there are devotional songs (*bhajan*) to the Goddess. A stage is prepared for the 'cultural program' of song and dance performances. The puja committee began their preparations several months ago and now it is finally time. The members of the association and other guests are expected for the evening.

Durga Puja is one of the most important festivals in Bengali culture. It is at the same time an expression of Bengali culture, a social gathering point, and an expression

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of devotion to the Goddess. It has social, cultural, and religious and political functions. In this text, I will explore how this is expressed in a European setting, in relation to a secular majority culture. It is based upon fieldwork and interviews on how celebrations of Durga Puja are staged in Stockholm, Sweden.

2 Ritual Competence and Performance

I will use Ronald Grimes' (2014) concepts of ritual competence and ritual performance. These refer to two different dimensions of a specific rite. Competence refers to the knowledge and skills in the tradition. This is coded in scripture and ritual manuals, and there are ritual experts to fall back on. Performance refers to how the rite is set up in a specific context. This relates to enactment, embodiment, and emotions.

In this text, I will show how competence and performance are in interplay in the staging of Durga Puja in such a secular setting as the Swedish context. There is an experience that ritual competence needs to be preserved and transferred to the second generation. Rachel McDermott (2011) makes a similar observation in relation to Bengalis living on the North American east coast. The experienced diaspora situation implies that there are efforts to recreate the traditions of South Asia on the American ground. There is an interplay of ritual conservatism and creativity. Fibiger (2021) also point out that Tamils in Denmark have concerns about tradition and the younger generation that is growing up in a European context. She connects this to a collective chain of memory. The sense that memory about the past needs to be restored and saved for the future.

In the present text, I will attend to the interplay of these concerns on ritual competence with performance. Axel Michaels (2016) characterises Hindu festivals, like Durga Puja, mainly as a mode of social action (*societas*), centred on community, producing group coordination and solidarity. Below, I will show that this also is the case in the Swedish staging of the festival. But Michaels also states that, like in all rituals, there is a performative dimension. Through framing and enactment it has the quality of 'celebration', something heightened, extraordinary, and set apart from everyday life. It entails embodiment and strong emotions. This is especially accentuated in a minority context where the surrounding society constitutes a radically different fund for the set. There are radical contrasts between being inside and being outside. In this way Durga Puja in a European setting differs radically from its South Asian counterparts.

3 Durga Puja as a Social Arena for Bengalis

A festival to the great Goddess (*Mahadevi*) is celebrated in the Autumn all over South Asia and in the Hindu diaspora. In the many cultures of South Asia, it has local variations and therefore several different names. However, the Bengali Durga Puja

is one of the most famous. It is a central festival in the Bengali culture, which has a long tradition of *shakta*-oriented worship (McDermott 2011; Rodrigues 2003; Rodrigues 2018; Simmons and Sen 2018). It is therefore also a vital part of Bengali culture abroad. As Rachel McDermott (2011: 224) phrases it, "Durga follows her Bengali immigrants."

Today, Bengal is divided between the Indian federal state of West Bengal, and the independent state of Bangladesh. The Hindu Bengali population in Sweden mainly have a background in Bangladesh, but there are also a significant proportion of West Bengalis. There is also a second generation that has been growing up in Sweden (Sardella 2020). Thus, the Durga Puja celebrations in Sweden gather a wide variety of people. It is an occasion for the reunion of Bengalis that are living in different places in Sweden or in some cases even across Europe. At the same time, it is also an arena for newcomers in Sweden to socialise with other Bengalis and to reconnect to their home culture. South Asian migration to Sweden has increased sharply over the past ten years, mainly in the form of skilled labour in the IT business or for higher education (Sardella 2020). This has created a new presence of South Asians, and a need for social arenas.

The situation is characterised partly by being in diaspora[1] (*prabasi*) in relation to the home country and partly by global networks and transnational mobility. In a certain sense this can be considered a paradoxical situation, as you represent a global religious/cultural tradition, and are speaking one of the largest languages in the world, while at the same time you are considered a relatively small minority in the contemporary multicultural society of Europe. In Sweden, there are other immigrant groups that are more numerous and therefore more the focus of public attention. As Zavos (2020: 674) phrases it, Hinduism is a rather 'hidden' identity in many countries in Europe.

4 The Multiple Functions of Puja Committees

The public celebration of Durga Puja is organised by committees (*kamiti*) consisting of devoted individuals. This has its roots in Bengali traditions, where there is a difference between the more public (*baroyari*/*sarbajanin*) pujas, that are organised by neighbourhood groups or civic organisations, and private pujas, that are organised by individual patrons. Zeiler (2018) points out that these committees are organised on a community level, and that the contemporary staging of a Durga Puja in Bengal involves social status. It has political and economic functions. McDermott (2011: 19) also notes that it is a way to frame oneself as devoted to the ideals that the Goddess represents in the local Bengali context.

A central part of Durga Puja is the temporary erection of images (*murti*) of the Goddess and her associated deities. In Bengal, artisans and factories are specialised in

[1] It is contested if 'diaspora' is an appropriate term for Hindus that are living outside of South Asia (see for example Fibiger 2021; Jacobsen 2020). This is since it implies a conception of being marginal in relation to a place of origin, which might not correspond to the experience of all Hindus abroad. The term corresponds to the Bengali *prabasi* ('living outside') that sometimes is used as a self-designation.

the making of images for Durga Puja. In Kolkata, there are quarters with street stalls where you can buy all the paraphernalia you need for the festival (McDermott 2011; Rodrigues 2018). The public images are often housed in temporary constructions called *pandal*. There are many variations, and they differ from year to year. "Every Durga puja is unique," writes Rodrigues (2018: 199). In the South Asian context, it is also a matter of trying to surpass each other in setting up the most impressive *pandal* (Zeiler 2018). Some might be very lavish, as for example the real-size copy of the Burj Khalifa skyscraper that was raised in Kolkata in 2021.

The increasing South Asian immigration has resulted in more Bengali puja committees being established in Sweden. As their South Asian counterparts, they are formed by devoted individuals. However, there is a difference in the structure and the functions. As they are part of the Swedish civil society as community associations, they need to follow Swedish regulations for non-profit organisations. Participants are registered according to rules of membership, with a yearly fee. There needs to be a board, consisting of a chairman, vice chairman, treasurer, and secretary. For the board members, the commitment is a great investment of time and work. You need to acquire skills in administrative and practical issues as part of the civil society. Finding different sponsors is a major part of the enterprise, as the activity is both funded through the fees of the members and from donations. You spend a lot of your free time and use your vacation days to be able to be free during the festival. As one board member says: "It's a full-time work, all the year around. Most of us have a regular occupation, our children go to school, and it is a lot of planning and arrangements to be done."

The committees in Sweden do not only arrange Durga Puja, but also other major goddess festivals in the yearly cycle of the Bengali calendar, that is, Kali Puja and Sarasvati Puja. Other happenings are also organised, such as the Bengali New Year, and the commemoration of Bengali cultural figures, such as Rabindranath Tagore and/or Kazi Nazrul Islam (Sardella 2020: 1475). Thus, they simultaneously have social, cultural, and religious functions. One of their aims is to uphold Bengali traditions and heritage among Bengalis in Sweden. At the same time, there is an ambition to promote the Bengali culture to other South Asians in Sweden, and to the majority community. The Ambassador of India usually visits the different celebrations in Stockholm and representatives from the Swedish press are invited. Another important aim is the transmission of knowledge to the next generation, to be a platform for cultural competence for the second generation that is brought up in Sweden, "so that they do not forget their roots." The youth of the community are encouraged to take an active part in the different religious rites during the festival, and to perform in the cultural program.

To sum up, the puja committees of the Swedish context have their background and counterparts in South Asia, but they have divergent organisational structures and agendas. In the European context, there is an interest in restoring the ritual competence in relation to the traditions of Durga Puja. There is a sense of urgency to uphold the tradition to the migrants, that are experiencing a diaspora situation in

relation to South Asia, and transmit it to the second generation, that has weaker ties to South Asia. In the next section, I will turn to how this maintenance and transmission is executed through the performance of the specific rites and the cultural program.

5 The Deity Images

Durga Puja is performed in five lunar days, according to the phases of the moon (*tithi*). Each lunar day has its special significance, and some timings are especially important. At the first lunar day, the Goddess is welcomed, and the deity images are put into their places of worship and installed (*bhodana*). The puja committees in Stockholm use a traditional arrangement of the images. Mother Durga is placed in the centre with her lion, depicted in the act of slaying the demon Mahishasur.[2] She is flanked by the goddesses Lakshmi and Sarasvati, and the gods Ganesh and Kartik. In this context the accompanying deities are seen as the children of Mother Durga. According to mythology, Durga is currently coming down with her children from her abode in the Himalayas to her parents' home. It has an equivalent in the celebration, where the families and relatives gather and reunite (Rodrigues 2018).

The images are purchased and imported by the board members themselves, from the artisanry district of Kolkata. As McDermott (2011) notes, the industry of Durga Puja utensils in Bengal has adapted to the needs of the diaspora. Due to practical reasons the images are made of fibre plastic instead of clay. Clay breaks easily and images made from fibre plastic are more easily transported and stored.

Traditionally, the images are de-installed and lowered (bisarjan) into a river or water at the end of Durga Puja. This ends the last day, when the victory (bijaya) of the Goddess over the demon Mahishasur is celebrated. In the Swedish context the ceremony of lowering (bisarjan) is only done symbolically, using a mirror in a bowl of water. The devotees meet the gaze (darshan) of the Goddess in this mirror. The images are then carefully packed and stored in a secure place or in a committee member's home. One person says: "We do not have the opportunity to get a new murti every year. It is a big procedure. Therefore, we choose fibre plastic that has better durability so that we can have it for a few years."

Another issue concerns the final disposal of the image. A board member points out that, according to Swedish standards it would need to be left for recycling, and maybe burnt among other waste and garbage. She has a strong environmental awareness, but it contrasts with her feelings about the murti. "We need to leave it to the recycling centre, which does not feel good. If it is needed, it is needed, but it is something that hurts. But for the sake of the environment, you have no other choice."

[2] The devotees above all see Durga as *Ma* ('Mother'). She is the Great Mother, the origin of the universe and the lifegiving force in all creation. As a mother, she is simultaneously compassionate and a protector. Durga Puja celebrates her courage, and the victory of truth and goodness over evil, that is mythologically expressed in the battle with the demon Mahishasur (Simmons and Sen 2018).

6 Timing

Another issue is the timing of the performance. As the festival calendar follows the lunar cycles, Durga puja falls during different days in October/November each year. In Bengal the celebrations are from early morning to late evening. It is a mixture of religious rites and cultural programs, and everybody is in a festive mood. In the Swedish context, this is not a holiday of the majority society. At weekdays people are supposed to be at work and their children following the ordinary curriculum in schools. Thus, the celebrations are relocated to the closest weekend, with the result that they do not match the correct lunar days. Many times, it is either before or after the South Asian counterparts. A person describes how this interferes with the closing greetings, that should be sent to relatives and friends: "We all, who live in the Western world, try to celebrate our holidays. Mostly, it is not the right timing with India. Either they have already finished, and then they wait for our closing greetings, or we must wait, because they have not celebrated yet, so then we should not make our closing greetings. We need to wait until after the weekend."

This is of course a feat to plan, and it inevitably means that adaptions need to be made in how the specific rites of the lunar days are performed and how they are to be integrated with the cultural program. One board member complains: "You need to shorten the rituals and speed up so that you will be finished, because you need to serve the food and follow the cultural program."

One of the puja committees in Stockholm have tried to solve these problems by separating the religious rituals from the cultural program into two different parts. They celebrate the religious rituals during the correct lunar days, and they organise the cultural program at a later weekend, according to the Bengali tradition of arranging a getting together, *bijoya sammelani*, at the end of the festival season. The religious rituals are located at a local temple, not in an assembly hall as the other committees. They also use the local temple priest (*pujari*) as the main officiant (*purohit*). One of the board members tells me: "we were some friends who felt that it did not feel good, we wanted to try to celebrate the exact days. Our children asked us, 'is it the party you are looking for or is it the puja?'"

7 The Proceedings

During the festival different rites succeed each other according to a common structure. There is a ritual specialist (*purohit*) who is the head performer of the religious functions. The different committees in Stockholm have their chosen ritual specialists. During the celebrations the *purohit* is continuously occupied making offerings of flowers, foods, fruits, coconuts, oils, pastes, waters, incense.[3] The central scripture that is

[3] See Rodrigues 2003 for a detailed description of the complex ceremonies performed by a *purohit* during Durga Puja, although in the context of Varanasi (Banaras).

recited in different parts during the lunar days is the *Durga Saptasati*,[4] but the *purohit* also uses other collections of prayers (*stotra*) and takes guidance from ritual manuals (*paddhati*).

The board members aid the priest in presenting offerings in front of the deity images and keeping track of everything. The women prepare food that is consecrated by the goddess (*bhog*) and is served to those who have participated. It is thus both a sacrifice to the Goddess and an expression of communion around the meal. The more committed devotees take vows (*vrat*) and perform periodic fasting during daytime and only eat after the evening *arti* has been performed. *Bhog* is perhaps the most traditional form of Bengali food, and therefore a general topic of conversation during Durga Puja. Exactly which dishes are included and how they are to be prepared and served is widely discussed. "How did the chutney taste this year?"

The congregated devotees socialise and enjoy (or themselves perform in) the different acts in the cultural program. In the evenings of the festival days dinner is served, and there is dancing. "*Jai mata ki jai*" or "*Bole Durga ki jai*" is repeatedly exclaimed. Everything is documented in photos and videos that are posted in social media. Many people want to take their portraits in front of the deity images. Mobile devices are used for 'selfies' and there is a photographer engaged by the board.

The congregated devotees do not participate in all the continuous rituals for the deity images, which is the assignment of the *purohit*. They only gather in front of the deity images in selected rites, such as the recurring offerings of flowers (*pushpanjali*) and fire ceremonies (*arti*). The *purohit* recites from the texts and the congregated devotees repeat. Often, there are discussions and laughter about how to do or which passages to read. There are also significant and auspicious moments when the devotees assemble, such as the *shondi puja*, which is the transition between the eighth and ninth lunar days. The festival ends with the women decorating red coloured vermillion on themselves (*sindur khela*) and by everybody exchanging greetings and hugging.

8 A 'Celebration' Set Apart from Everyday Life

Durga Puja is a moment of 'celebration' in terms of performance theory, something set apart from ordinary life and with a heightened atmosphere. This is created through the combined effects of food, dance, music, sounds, *et cetera*, and fosters emotions of commonality, belonging, and togetherness (Michaels 2016: 160). People talk about a particular mood (*pujo feel*). One person says: "It is not an austere event. You should have fun. You meet people you have not met in the whole year. And on the last day you should exchange greetings. You hug each other and offer sweets. So even people that you do not like very much or even would avoid the rest of the year, just that day you become friends and you hug. There is a harmony to it all."

[4] Also called *Devi Mahatamya* and *Candi Path* (Coburn 1991).

The special atmosphere is a mix of feelings involving seeing persons that you have not met for a long time, eating traditional food, singing hymns and songs that you recognise. For the more religiously minded it also involves devotion to the Goddess. Or as some might say, it is a sign of the presence of the Goddess. One of the puja committees posted on social media: "*Ma* Durga is among us, giving us the strength to keep our spirits up through these uncertain times. Now it's up to us to embrace the positivity, light, and warmth that she has brought with her."

However, the everyday reality of the surrounding setting intrudes in this 'celebration'. For example, one of the Durga pujas in Stockholm is staged in an assembly hall belonging to the Municipality. You therefore need to be careful with not causing too much fire and smoke, so that the fire alarm goes off. You also must take care with the colours, so that they do not destroy the floor and the furnishings. The board members announce this in the welcome speech and repeat this several times during the celebrations. There is also a strict timing to be held to for when the hall needs to be left, so that the social activities and dancing in the evening need to be ended at a fixed time. A person expresses how the festive mood faces a rather abrupt ending when you walk out of the assembly hall as you travel home. The warm atmosphere of the festivities is in contrast with the cold climate of the Autumn in Sweden, and the relatively empty streets in the Stockholm night.

9 Conclusion

By using Ronald Grimes' concepts of competence and performance, we can distinguish characteristic features of the celebration of Durga Puja in the Swedish context. Regarding ritual competence, there is a relatively strong focus on preservation and restoration with the backdrop of the secular setting. There are also concerns about transmitting competence to the second generation.

Regarding ritual performance there are issues on how tradition is enacted in relation to the secular setting. This requires creative solutions in for example timing and what ritual paraphernalia is available. However, in principle this creativity is not something that is exclusively characteristic of Durga Puja outside of South Asia, even if there are specific challenges in a context where it is not part of the majority culture. In all staging of a festival like this, there will be differences in how ritual competence is put into practice and how people lean towards more conservative or more creative solutions. Variations are intrinsic to the performance of the festival. What is a more defining trait of the Swedish Durga Puja is how it is framed, and the radical differences between the set and the setting. This is due to the fact that the festival is staged in a context where it is alien and as part of a minority position in a secular majority society.

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Part 3: Ritual and Body: Bodies as Rituals

⊠

Chapter 10: Ritual Dance from a Philosophical Perspective[11]

Erica Appelros

1. Introduction

Dancing has been a means for humans throughout history and pre-history to bond together, experience trance, express the religious/sublime, and deal with emotions and passions. That dancing gives a sense of community and belonging together, that it is emotionally expressive, and that it can be an enjoyable pastime is understandable. However, what is dance that makes it such a universal vehicle for religious experience and expression across cultures, eras, and religious traditions?

In this article, I suggest that philosophy of religion should pay more attention to religious rituals and dances since these embody otherwise unattainable elements of the *habitus* of lived religion that rightly belongs to the philosophical study of religion.

2 Dance, Rituals, and Embodiment

Dance is undoubtedly one of the most engaging forms of religious practice, bodily, but also socially and mentally. When dancing, we activate several of our perceptive sensory organs. We are used to talking about our five senses, sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell. But we also have a sense that measures our inner bodily states (interoception) and another one that senses where our different body parts are located relative to each other and the environment (proprioception), both of which are very much engaged in dancing.

Besides involving the physical body with all its senses, dance also requires a focused consciousness to get the steps and gestures right and not get out of rhythm with the rest of the dancers. It is the same kind of mindful focus demanded of air pilots and surgeons, where your body knows every movement by heart from years of practice and drills, but even so, you cannot let your mind wander lest you risk losing the patient

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or crashing your aircraft. The modern-day Western sacred dance (or circle dance) tradition sometimes describing itself as meditation in movement or meditative dance is no coincidence.[1]

Since dance in religious contexts is primarily a collective matter, dancing also activates the social ritual body. Each dancer must relate to the bodies of others and the restrictions and possibilities of the spatial dancing space. When Hornborg introduces being in the world as necessarily relating to other bodies, she mentions dancing as a way of getting in touch with and becoming sensitive to other participants' bodies. Specifically, she emphasises that

> [t]he somatic mode of attention is of importance when the Mi'kmaq are dancing at the pow wow, since the shared movement is a way of sensing an embodied community. The sensory engagement in other bodies combines with the cultural setting, and thus ritual enhances the participants' capacity to not only reproduce the world but – conjointly with others and therefore more persuasively – to act upon it (Hornborg 2005: 383f.).

So, in dance, the participants jointly make up their ritual world and religious community by relating to each other's bodies. But not only that. The dancer's relationships are multidimensional. On the personal dimension, the dancer relates to their own physical body and their individual intentions to participate in the ritual. On the social dimension, the dancer relates physically and socially to the other dancers, enabling the dance to flow smoothly and create a group identity. And finally, in the symbolic dimension (or, if one wants, the spiritual dimension), the dancer relates to the spiritual and symbolic aspects of their religious world, specifically the parts thereof that the dance embodies. Here is where prayers are offered, and sacred visions received.

Dance can take many forms. People share their religious experiences through dancing in myriad religious contexts all over the world. Temple dancers in India move in highly stylised ritual dances that embody elements of religious significance from the Hindu tradition. The Sufi dervishes in Islam swirl hour after hour in a dance that in itself constitutes a prayer and a contact with the divine. The Lutheran Church of Sweden occasionally celebrates dance masses, where the entire congregation participates in ring dances embodying and symbolising the different parts of the Eucharist. North American Native American shamans dance their way into another world. And in Judaism, people have been dancing ever since Miriam legendarily led the Israeli women in dance after the Egyptians drowned in the Red Sea. And on it goes.

We can find dance as a religious element as far back as we know religion. Some anthropologists even assume that religion and culture arose through dance and other embodied rites (Wunn 2005: 2868–2869). The dance, supposedly, later developed into

[1] See Watts 2006 for an introduction to the modern-day sacred dance tradition, originating with Bernhard Wosien in the 1970s.

other rituals and cultural expressions that codified the group's values and belief systems.

Dance would have served as a unifying force for the small group of collectors and hunters, representing the group's values and life context, providing group security and identity, and an outlet to express questions and feelings of existential nature. One might say that the philosophical questions of religion were initially danced long before they were formulated in rational sentences.

Experiencing, shaping, and exercising one's spirituality through dance and rituals offers something that cannot be obtained in any other way because, as we have seen, dance provides a multidimensional commitment to embodiment and not just to the ability to think abstractly.

However, dance and other religious rituals are virtually invisible in philosophical analyses, notwithstanding their religious and cultural significance. Why is that?

3 The Problem of Philosophical Dualism and Mentalism

Body and soul. Spirit and matter. Consciousness and physical being. In philosophy and religion alike, a sharp distinction has often been made between the body and the soul, most often to the disadvantage and devaluation of the former. Perhaps the most famous modern philosopher in this context is Descartes, who reasoned that matter has spatial extent and other secondary properties, something that consciousness does not have. Consciousness and body are thus two completely different substances.

The classical philosophical dualism between body and soul has had many consequences. As contemporary feminists claim, the dichotomy between spirit and matter has caused much evil in the world (Frankenberry 2018). It has spilt over to other concept pairs such as man-woman, culture-nature, god-man, and reason-emotion, granting (the rational strong) man an obvious right to rule over (the emotional weak) woman. Similarly, self-appointed civilised peoples endowed themselves with divine authority to grossly exploit nature, so-called uncivilised peoples, and the supposedly soulless animals for their own gain.

The pervasive influence of the philosophical dualism stretches far into religious studies, which makes Professor Hornborg lament that "even where the body has been the focus in anthropological literature, Cartesian dualism has been difficult to overcome, especially in analgising ritual and praxis" (Hornborg 2005: 361).

However, the dichotomy between body and soul/consciousness has been disputed in continental philosophy and the emerging feminist theory from the latter part of the twentieth century (Anderson 1998). Recent decades have seen a complete explosion of hitherto more abstractly oriented disciplines now including the body, which can be seen as a reaction to structuralism and poststructuralism's earlier focus on discourses

and texts. More fields now enhance the body's importance for language, knowledge, consciousness, faith, identity, and rationality.

In continuation of the French philosopher Merleau-Ponty's perception-oriented phenomenological tradition, a theoretical shift now takes place where discourse or transcendence is no longer emphasised at the expense of the material. Instead, the two are seen as intertwined for understanding human life (Lennon et al. 2012: 2; Kiverstein 2012). Without our senses, we would get no impressions. Without impressions, we can form no ideas about the world around us. And without ideas and concepts, no philosophy.

An embodied philosophical view considers the body as a subject rather than an object. The body is not only the physiological precondition for intelligence, personality, and intentionality; it is also the context within which cognition *per se* occurs – the body shapes and influences cognition (Watts 2013: 747).

We can locate the philosophical view between the two extremes mentalism and physicalism. Mentalism is traditionally the prevailing view and means that the body and the material are seen as inferior to culture's 'higher' faculties and values , perhaps even as harmful or unnecessary. Physicalism, which has become increasingly common in Anglo-American philosophy over the last century, on the other hand, means that everything, including consciousness, can be reduced to bodily, material functions.

4 The Study of Religion and Embodiment

Following the mentalist philosophical tradition, the Western world has often treated religion and the study of religion as something primarily spiritual and incorporeal. Admittedly, archaeological remains and ethnological finds have always been part of the study of religion. Still, textual studies and philosophical/systematic analyses of belief systems have been dominant until the so-called 'material turn' in religious studies, which made body-related topics such as gender, sexuality, rituals, film, and so on, into legitimate study objects (Morgan 2017: 272). After this, it has become more common to understand the study of religion "not as a web of meanings, but of embodied relationships among people, things, estates, saints, ancestors, places, and times" (Morgan 2017: 279). As an example, Professor Hornborg claims that "the foremost purpose for the Mi'kmaq in rituals is not to reflect passively on or merely symbolise societal structures. Instead, it is to actively negotiate with and rework the individual's lived world" (Hornborg 2005: 381). Not symbols, but the lived world of the individual (and, if I may add, the group) stands in focus in many present-day studies of religion and religious rituals.

In addition, religion has traditionally been studied either from an exclusively textual/philosophical/dogmatic point of view *or* from an anthropological, psychological, or sociological point of view. Now, however, there are attempts to try to bridge these

two perspectives. Philosophy of religion needs to shift from exclusively having studied texts, beliefs, and propositional content to include rites and corporeality.

Why is this shift necessary? The following are the four main reasons I see to incorporate an embodied mindset in the work of philosophy of religion:

1. However spiritual or etheric the religious doctrine may be, there are always fundamental material aspects involved: a person or a material object may convey the religious message, participants may practice physical rites, handle sacred objects, or subject their bodies to various kinds of prescribed physical disciplines.

2. Many central religious concepts appear abstract and metaphysical and, therefore, hard to understand. However, since neuroscientific research on mirror neurons indicates that abstract concepts originate in bodily experiences, they could be traced back to their bodily origins through studying rituals.

3. It seems reasonable that some religious experiences are only available through immersion in corporeal rites or movements due to their physical nature. Suppose religious experiences are not entirely reducible to rational arguments and concepts. In that case, we must find other ways of deducing their meaning and rationality by analysing rituals, dances, and other embodied means of religious expression.

4. Learning is not exclusively intellectual, but to a large extent, embodied. To thoroughly understand the cognition of and socialisation into religious traditions, identity, and belonging, we must therefore do so through their rituals and physical dealing with objects and bodies.

Philosopher of religion Kevin Schilbrack (2014: xiii) claims that "philosophers of religion should adopt an embodiment paradigm in the sense that they see a religious body not only as a passive object on which culture operates but also as the seat of subjectivity and religious being-in-the-world." His appeal to the scholars of philosophy of religion is

1. that philosophy of religion should treat all types of religion and not just theism,

2. that it should study lived religion and not just texts and thoughts, and

3. that it should collaborate with other philosophical and religious disciplines (Schilbrack 2014: 11–25; Schilbrack 2004).

I wholeheartedly agree with Schilbrack and his manifesto and have found religious studies, especially the speciality of Professor Hornborg, anthropology and ritual studies, to be a fruitful collaboration area. Schilbrack proposes two theoretical tools: *conceptual metaphors* and *extended mind theory*. The theory of conceptual metaphors derives from

cognitive embodiment theory and states that our ability to think abstractly originates in bodily experiences. Extended mind theory means that our consciousness is not limited to the mind but is also physical and may even extend to external media, such as books or computers. Therefore, the philosophical study of religion should rightly address rites, artefacts, and behaviours, as part of its study of abstract belief concepts.

5 Rituals and Dance

Many rituals can be understood as stylised dances and might even originate in concrete dancing. Suppose one expands the concept of dance slightly, as the philosopher, dancer, and religious study scholar Kimerer LaMothe suggests. In that case, one can argue with her that dance, understood as our bodily motions that constantly brings our body and being into creation, is the source and goal of human life, culture, religion, and philosophical thinking. Dance, according to LaMothe (2015: 8), can be any movement or activity that meets the following criteria:

1. it contributes to the creation of our bodily self,
2. it shifts our sensory experiences, and
3. it is performed with conscious attention to what we, with our movements, create, and become.

LaMothe claims that dance (in a broad sense) expresses a uniquely human ability, namely sensory creativity, an ability to consciously create, pay attention, imitate, and be created in movement patterns. This ability, she claims, is the basis of our relationships, the art of writing, the emergence of ethics and religion, our relationship with nature, and our humanity. Dancing creates sensory experiences and responses, which contribute to who we become. We participate in a constant rhythm of bodily creation, and the awareness of our participation in this process allows self-awareness to emerge. With the help of this self-awareness, we can reflect on ourselves and the existential philosophical and religious issues that are part of our human condition. We can then further develop our movement potential to dance more of what expresses and creates our well-being. "What I am calling 'dance' happens when we consciously engage our sensory awareness as a guide to participating in the rhythm of bodily becoming" (LaMothe 2015: 8).

What LaMothe says about dance, in the broader sense of the concept, holds, I claim, also for rituals, viewed as stylised dances or sets of bodily movements embodying conceptual meaning. Therefore, when I speak of dance, I will assume that what I have to say is relevant for most rituals. And if I talk in terms of rituals, I will assume that it is interchangeable for dance.

In dance research, philosophising about physicality and embodiment has become a central theme in recent decades (Carr 2013: 63). The dancers are who embody the

dance. Without their bodies, the dance would not exist. Without embodiment, neither would religious ritual dances exist. The dancers are not necessarily the ones who created the dance (the dance may be choreographed or a traditional folk dance, inherited through generations), but their dancing bodies are necessary for the performance of the dance. Through the expressive movements of the dancers, dance can express an embodied meaning that could not have been understood or conveyed by simply reading the dance notations on a piece of paper, no matter how accurate they had been. "Dancers do not cause the dance: rather, they are the dance – their movements instantiate it" (McFee 2013: 27). Dance is a phenomenon and concept inseparable from the dancing bodies that realise the dance.

In adopting Pierre Bourdieu's (1979) thoughts on *habitus*, anthropologist Ted Polhemus argues that dance is a crystallisation of the more general bodily culture in which the dance occurs. According to Polhemus (1998: 171–189), dance functions as a reinforcement and communication of an underlying cultural identity. Through dancing, the dancer gains entry and insight into a foreign culture in a more profound and physically pervasive way than from just reading about the culture. A deepened incorporated cultural knowledge is enabled since dance and rituals express aspects of the cultural habitus that usually remain unformulated and therefore not to be found in texts. Professor Hornborg illustrates this nicely when, in her description of the process of creating a new Mi'kmaq identity, she mentions that practice has proved to be a more effective way of reworking identities than reading books (Hornborg 2005: 375). A group's habitus involves so much more than propositional statements, capturable in books and articles.

6 Mirror Neurons, Abstract Religious Concepts and the Transformative Power of Ritual

In the article's final section, I want to exemplify how one might study religious dance rituals from a philosophical perspective, using the research findings on mirror neurons. Ever since researchers in the 1990s accidentally discovered how a macaque's brain activated neurons for hand movements even though the macaque itself was immobile and only observed someone else reaching out to take a fruit, research on the so-called mirror neurons has been intense and debated. Cognitive embodiment theory has linked the mirror neurons to human higher functions such as empathy, language ability, and awareness of other consciousnesses (theory of mind) and wants to show how bodily motor activity is the basis for all of these functions.

According to cognitive embodiment theory, action and simulation share the same brain substrate. That is, when we simulate an action (for instance, witness it, read about it, remember it, or fantasise about it), the brain partially reactivates the same areas and neural networks that were activated in the original action together with the

associated thoughts and feelings. Additionally, cognitive embodiment theory claims that abstract concepts arise from our bodily experiences and constitute embodied abstractions. Therefore, we can understand and remember abstract concepts through our own experiences and through simulation of our own or others' experiences.

For example, let us take the conceptual complex involving forgiveness and guilt. These are universal human experiences and dealt with in religions worldwide. People feel guilt towards other people and the divine, and there are religious rituals to atone for sins and receive forgiveness. Guilt and forgiveness are abstract concepts, but we can easily see in which concrete experience they originate, namely, the everyday act of washing oneself clean of dirt. The more abstract act of being forgiven, or ritually cleansed of one's guilt is embodied in similar concrete actions and rituals such as washing, cleaning, rinsing, baptising, undergoing ritual baths, or dipping oneself in the river Ganges. Presumably, the sensory experience of becoming physically unclean and then cleaning one's body from the impurity is the basis of the more abstract concepts of guilt and forgiveness.

Scientific studies have shown how the physical act of washing one's hands reduces the feeling of guilt more than watching a video of someone washing their hands, which in turn reduces the sense of guilt more than watching a video of someone using their hands for type-writing (Xu et al. 2016: 87–91). Washing one's own hands is a bottom-up process in which sensory and motor experiences activate the abstract concepts of purity and forgiveness. Seeing someone else wash their hands is, on the other hand, a top-down process, where the brain, through its mirror neurons, simulates comparable sensory and motor experiences. In both cases, the guilt is reduced. But in the latter case, when the brain relives or simulates the experience of washing hands, only some of the neurons activated in the original experience reactivate, so the effect is somewhat lower.

The results ought to be transferable to a religious context. I find it reasonable, for instance, to assume that religious purification rites could reduce feelings of guilt to a greater extent if the persons themselves physically perform them and to a lesser extent if a ritual leader performs the forgiveness or purification rite. And to an even lesser extent, if at all, should the person not partake in the ritual but watch it as a bystander.

Another example concerns an observation that Angela M. Yarber (2011: 105) makes concerning the Sufi dancing dervishes. Sufis who are present but not whirling in the ritual called *sema* may receive religious inspiration, but not to the same extent as if they had been experiencing the ritual through their own dancing body. Some of the prayers that the dervish dance expresses and some of the blessings that it asks from the divine are only attainable in the bodily positions occupied by the whirling dervish through the dance that is prayer itself.

Using the findings from the research on mirror neurons, I suggest we may readily explain how even a Sufi not participating actively in the dervish dance can receive some, though not all, beneficial ritual outcomes. Recall that our mirror neurons let us experience something we see, recall, or imagine, almost as if we had performed

the movements ourselves. The same neural networks thus activate in the Sufi who partakes in the ritual without dancing and the Sufi who performs the swirling, the only difference being in degree of detail, not in the quality of the experience. The dancing Sufi activates the neural circuits through a bottom-up process, in which sensory and motor experiences activate the abstract concepts of prayer and blessings. In contrast, the non-dancing Sufi goes through a top-down process, where the brain, through its mirror neurons, simulates comparable sensory and motor experiences associated with prayer and blessing.

However, for the mirror neurons to start the top-down process, the non-dancing Sufi needs to know something about the significance of the ritual. A completely uninitiated spectator would not gain these religious benefits from merely watching the Sufi ritual, as if it were a performance for aesthetic enjoyment only. Similarly, a macaque who saw a robotic arm stretching out to grab a fruit might not have lit up its hand movement neural networks (though the act might very well have ignited its fruit desiring neural network, if it was hungry). I assume here that the macaque would have had no way of correlating the robotic arm movement with anything it had personal knowledge about.

For the mirror neurons to activate, there needs to be a minimal point of comparison between what is seen, imagined, recalled, or in some way simulated and the subject's own experiences. The overlapping point of comparison could stretch from a purely theoretical or even deduced knowledge to a fully-fledged identical previous bodily experience. The wider the overlap, the more similar the neural activation will be. The other necessary element is an intention to participate in the ritual and not merely observe it. The non-whirling Sufi benefitting from the ritual is thus not the cause of an automatic mechanical process but deeply dependent on their dedication and intention in participating in the ceremony.

As intentionality is an important philosophical theme in its own right but one the debates of which I have neither the space nor the desire to enter right now, let me just provide a short pragmatic rationale for my use of the concept of intentionality.

We may, in a medical context, talk about a broken hand. But that we understand it and consequently treat it medically and ethically as a human hand and not an animal paw shows a certain degree of intentionality present. When we talk about clasping our hands in prayer in a devotional context, the context is even more dependent on the person's intentions, namely the intention to use their hands to signal devotion. The positioning of hands is now part of an overall religious intention to turn to a higher power. We can estimate the role of intentionality by asking the question: What circumstances would need to exist for us to regard the statement: 'The hands are clasped in prayer' as false? If there were no physical hands present at all, then, of course, the statement would not be true. But even if the hands were there but clenched in anger in an identical physical gesture, we would not say that the statement was true. Hands clasped as in prayer, but without the intention to pray, does not constitute a religious situation. As a final example, we can talk about 'receiving everything from God's hands' and metaphorically intend a humble and accepting attitude towards whatever we encounter

in life. To consider this statement true, no physical hands need to be present. However, if we had not had experienced physical hands ourselves, the expression 'God's hands' would not be meaningful and the statement meaningless. And if someone uttered the sentence with a different intention, such as receiving orders from God's hands to take their own life, then we might presumably protest and say, no, that message cannot stem from the hands of God. This shows that the statement's truth is also dependent on the intention to use the concept of 'God' in accordance with its accepted contextual religious meaning. I conclude that to some degree, intentionality always plays a pragmatic part in understanding statements and their context of utterance and that concepts are always, to some degree, embodied.

Another illustration of how participating in a ritual brings about real-life changes comes from Professor Hornborg's analysis of how the Mi'kmaq strive to find their identity. "In rituals, you don't symbolise being a Mi'kmaq, you become a Mi'kmaq" (Hornborg 2005: 375). The concept of Mi'kmaq identity is thus embodied in the ritual, not only symbolised. Consequently, the individuals partaking in the ritual also get to partake in the new identity for real, not merely symbolically. Hornborg (2005: 370) suggests that the Mi'kmaq have stored the memory of being an oppressed people in their bodily memories – I assume, both collectively and individually – and that they today employ ritual practices and ceremonies for their healing. She then raises the question of "why a bodily practice is so important that the more intellectual pursuits such as political claims, debates or reading books are not sufficient to heal" (Hornborg 2005: 370). Her reply is along the lines of taking the individual's agency into account and not viewing rituals as solely social. Moving away from the Cartesian dualism, which would have us see the rituals as merely a religious response to bodily suffering, she suggests that we instead join scholars "who want to move beyond the perception of ritual as epiphenomenal add-ons," such as McGuire (1990: 285). According to Hornborg, individuals, seen as independent agents, can gain increased well-being, healing from oppressive memories, and a new proud identity through participating in Mi'kmaq rituals.

The agency Hornborg refers to bears distinct similarities to the knowledgeable intentionality that I referred to as necessary for a ritual to have a transformative effect on the participant. However, agency as such is not enough (I do not, of course, say that Hornborg means this). The agency must also have an intentional direction, and the agent must have at least minimal understanding (be it intellectual, emotional, or physical) about the ritual's religious significance.

In the case of the Mi'kmaq, as Hornborg describes it, only when an individual senses the need for healing or a new and proud Mi'kmaq identity, they turn to rituals for a solution. The underlying hurt and identification with being Mi'kmaq would qualify as minimal understanding. The hope that the ritual will make a difference in their lives would qualify as intentional direction. Therefore, the healing that takes place and the new identity bestowed on the individual in the ritual are 'real'. They are physical in the sense that with a new proud identity, you proudly move your body in novel manners,

stand up more erect, take up more physical space, and so on. In the ritual, you have learnt what your new identity looks like through embodied learning. Or, as Hornborg (2005: 375) expresses it: "Rituals provide a bodily reorientation for the participant and ritualisation becomes a way of embodied learning."

Real transformation takes place in religious rituals and dances. Sometimes the change is physically visible, such as a prouder posture embodying a new identity. Other times the difference may consist in subtle neural rewiring, not immediately visible to the outside world but experienced by the individual as perhaps forgiveness, release, or a sense of meaning. These less immediately visible transformations may, in due time, become socially apparent as the individual's behaviour changes as a consequence of the inner transformation.

We have seen that no matter how knowledgeable a spectator to the Sufi ritual might be, they would nevertheless not gain the religious benefits of the ritual without the intention to participate in it. However, even the detached spectator might gain new insight into the ritual's meaning through grasping how the swirling constitutes the prayer, not merely symbolises it. And even the impartial scholar may get an increased understanding of what Mi'kmaq identity and healing involves from experiencing the all-encompassing physicality of the Mi'kmaq sweat lodge ceremony. Theoretical knowledge of the content of faith is insufficient to understand a fully embodied religion; therefore, we need to study also rituals and practices.

Through the study of rituals, we may thus attain two different goals. We may understand how rituals are genuinely transformative for the participants, and we may gain new insights into the religious meanings embodied in the practices.

7 Conclusion

In conclusion, cognitive embodiment theory offers valuable tools for analysing religious rituals' constitutive role for their associated abstract beliefs. The concepts of habitus, mirror neurons, conceptual metaphors, extended mind theory, and a non-dualistic, non-mentalistic view on our being and becoming in the world provide comprehensive tools to understand religion better through its embodied rituals. Therefore, we should examine how abstract concepts actualised in a particular rite or dance get their meaning through bodily experiences. We would then be in a better position to understand how partaking in a religious ritual recalls the embodied meaning of a concept (such as forgiveness, healing, community, and identity) to consciousness to bring about a truly transformative experience.

Within the research field of philosophy of religion, dance and religious rituals have not yet received much attention. But my hope is that dance research will be the next step in philosophy's newly awakened interest in embodied religion.

Ritual dances convey, reinforce, and embody spiritual significance through bodily expressions and movement patterns, both in the individual dancer and in the dancing

group as a whole. Above all, this applies to such meanings that the religious tradition or participants cannot (or at least not in a simple way) convey through words and thoughts, but which are essential for religious/ cultural identity and understanding. Sacred dance is thus not just a pretty icing on the cake that we can do without but is a fundamental part of the *habitus* of religious culture.

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Chapter 11: Transformation beyond the Threshold[(12)]

The Reiterative Practice of Initiation in the Contemporary Initiatory Society Sodalitas Rosae Crucis (S.R.C.)

Olivia Cejvan

This article explores the *postliminal* phase of Victor Turner's tripartite ritual formula, analysing initiatory transformation beyond the liminal phase. This is accomplished with a point of departure in my own initiation as a Neophyte in the esoteric society *Sodalitas Rosae Crucis*. My ethnographic findings point to three transformative aspects of initiation that take place after the actual ritual: (1) the re-interpretation of the experience of initiation in a process of *post-ritual assessment* and (2) in re-experiencing the ritual again as one of its performers, and (3) the 'slow fermentation' of *reiteration*, through self-reflexive journaling as well as peer-discussions. These three aspects emerge as fundamental parts of the postliminal phase – a phase with as much transformative potential as the liminal.

1. Introduction

It is almost impossible to think about rituals of initiation without simultaneously thinking about the threshold – the liminal phase made famous by Victor Turner to denote the transformative middle phase of the tripartite ritual process initially devised by van Gennep (1909). During the liminal phase, according to Turner, initiates find themselves in an indeterminate zone and a state of suspension, having "shed their old identities and have not been given new ones, so they are neither one thing nor another" (Turner 1967: 96). The initiate is removed from their previous identity during the ritual and a state of exception ensues as familiar norms are dissolved (Turner 1969; Turner 1982: 27).

In this article, I take issue with Turner's theory to explore the transformative potential of the postliminal phase through an anthropological study of an esoteric ritual of initiation that I experienced during fieldwork as an initiate in the *Sodalitas Rosae Crucis*[1] (Society of the Rosy Cross, abbreviated *S.R.C.*). This initiatory society was

[1] Webpage: `https://rosae-crucis.net/eng/`. Accessed 23/04/2023.

founded in Sweden in 2002, and it perpetuates the teachings of the *Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn*, an influential initiatory society instituted in London in 1888. Since its inception, S.R.C. has branched out with temples in many different countries, but the present study concerns primarily the branch in Stockholm called *Temple III*.

I became an initiate in S.R.C. in order to study how individuals, including myself, learn skills, such as performing rituals, within an initiatory community of practice. A focus on teaching and learning enabled me to trace the cultivation of ritual expertise within this community and, in a broader scope, understand how spiritually oriented practices are transmitted, negotiated, and changed over time as skills and notions are re-interpreted by individuals involved in learning them. One of my conspicuous findings, to be discussed in this article, concerns the ritual of initiation and the transformation it is thought to bring about. For my discussion, I draw on my extensive fieldwork experience, which includes a substantial amount of autoethnography of my learning in the society, as well as interviews and informal conversations with my fellow initiates. My approach to fieldwork can be characterised as "methodological ludism" (Knibbe and Droogers 2011), where I aimed to suspend disbelief and approach ritual practice on its own terms. To be absorbed in an experience and analytically distance oneself from it afterwards is all part of being self-reflexive. This capability is nothing unique to the anthropologist; in fact, it is a skill that is encouraged in the S.R.C., constituting a fundamental dimension of their teaching.

While rituals of initiation have been studied quite extensively in various cultural contexts, studies of Western *esoteric* rituals of initiation are remarkably few. The only full-length monograph on the subject is religious studies scholar Henrik Bogdan's historical study of esoteric rituals of initiation (2007), which untangles aspects of initiation in esoteric initiatory societies. In the context of esoteric movements, initiation is often devised as a path of gradual *transformation* of the individual. It is also a path that is fundamentally educational, meaning that it is thought to progressively transform the candidate through ritual experience, instruction, study and, fundamentally, the interpretation of ritual experience. In Bogdan's words: "It is the experience of the ritual that constitutes the message – or perhaps more adequately, the experience *and interpretation* of the ritual" (2007: 47). This has prompted me to explore the iterative dimension further by focusing on the postliminal phase of the Neophyte ritual of initiation in S.R.C.

I was admitted to S.R.C.'s closed world of ritual magic after being interviewed by the leaders of Temple III, Sophia and Lily. Before I could receive initiation into the very first degree, called *Neophyte*, I had to undergo a trial period called *Three Month's Operation*, basically, an introductory course in ritual magic, consisting of

[2] This brief ritual originates from the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and remains a staple ingredient in various occult handbooks and manuals to this day. For a deeper account of this particular ritual, see Wheeler 2020.

daily assignments, such as performing the *Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram* (LBRP)[2] twice daily. Completing this course made me eligible for initiation into the first degree of *Neophyte*. Consequently, on the 5th of May 2019, I arrived in Stockholm to undergo the ritual of initiation.

2 Undergoing the Neophyte Ritual of Initiation

Equipped with the prescribed black robe, red socks, and a red rose, I arrive at the designated address in Stockholm after a four-hour journey by train from Lund. As instructed in the invitation letter, I have fasted all day and contemplated the theme of life and death and the circumstances leading up to this event. I ring the doorbell by a heavy door the moment the clock strikes six. A tall, black-robed stranger in his thirties soon answers the door and bids me enter. I am gently blindfolded and led down a flight of stairs where the hoodwink is removed. I find myself in a candle-lit, oak-panelled chamber with a high ceiling and old-fashioned furniture. On the coffee table is a burning candle, and beneath it, a handwritten note.

"You must commit these words to memory," the robed man tells me. "And put the blindfold back on when you hear a knocking on the door." He takes the rose with him as he leaves.

I walk back and forth in the chamber, reciting the words over and over to commit them to memory. This defined and repetitive task is rather soothing. It serves, if nothing else, to alleviate my anxiety. I keep up the rehearsal for about half an hour, stopping only as I hear a faint sound of knocks and voices echoing through the walls, like a reverberating church choir. Then the voices grow silent, and the knockings cease. I wait. I recite the words. When will they come for me? What will they do? I grasp for cues and clues in the sounds outside the door, footsteps, mumbling voices, and banging doors. When what lies ahead is unknown, all senses are sharpened. A state of heightened attention sets in. I am reaching, second-guessing. This apprehension seems to clarify and consolidate my intentionality.

I try to meditate. Breathe slowly. I fail.

Knocking at the door, at last! I put the blindfold on. The floorboards creaks as two persons promptly enter the chamber. A battery of strange questions ensues. I do not have the slightest idea how I am supposed to reply. The anthropologist recalls the trials involved in ancient mystery religions. But should the scholar answer? Or should I answer like an ancient Greek? Should I consider the misdeeds of my youth when answering? Should I take it like a 'spin the bottle' game of teenage parties? Will I be expelled if I do? No time to ponder; just answer and do not look back. Hesitation could be a failure criterion, for all I know. I am anxious to be accepted and to fit in. I find some solace, though, in recognising Tommy's voice. I trust him, but at the same time, he is distinctly someone else. Moreover, the absurdity of some of the questions make it feel like a Beckett play.

In retrospect, I recognise this sequence as a crucial point of liminality in the initiation ritual. I lost my footing as I was threshed through that battery of questions. This threshing accentuated feelings, hopes, fears – dimensions of myself beyond the curious researcher. *Who answers?* Behind these reflections remained a visceral dimension, the pounding heart, soon to be symbolically removed. The many questions sifted out the researcher until only the mortal, the seeker of deeper knowledge, remained.

The officiants leave the room, and I pull the blindfold back over my sweaty forehead. Were they satisfied? They gave me no clues. What will happen next? I begin reciting the words on the piece of paper again to still my heart and quiet my mind.

Footsteps approach outside the door. I straighten my back and put the blindfold back in place. I am finally led out of the chamber, up some stairs, then halted, and my hands tied behind my back with a rope, loose enough to escape if I wanted. "It is only a symbolical tie." I recognise Lily's voice. "Do you know the password?" she proceeds.

This is easy: I recite the words I learnt by heart. She knocks once on what sounds like a door, and a moment later, another knock resounds from the other side. Led by Lily, I cross the threshold to the temple. Still blindfolded, I am purified with water and consecrated with fire. Heavy incense lies thick in the air, and I am addressed by the Hierophant, whose chiming, authoritative voice is recognisable as Sophia's: "Inheritor of a Dying World, why seekest thou to enter our Sacred Hall? Why seekest thou admission to our order?" (Regardie 1989: 121).

I ponder for a few seconds before I reply. It is probably not wise to say 'research' now, so I opt for something close and equally honest: "I seek higher knowledge."

I am allowed further entrance, walking into the temple with Lily as my guide. She is the Hegemon, the personification of balance, as I will later understand. We are going in circles, back and forth. I feel water droplets on my forehead and incense drying up my nostrils. Although I think I am performing relatively well, suddenly there is a pause in the ritual where I get the distinct feeling that the Hierophant is displeased with something I have said or done. She distrusts me; I feel it in the pit of my stomach and as a taut sensation in the throat. Blindfolded and confused, I feel the cold from the marble floors through my thin red socks. "Cold feet," I mock myself silently.

I go over and over what I have done up until that moment. My quest is sincere: I want knowledge; the deeper, the better. I am here of my own free will, and in some sense, my initiatory predicament feels like a game, where I know that I have entered something that I can turn back from at any time if I want, even if it would close the door for good. Regardless, I am invested now. I really want to join, not least because of the promising research venue indicated by this elaborate ritual practice. Clearly, here is an established ritual praxis and a learning regime; precisely what I came to study. Simultaneously, I am enmeshed in an experience that has already affected me on a deeper level than my scholarly identity: the knot in my stomach and my racing heart tell me so.

Once more, I am purified with water, consecrated with fire, and led around in circles. I occasionally stumble, only to be rescued by the Hegemon, constantly by my side. Her grip is steady and speaks louder than words: *I'm your ally.*

A multitude of voices echo in the hall. More questions. Finally, an answer and secrets to be kept. Naturally, I am not at liberty to share all the details of what I experienced inside the temple. Symbolically, my heart was removed and weighed. The point came where I stopped taking head notes and quit second-guessing the ritual content. Behind that blindfold, the point came where I surrendered to the ritual process.

I hear Lily's voice again: "Inheritor of a Dying World, we call thee to the Living Beauty" (Regardie 1989: 121).

Then a male voice: "Wanderer in the Wild Darkness, we call thee to the Gentle Light" (Regardie 1989: 121). The blindfold is torn away, and my eyes hurt.

"Quit the Night and seek the Day!" the officiants around me exclaim in unison. As my eyes adjust, I am awestruck by the sight of them, standing in their striking ritual regalia, in a triangle formation around me. All of them wear striped Egyptian headdresses. Three are familiar: Lily as the white-clad Hegemon, the personification of balance and the candidate's higher soul; Sophia, imposing Hierophant in her long red cape; and Tommy, founder of S.R.C., as the menacing, dark-clad Hiereus. I recognise the man who welcomed me by the door, holding a lamp and a wand. There are also two completely new faces: a man holding a lidded brass censer on a chain and a woman holding a silver cup.

The Hierophant raises her sceptre and descends from the dais, saying: "I come in the Power of the Light. I come in the Light of Wisdom. I come in the Mercy of the Light. The Light hath healing in its wings" (Regardie 1989: 121).

Accepted, I take an obligation that, among other things, includes secrecy. I am positioned between the pillars, the white and the black. The rope around my waist is removed. The Hiereus instructs me in the grade signs, which from now on must be integrated into my ritual work: "Advance your left foot touching mine, toe, and heel, extend your right hand to grasp mine, fail, try again, and then succeed in touching the fingers only. It alludes to the seeking guidance in Darkness. The Grand Word is Har-Par-Krat, and it is whispered in this position mouth to ear, in syllables. It is the Egyptian Name for the God of Silence, and should always remind you of the strict silence you have sworn to maintain" (Regardie 1989: 121). He whispers the password in my ear, teaches me the step, and repeats a handshake that also embodies a crucial lesson: the importance of trying again in the face of failure. My heart is symbolically returned to me. With her breath, the Hierophant heals my equally symbolic wounds. I have entered the threshold and returned a Neophyte.

3 Crossing the Threshold of Liminality

Turner's conceptualisation of liminality introduced above can certainly be applied to the Neophyte ritual of initiation. Preparation, separation, and liminality are prominent ingredients in the account above. In the first phase, I had accomplished the three months of necessary ritual work, followed instructions, and arrived promptly at the ritual site with red socks and a red rose. In essence, this preparation phase made me eligible for initiation. The separation phase, then, occurred as I entered the first doorway and was blindfolded. Separation intensified as I entered the chamber to wait. The memorisation of the password, however, gave it the character of further preparation. Underscored by blindfolds and passages, liminality ensued, but liminality itself had nuances and degrees. I certainly experienced the preparation chamber as liminal despite its preparatory function. Subsequently, liminality oscillates. The mythical narrative of the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* (Wallis Budge 1895) underlines the ritual and reinforces a classical liminal phase, as the candidate, like Osiris, wanders from death to resurrection.

In a formal sense, liminality ends after the obligation, when the status as an initiated member is declared by the Hierophant, using the new name, a motto in Latin, or another ancient language, chosen by the candidate to express her initiatory ambition (mine was *Temet Nosce*, meaning 'know thyself' in Latin). Properly named and announced as a *soror* (sister) in the society, I was then acting as a member among the others in the reverse circumambulation, making the proper salutation towards the East as I exited the temple as soror Temet Nosce, Neophyte of Temple III of Sodalitas Rosae Crucis.

As I went to bed that night, it seemed like my transformation was a done deal. I was initiated, I was in. Still, I slept very little that night. The ritual experience would not settle that easily, even as I resorted to my daily Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram. The familiar, however, would become strange as I approached it in my new capacity as initiate.

A tiny ember on the tip of an incense stick is the only light in the confined, dark space where I stand. I close my eyes to shut it out, focusing on finding the point of brighter light just above my head. *Ateh*, my voice resounds as I imagine a star of brilliant white light growing. I draw it down like a ripe fruit just within my reach. I breathe in, touch my chest, and fill my lungs with air as I visualise my core expanding with light. *Malkuth*, I almost roar. The visualisation is clear enough but cannot banish a hollow feeling, a void inside that neither light nor roaring seems to fill. I touch my right shoulder, *Ve-Geburah*, the light is fainter now. My lungs are taut; I gasp for air. I know I have gone through a symbolic rebirth during my initiation, but I do not feel completely alive. My throat tightens. I know I was not entirely honest during the ritual questioning in the initiation chamber. Have I really passed the threshold, been reborn, or did I leave a piece behind?

Ve-Gedulah, my voice a whisper now. Inner monologue disperses the light. This space is too small. I cannot breathe; I feel no pulse. *Le-Olam*. Where is my heart? I know it was symbolically removed during my initiation. But that was clearly just a metaphor. Perhaps the metaphorical heart was metaphorically left behind in the Scales. Metaphorically still being weighed. *Amen*. I open my eyes and extinguish the incense stick. I open the door, the lightbulb switches on automatically, and the temple is reversed to a wardrobe. I flip open my magical diary to journal my results, or lack thereof before the impressions fade.

Such was the immediate aftermath of my first initiation, written up from the notes in my journal of daily rituals. I felt betwixt and between, even more so after than *during* the ritual. Something had happened to me, not just metaphorically. During my first days as a Neophyte, I tried to retrace the steps and understand how it had happened and what it really meant. Slowly I digested the load of impressions, multi-levelled, multi-faceted. Symbols, bodily affect, memories. Self-doubt. Even the pride that I had passed the threshold.

The ritual aftermath indeed called for an integration of the initiatory experience. The initiatory process in S.R.C. continues *after* the ritual, in part by integrating it into the daily, solitary work and its continuous journaling that further encourages reflection, and connection, through which understanding is calibrated and experience negotiated. Interpretive manoeuvres are also carried out between peers, in sharing and comparing experiences, for instance, when Lola and I compared our Neophyte experiences. During an interview, Lola told me: "The moment the blindfold was removed, I saw that Sophia and Lily stood before me, but I couldn't look them in the eye. I felt so ashamed. I wondered if my mascara had run and tried to catch a glimpse of my face in the shiny blade of the Hiereus sword as he held it before me. I had to focus on something simple, like how my face looked, in order to cope with the confusion and shame. Lily tried to lighten the mood and make funny grimaces, but I just couldn't take it in."

"I can really relate to that feeling," I reply. "My confusion and shame weren't as intense as yours, but I felt like a failure so many times, confronted with my desire to perform well and be worthy."

"Afterwards there was socialising and partying," Lola continues. "But I went back to my cabin early. I just couldn't let go. I was preoccupied with my own performance: Did I perform well? Was I good? How do candidates usually behave?"

"I felt exactly the same. Was I good? Were they impressed?" (Lola 2020).

As the quote indicates, I was not alone in needing time to digest the rather intense experience of the Neophyte initiation. Sharing the experience in this way, peer-to-peer, allowed for further integration of the ritual event. I would have several similar talks with my fellow initiates. In a sense, this is what the Neophyte handshake is all about: trying to grasp something and failing to do so at the first attempt. Reiteration is necessary.

To fully understand initiation in esoteric societies such as S.R.C., we need to get past the threshold of liminality and take a closer look at what happens afterwards, in

the postliminal phase, which is of great importance to esoteric rituals of initiation in general, as Bogdan has pointed out in his study: "[P]revious scholars such as Eliade have stated that a rite of initiation is supposed to change the innermost nature of the initiate and thereby make him or her a new person. In my opinion, this is also the case in Western esoteric rituals of initiation, but it is not so much the experience as the *interpretation* of it that has a transmutative effect upon the initiate" (2007: 47).

Anthropologist Edward L. Schieffelin's performance theory may further reinforce the postliminal perspective on initiation. Inspired by Turner, for whom performative action became the key to ritual (Turner 1982), Schieffelin understands ritual as an event, limited in time and space, but simultaneously as an ongoing construction that continues beyond the situated and temporal framework of the ritual (1985: 721). Schieffelin emphasises that the meaning of the ritual is negotiated and consolidated afterwards (1985). This *iterative* dimension of performative rituals is particularly important for understanding rituals of initiation in the context of S.R.C. because, here, transformation is not understood as solely accomplished during the initiation ritual. Instead, the experience of the ritual of initiation is supposed to be digested in the daily regime of ritual performance that the candidate is obliged to uphold.

Magic, a liminal phenomenon to the researcher, who cannot pinpoint it, is a *skill* to the practitioner with a day-to-day application in the solitary ritual practice. Turner's conceptualisation of the *liminoid* can help to delineate the difference between the daily ritual practice, which has the voluntary character of the liminoid, in contrast to the heightened, liminal occasions of rituals of initiation, which you only go through once: "One works at the liminal, one plays at the liminoid," as Turner put it (1982: 55).

In the curriculum of S.R.C., the daily work and the initiations go together in synergy. The myth and symbols of death and rebirth contained in the ritual can and should be unlocked in relation to the candidate's own circumstances. As such, the singular event of the ritual of initiation may reverberate in the daily rituals. For example, the candidate performs the ritual gestures of Isis, Apophis and Osiris – the so-called 'LVX formula' – which is a concentration of the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. The candidate enacts it daily, taking less than a minute to perform.

To deepen my understanding of these gestures, the Hierophant recommended I read "The Apotheosis: the LVX Signs of the 5=6," an in-depth exegesis on this formula written by George Slater, an initiate of the Golden Dawn offshoot 'Alpha+Omega' in Paris during the 1920s. Slater indicates the condensed meaning of these gestures: "It is as though the student were bidden to repeat beforehand what he were about to do: an affirmation that he has chosen his work – that he is prepared to carry out in himself that wonderful yet terrible Initiation of the Soul which is symbolised by the Signs that follow" (1923: 3). On the basis on such study, the candidate is offered new interpretive venues in the light of past perpetuations of the Golden Dawn tradition.

4 In a New Light: Self-Reflexive Reiteration

The essays I submitted as a part of my examination for entry into the next degree, the *Juniorus*, reflect further iterations as I draw conclusions about my learning process based on quotes from my magical journal, marked here with quotation marks:

> The 27th of October I experienced a new level of silence and centring in the meditation that superseded the LBRP and BRH: "A particular, heavy stillness – bodily. I feel like a ripe fruit, hanging heavy from its branch. Total silence, unpretentiousness. No ambition, no astral vision, just this calm, its very own perfection." So that feeling, that I was back on square one, was true in this regard: the very point of origin of everything – to be centred in oneself, in the single point, in the heart of the rose, in the Silence (Cejvan 2019).

By experience and its reiteration, the associations, meanings, and interpretations gradually become internalised. The journaling and subsequent grade reports, from which the quote above is a small sample, nurtures self-reflexive assessment. The diary and the reports became arenas for implementing the themes of the curriculum, such as silence, death, and rebirth.

During an interview, I asked Rantes, one of my S.R.C. peers, how it had felt for him when he looked back on his Neophyte journal to write it up for a grade report, like I had done. Did he learn anything from it? He replied: "I feel it's a way to compare. For example, when I send my report, I try to cover all the things that have changed in me. For example, since I stated to practice this ritual, I notice this, this, this. So, it is a way for me to compare the person that I am now with the person that I was when I started to practice this." "And that feels rewarding?" I continued.

"Yes," he replied. "I don't know if it is a learning experience, but it is just like a proof that I'm doing something, that I'm progressing. It is not the same. I always have this question: 'But If I hadn't performed the rituals, would I still have been the same?' And in a way it's like: probably not" (Rantes 2020). Einar, another peer, succinctly put it like this: "[...] a third of all the work in the order is to constantly view the first initiation in a new light" (Einar 2020).

The iterative processes that follow the Neophyte ritual of initiation can be related to the Kaluli séances analysed by Schieffelin, where the participants co-create the meaning through interpretation, precisely because the indeterminate nature of the ritual experience becomes involved in establishing its meaning and outcome: "This experience of inconclusiveness and imbalance gives people little choice but to make their own moves of creative imagination if they are to make sense of the performance and arrive at a meaningful account of what is happening. In so doing, however, they complete the construction of its reality" (1985: 721). It should be stressed, though, that this was not an initiation ritual, but a séance for divination. However, the general point is transferrable to the rituals of initiation in S.R.C.

A careful study of the Neophyte ritual script is prescribed in the curriculum. It serves to reawaken and reiterate the initiation experience, but there is a practical reason as well: you need to officiate in the ritual and know your lines. As such, re-experiencing the ritual of initiation as one of its performers further contributes to reiterative integration in the postliminal phase of initiation.

5 Bringing Others to the Threshold: Re-Experiencing Ritual

With another Neophyte initiation coming up in September, the Hierophant had assigned me the office of *Sentinel*, which meant that I was going to assume the godform of Anubis and guard the entrance to the temple with a sword. I had carefully memorised my one and only line and studied the Neophyte ritual script as instructed. Then, in early September 2019, as I head towards the subway, the Hierophant informs me over the phone that one of the participants has taken ill and they need a replacement for the role of *Stolistes*, the cup-carrying officiant who purifies the temple and the candidate with water. Would I like to take it on? "We will rehearse it before," she assures me.

Yes. I take the offer, happy to gain a deeper insight into the mechanics of the complex ritual that I had undergone just four months ago. On my way to the meetup, I rehearse the lines of the Stolistes and underline them carefully in my copy of the script. My new role will require a lot more action and speech, but it was all there, on paper, so what could go wrong? The security offered by the printed script would prove to be deceptive. Some components of the ritual were so ubiquitous that neither of the senior members thought of introducing them to me. It concerned specific techniques not included in the script but part of the practical know-how that is transmitted in practice and verbal instruction. For instance, I did not know how 'assumption of godform' was supposed to be done. In my mind's eye, I pictured the Egyptian goddess Mut, with her golden vulture crown and white linen dress, and I imagined myself stepping into her form. Then, on several occasions in the ritual, everyone performed the LVX-formula, which made me realise that I had not performed it correctly in my solitary practice. I followed the movements of the other participants to the best of my ability, and calibrated myself to the collective performance.

As the blindfolded candidate is led into the temple, I feel for him. Not long ago, I had been in that place, fetched from that candle-lit, oak-panelled room, and led to the threshold. Intently aware of the candidate's situation, I am re-living my own initiatory ordeal from a new perspective, that of the Stolistes and her watery, emotional outlook and the maternal perspective of her godform Mut. I remember all too well how it felt behind that blindfold. Later, seeing the candidate's amazement when his blindfold is removed reawakens that feeling in me, although I can now approach it from my new point of view. Putting so much effort into staging the elaborate ritual struck me

suddenly as such a loving gesture, even as it is designed as an ordeal. However, it should be mentioned that focus and immersion fluctuate during the several hours it takes to perform the ritual. I occasionally forgot my researcher persona like this and experienced full participation in the unfolding ritual. One moment I sensed the golden vulture crown on my head, the next moment, I was taking headnotes – an ongoing transformation of identity.

6 Reiteration: the 'Slow Fermentation' of the Initiatory Process

When I asked the S.R.C. founder, Tommy, how initiation is understood in the society, he pointed out three important parts: (1) The ritual of initiation: "[...] given from the outside, by a Temple or a Hierophant," (2) The cumulative, personal work: "[...] a part that you must accomplish yourself," and (3) initiation through spiritual means: "a part that only the Higher – whether it is the Guardian Angel, deities, archetypes – can initiate in." He went on to explain that ideally, "[...] there is a perfect balance between the external initiation, in that the people who lead it know what they are doing, can focus on energies and god-forms and possess both the pedagogy and the mysticism or magic [...] But you have to come prepared, and you have to have done the groundwork yourself so that you can absorb it. But when you have done that, the Divine can also come" (Tommy 2020).

As Sophia, the Hierophant, explained to me during an informal conversation, there is a transformative, *magical* aspect of initiation brought about during the ritual event, for instance, in making a great array of Ancient Egyptian gods present in the ritual as participant agents. The Hierophant herself, for instance, embodies Osiris, god of the 'Duat', the realm of death that the candidate needs to go through ritually. From an emic perspective, the magical aspect is the key ingredient because, without it, the Neophyte transformation cannot happen. The transformation that takes place afterwards is made possible by the candidate first undergoing the ritual of initiation.

The crucial element of reiterating the ritual of initiation – the post-ritual assessment – is articulated by Sophia when, during an interview, I asked her if she had thought of any points concerning the pedagogical dimensions of the initiatory process since we last talked. She began exploring the subject tentatively:

> If I may reason out loud, what is SRC doing from a pedagogical perspective? In part, it is the targeted measure of initiation, with the preparation before and the catching of the candidate afterwards, to provide the proper perspective. Such as immediately after initiation: 'did you notice that this and this happened?' To make sure, as the person shapes her experience, as everything is about to settle, that you make sure it sets according to form: 'Here, think about this, meditate on this during the night, or make sure to

> do A, B and C in preparation for tomorrow'. Then you enter it with the right mindset, and then [snaps fingers] it happens – things such as these [are] important components (Sophia 2020).

Sophia's response indicates how and why initiation works, according to the emic understanding. How is initiation carried out? With preparation before and debriefing after, to facilitate its interpretation and to provide concrete, practical steps to be taken ("meditate on this during the night, or make sure to do A, B and C"), in order to integrate the experience. The aftermath of initiation is indeed a crucial component in initiation as it is understood in the context of S.R.C., although magic is understood as the initiatory spark. Reiterative support is provided by the ritual participants in the post-ritual assessment. Support is carried out contingently, tailored to the individual, to help integrate the liminal experience of the ritual.

In the interview, Sophia proceeded to point out the 'slow fermentation' involved in the initiatory process tied to the reflection and reiteration that the candidate is encouraged to do in her daily work, journaling, peer-assessment and tutoring – what constitutes the 'groundwork' for further initiation. In this account, she provided two key aspects of initiatory learning: catching the candidate in debriefing, what I call post-ritual assessment, as well as encouraging the 'slow fermentation' of reflection, reiteration, and integration throughout the months and sometimes years it takes to reach eligibility for initiation into the next degree.

7 Concluding Remarks

Exemplified with an ethnographic account of the Neophyte initiation in Temple III of S.R.C. and its aftermath, this article has explored Victor Turner's notion of the postliminal phase to extend our understanding of the transformative components of initiation beyond the liminal phase of the ritual event. In addition, Schieffelin's performance theory underscored the transformative potential of the ritual aftermath, particularly his insights regarding the interpretive manoeuvres of the ritual participants after the ritual event.

Initiatory transformation, then, is not only due to liminality but to *reiteration* as well, progressing through several cycles of interpretation. These can be both solitary, such as journaling, and social, as in the staging of new rituals and in conversations with peers and tutors, who provide contingent feedback. Such reiteration helps refine and integrate the experience of initiation. Three components of the postliminal integration phase stand out: the *post-ritual assessment*, the *re-experiencing* of the ritual as a performer, and the slow fermentation of *reiteration* through journaling the daily ritual work as through feedback from peers and tutors.

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Chapter 12: Bringing Embodiment Back to Antiquity[13]

Manifesting Enlightenment through the Body in Valentinus' Writings

Paul Linjamaa

1. Introduction

The starting point of the history of western ideas began with the philosophy of classic antiquity. This is a widespread perception. The philosophy of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics are seldom undervalued. Among these ancient schools of philosophy, the mind or intellect (*nous*) played a central role. A wise person was defined as a person who was able to discern truth from falsehood. By extension, a wise person was a virtuous person. This is how Plato portrays Socrates, the wisest of them all (*Apology of Socrates* 21d). The faculty which determined one's ability to process information as well as use that knowledge to choose the good in place of the bad, was the intellect. In comparison, the body was associated with the baser aspects of human life and enterprises. The body was often portrayed as a threat to a higher and nobler life. Being controlled by one's bodily needs – hunger, sleep, sexual drive, *et cetera* – was among Stoics, Platonists, and Peripatetics alike viewed as the lowest form of human life.

But the split between the mind and the body reflected in ancient philosophy – epitomised in the Cartesian split almost two thousand years later – does not tell us the whole story. The importance of the human body as a vehicle for feeling, thinking, healing, memorising, and learning, has been highlighted by a long line of contemporary scholars. Important theoreticians, such as Marcel Mauss, Pierre Bourdieu, Mary Douglas, and many others can be mentioned here. It is perhaps mainly through the work done by anthropologists and ethnographers that these insights have been brought to the attention of religious scholars and ritual studies (Csordas 1993: 135–156; Hornborg 2005: 356–394; McGuire 1990: 283–296). So, it is not strange that it is chiefly in studies focusing on contemporary expressions of religion and ritual that these insights have

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chiefly been disseminated. In this article, however, I wish to draw attention to the value of applying the insights of embodiment on ancient material. It will be argued that by applying insights from contemporary ritual studies pertaining to the role of the body as a vehicle for meaning making and identity formation, we may solve a puzzle that for a long time has divided scholars regarding certain aspects of the writings of the great Christian second century preacher Valentinus.

Valentinus (circa 100–160) was a Christian teacher and theologian of Egyptian descent. He moved to Rome in the middle of the second century, where his theological teachings gathered a large following. Valentinus' interpretations of Christian theology would inspire Christians for centuries to come, to the great annoyance of some of this Christian contemporaries, sometimes known as 'the Church Fathers' today. The Valentinians, as the Christians who drew inspiration from Valentinus were called, are attached to many particular theological traits, for example: (1) interest in protological and pleromatological issues;[1] (2) the view that the cosmos was not formed by the highest God but rather a lower being (sometimes called the Demiurge); (3) the view that the heavenly world (often called the Pleroma) was populated by eternal beings called Aeons (sometimes identified as the emanations of the Father); and (4) that the cosmic life was created as the result of a fall of the youngest of the heavenly beings (often called Sophia) and that the Saviour Jesus was sent from the Pleroma in order to bring back the spiritual substance that issued forth as a result of the fall.[2] Notice that there is no mention here of the body, which should not surprise us considering that Valentinus has been considered as one of the first 'Gnostics'.

The ancient phenomenon 'Gnosticism' has throughout history been portrayed as an archetypical manifestation of ancient philosophers' overenthusiastic esteem for the intellect. The 'Gnostics' have been presented as people who valued knowledge before all, who viewed the body as a prison that the mind needed to escape. Even if this portrayal of Gnosticism is the result of heresiologists' polemical depictions of their theological enemies, it is an idea that still manifests in scholarship of ancient religion. What I here will attempt to show is that even in the theology of Valentinus, one of more well know 'Gnostics' – a person whom the most famous heresiologist of antiquity spent countless pages in refuting – the body was seen as an important medium through which salvation was manifested.

[1] By protology I refer to the theories concerning what happened before creation during the time and place before cosmos was created and ordered. Pleromatology refers to the theories that focus on the constellation of this world, often called Pleroma (fullness), what beings exist there, and what happened there that resulted in the creation of the cosmos.

[2] I have presented this rendering of Valentinian traits before in Linjamaa 2019: 37–60.

2 Introducing Valentinus Fragment 1

Valentinus' writings and preaching did not only generate adversaries, but generations of followers and sympathisers. However, since Valentinus' writings came to be associated with heresy by the theologians who were to prevail in the struggle for ecclesiastical power, they were suppressed and are today almost completely obliterated.[3] This article presents new interpretations of one of the scenes depicted in Valentinus' Fragment 1, one of the very few samples of Valentinus' own writings extant today (Markschies 1992). In this short extract Valentinus' utilises the rhetoric concept *parrhésia*, a term whose meaning has become a source of some scholarly disagreement among authorities on Valentinianism. Through a short contextualisation of the use of the term *parrhésia*, a term most often translated free, bold, or open speech, this article aims to cast new light on Valentinus' authorship and literary style, the grace of which even his opponents considered masterful, as Tertullian put it (*Against the Valentinians* 4). It will be argued that Valentinus utilised a particular aspect of the ancient concept *parrhésia* (παρρησία) which taps into the embodied aspects of the term. The body was an important medium through which one could manifest transcendence. This practice of embodiment was so forceful that it was utilised even by those considering the body a prison for the soul.

The text passage which has come to be known as Valentinus' Fragment 1, quoted by Clement of Alexandria, is an extract from a letter by the hand of Valentinus where angels are portrayed as moulding the body of Adam. Valentinus describes the angels as frightened of Adam and they do away with him when they hear unexpected sounds. In this passage Valentinus utilises the word *parrhésia* (παρρησία/παρρησιάζομαι). The function of this term in the scene that Valentinus depicts has been interpreted in different ways by the scholars who have worked with the fragments of Valentinus. The term has most often been translated as *boldness*, but scholars disagree on whom it is that speaks with boldness. The fragment, found in Clement's *Stromata* II 36, 2–4, runs as follows (in Thomassen's translation, Thomassen 2006: 430–431):

> And just as in the presence of that modelled figure fear fell on the angels when it emitted sounds that surpassed its modelling because of the one who had invisibly deposited in it a seed of the substance above and openly spoke, thus also among the generations of the cosmic humans the works of humans become objects of fear for the ones that make them, as in the case of statues, images and everything that hands fashion in the Name of God. For having been modeled in the name of Man, Adam caused fear of pre-existent Man, since he in fact was present in him. So they were terrified and quickly did away with their work.[4]

[3] See for example Irenaeus' *Adversus haereses*, written mainly to combat Valentinians of his time.

[4] καὶ ὡσπερεὶ φόβος ἐπ' ἐκείνου τοῦ πλάσματος υ πῆρξε τοῖς ἀγγέλοις, ὅτε μείζονα ἐφθέγξατο τῆς πλάσεως διὰ τὸν ἀοράτως ἐν αὐτῶ σπέρμα δεδωκότα τῆς ἄνωθεν οὐσίας καὶ παρρησιαζόμενον: οὕτω καὶ ἐν

In the passage Adam, being modelled in the "Name of Man," is depicted as possessing superior abilities, enabled by the seed of ontological superior substance. "Pre-existent Man" is a concept in some Valentinian material that envisions the manifestation of the Father/Pleroma through the Saviour as a "Primordial-Man."[5] The concept of Name and Naming also appear in some Valentinian writings, and seems to be used soteriologically, often in descriptions of protology, aeonology, as well as in connection with baptism.[6]

It is not all that clear who it is that is speaking here and who places the superior substance in Adam.[7] Einar Thomassen and Christoph Markschies have suggested that it is the invisible agent placing the substance in Adam who speaks. Dunderberg instead suggests that it is the seed (τὸ σπέρμα) inside Adam who expresses boldness, or rather makes Adam speak boldly, as Dunderberg interprets it. I agree with Dunderberg. It must be Adam who expresses *parrhésia*, because the angels' surprise and fear is directed at the form (that is, Adam). Whatever the *cause* of *parrhésia*, from the perspective of the angels at least, it is Adam who *exhibits* it.[8][9] Why would the depositor first act

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ταῖς γενεαῖς τῶν κοσμικῶν ἀνθρώπων φόβοι τὰ ἔργα τῶν ἀνθρώπων τοῖς ποιοῦσιν ἐ γένετο, οἷον ἀνδριάντες καὶ εἰκόνες καὶ πάνθ' ἃ χεῖρες ἀνύουσιν εἰ ς ὄνομα θεοῦ: εἰς γὰρ ὄνομα Ἀνθρώπου πλασθεὶς Ἀδὰμ φόβον παρέσχεν προόντος Ἀνθρώπου, ὡς δὴ αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐ τῷ καθεστῶτος, καὶ κατεπλάγησαν καὶ ταχὺ τὸ ἔργον ἠφάνισαν.

[5] Irenaeus *Adversus haereses* 1.4,5; 5,6, see also 12,4 where Irenaeus writes that some Valentinians named the first Father himself "Man"; *The Tripartite Tractate* 66,10–12, 86,23–88,27; *Excerpta ex Theodoto* 21,1. Thomassen has a much more developed idea which he evolves on in Thomassen 2006: 437–442.

[6] For soteriology and the Name see *Gospel of Truth* 27,15–31, 38,28–31, 43,19–21; *The Tripartite Tractate* 61:14–28 and Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* I, 21:3. For protology and the Name, in the portrayal of the "triad" for example, see *Gospel of Truth* 38,6–12; 38,32–38; *Gospel of Philip* 54,5–10; *The Tripartite Tractate* 65,4–11. For Aeons and the Name see *The Tripartite Tractate* 65,35–67; 73,8–18; Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 1.15,1. For the Name in connection with baptism see *Gospel of Philip* 64,22–31; 72,29–33; Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 1.21,3; *Excerpta ex Theodoto* 22,4–6; 76, 3–4. For details on theological analyzes see Einar Thomassen, "Gnostic Semiotics," *Temenos* 29 (1993), 141–156.

[7] Ismo Dunderberg has suggested that it is Adam that is speaking here and that Valentinus was inspired by the image of the fearless philosopher, who *spoke boldly* (παρρησιάζομαι) when confronted by authority (Dunderberg 2008: 46–59). Dunderberg's theory is not unchallenged. Einar Thomassen and Christoph Markschies have argued that it is the invisible depositor appearing in the passage who *speaks out openly* (τὸ σπέρμα τῆς ἄνωθεν οὐσίας). The syntax seems to technically allow for either the form (τὸ πλάσμα), the depositor (the one doing δεδωκότα) or the seed (τὸ σπέρμα) to express *parrhésia*. Thomassen and Markschies argue that it is the invisible depositor who puts the seed of heavenly substance (τὸ σπέρμα τῆς ἄνωθεν οὐσίας) in Adam and then *speaks out openly* (Thomassen 2006: 442–445; Markschies 1992: 37–38).

[8] It seems unlikely that the depositor first acts coy and in secret and then chooses to express himself with *parrhésia*, which is all but subtle. Instead, the reason for the angels' fear and subsequent aggression toward Adam is partly his expression of *parrhésia*. The seed is inserted in Adam and thus it is the seed in Adam that causes his 'sounds that surpass his molding', these sounds are expressed with *parrhésia*. Furthermore, as this article will argue, the use of the word *parrhésia* is particularly fitting in this context if it is connected to Adam because the word is also associated with a stable and firm ability, of upright walking.

[9] Thomassen and Markschies suggest that it is the Saviour-Logos. Thomassen reads both Fragment 1 and *Gospel of Philip* with close mind to the Valentinian theological system he builds up in his book *The*

invisibly and in the next turn speak out openly?9 So, it must be Adam who speaks or at the very least the one who appears to speak. But if it is Adam who speaks, what does *parrhésia* refer to in the context of Fragment 1?

Dunderberg reads the use of *parrhésia* from the perspective of classic philosophy, as the boldness philosophers of old were portrayed displaying when opposing worldly authority. However, the image of a philosopher is a hard fit into the context of Fragment 1, which obviously is a reinterpretation of the scene in Genesis 2:7 where God moulds Adam's body and breathes him into life. Genesis 2:7 generated much literary production and creative readings among Jews and Christians in the first two centuries CE. Adam is in many interpretations of this scene portrayed as inferior, sometimes unable to stand, until the spirit is inserted into him.[10] I argue that the use of the term *parrhésia* in Valentinus' interpretation of Genesis 2:7 fits perfectly, especially when considering that the word *parrhésia*, the speech of a free and bold individual, presupposed uprightness, bodily as well as intellectual. Before further elaborating on the scene in Fragment 1 in light of this particular aspect of *parrhésia*, let us first contextualise the use of the term within the context of Valentinus.

3 The Meaning of *parrhésia* in Antiquity

We first encounter the word *parrhésia* (παρρησία) in an Athenian context, from the Classical period. The word probably stems from the Greek *pás/pan-* (πᾶς/παν-) *all/whole/every* and the verb root *hré-* (ῥη-) *to speak*. It was in Athens essentially connected to the democratic privileges of the citizen, the right to voice one's opinion whenever in the Assembly (ἐκκλησία), a right directly opposite to the speech of slaves and foreigners. We also encounter *parrhésia* in numerous other different contexts of the classical *polis*: in prose and philosophy, in political and public life, as well as in the private sphere. *Parrhésia* was associated with truth telling; frankness; speaking without fear in the face of imminent danger; candid speech between true friends; speech by student to teacher and teacher to student. *Parrhésia* at times also appears in a negative sense, when speech was abused or used by someone driven by passion it easily turned to shamelessness and impudence (Radin 1927: 215–230; Sluiter and Rosen 2004; Dunderberg 2006: 52–55, n. 4).

The philosophical use of *parrhésia* – most often denoting a form of candid, truthful, and open speech – lived on through the Hellenistic schools of the Stoics, Epicureans, and especially Cynics (Foucault in J. Pearson 2001). In the *Cynic Epistles* (Ep. 1) from

Spiritual Seed, the discussion of Valentinus' fragments concludes his monumental work. See Thomassen 2006: note 2. Adam's superior words, Thomassen contends, are the result of him being modelled in the Name of the Primordial-Man and a similar conclusion is drawn by Markschies. See Markschies 1992: 38, note 4.

[10] See for example *Gospel of Truth* 29:9–30:26 where man is depicted lifeless and set with nightmares but when the spirit comes he is able to stand upright. See also *On the Origin of the World* 115:27–116:8 where Adam is unable to stand after the angels formed him but Eve, sent by Sophia, makes him

the second century CE, Socrates is depicted as saying that *parrhésia* is that upon which each person's life is set upright. Diogenes is said to have claimed that παρρησία was the most beautiful thing in the world (Malherbe 2001: 224). *Parrhésia* is presented as the pure expression of virtue and moral freedom, as opposed to those who were driven by their passions (emotions) who turned the use of *parrhésia* into shamelessness and excess; these were un-virtuous people, not in tune with the all-encompassing *logos* (law) of creation.

In the foreground of the concept of *parrhésia* we have the dichotomy between a free citizen's speech and the speech of a slave. The speech and demeanour of a free person differed from that of a slave, whether that person was a slave in the sense of being viewed as the property of another person or a slave to passions. A free person moved and carried himself in a certain way: uprightly and with confidence. In ancient times much stock was placed on how one carried oneself. The Romans made a science of this, which Timothy O'Sullivan has studied in his book *Walking in Roman Culture*. Much could be said about a person just by looking at how they moved. This scrutiny of the body was applied to rhetoric practice, perhaps most vividly exemplified in Quintillian's work *Institutio oratoria*. Quintillian puts much emphasis on the need for any good rhetorician to be in the possession of a firm and healthy body because the firmness of the body was reflected in the speech (book XII). Speech and movement were thus thought to be intimately connected, as O'Sullivan notes: "There was a pervasive belief in antiquity that the movement of the body reflected the movement of the mind" (O'Sullivan 2011: 8). Everyone listened to the speech of a true philosopher because he had earned his right to speak by ridding himself of passion; and a true philosopher spoke with *parrhésia* (Brown 1992: 61–70). The bodily aspect of *parrhésia* is most clearly illustrated in the philosophy of the Cynics who held that *parrhésia* was to be accompanied by a fit and strong body (Odile Goulet-Cazé 2001). The body should be trained in order to be able to withstand exercising one's freedom, which could sometimes come at the expense of worldly comforts, comforts that potentially blinded the mind from higher truths.

Turning to Jewish literature written in Greek we find the embodied connotations of *parrhésia* emphasised; denoting freedom and expressed in posture and general demeanour, of bodily uprightness as a symbol of freedom. This is clear in the Septuagint when we consider the Hebrew word that *parrhésia* (παρρησία) was chosen to supplant. *Parrhésia* only appears once in the Septuagint Pentateuch, in Leviticus 26:13. Here the Jews are being liberated from the yoke of Egypt, and God breaks their chains. We read that "God made you walk with *parrhésia*" (ἤγαγον υμᾶς μετὰ παρρησίας/ ⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠ ⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠ ⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠.). The Hebrew word behind the Greek *parrhésia* is *qō·wm·mî·yūṯ* (⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠), meaning *upright*, *erect*. We cannot know exactly how the Jewish translators reasoned when choosing *parrhésia* for a

upright. Also *Hypostasis of the Archons* 88:5–10 where Adam is unable to stand but a spirit comes and assists the angels.

word that in the Hebrew meant *upright* or *erect*, but it suggests that *parrhésia* was associated with a concept of freedom that was partly expressed by standing and walking uprightly and firmly. This should not surprise us; a free person spoke and carried himself uprightly, firmly, without a yoke to weigh him down. We find a similar use of *parrhésia* in the *Book of Wisdom* chapter 5, but here connected to righteousness. *Parrhésia* is used together with *histémi* (ἵστημι); "the righteous (δίκαιος) man shall stand firm in boldness" (στήσεται ἐν παρρησία). Philo also wrote that the greatest virtue among humans is the ability to present oneself with boldness and firmness toward one's betters, an ability that is contrary to the way of slaves (*Who is the Heir of Divine Things* 1–2).

Another context where *parrhesia* occurs in Jewish and later Christian literature is in highlighting the speech and demeanour of martyrs (Ehrman 2003: 368–369; Perkins 1995). In 4 Maccabees 10:5 for example, *parrhésia* is both connected to firmness of oration and firmness of one's demeanour, a theme that seems recurring in Jewish scripture. We encounter this sentiment in the New Testament also. In Philippians 1:20 *parrhésia* is used to express the firmness Paul feels when he states "that Christ shall be honoured in my body, whether by life or by death" (μεγαλυνθήσεται Χριστὸς ἐν τῷ σώματί μου, εἴτε διὰ ζωῆς εἴτε διὰ θανάτου). In other parts of the New Testament *parrhésia* encompasses both openness and boldness toward God and humans; the spirit of Jesus gives *parrhésia*, which is defined as the fortitude to withstand the awe of God's presence and the ability to convince one's fellow humans (1 *Tim* 3:13, 2:2, *Eph* 3:12ff, *Phil* 1:19ff, *Hebr* 4:16; 2 *Cor* 3:12ff).[11] 1 John presents *parrhésia* as the conduct of the pure hearted before God, those people have access to *parrhésia* who set their hearts at rest in God's presence and those who believe in the Name of the Lord (1 *John* 3:21, 5:14). In short, faith in God gave *parrhésia*, a freedom that was expressed through boldness of speech and body.

In this way *parrhésia* is associated with a common theme in ancient times: the theme of stability and immovability – in both speech and demeanour – as representing transcendence. This *topos* of immovability in antiquity has been explored by Michael A. Williams in his book *The Immovable Race*. Here Williams investigates the mention of 'the immovable race' (⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠ ⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠)[12] in Sethian texts and connects it to the late ancient philosophical and religious motive of stability (ἵστημι) and unshakeability (ἀσάλευτος) as signs of transcendence and authority.[13] Williams especially

[11] The connection between the Name and *parrhésia* is also found in Acts 4:29–31: the apostles are encouraged to perform the works of god using *parrhésia*, empowered by the Name of Jesus. As side note: later Valentinians, expressed in *Gospel of Truth*, for example, developed an advanced theology surrounding the Name of God, which is often identified with the Son.

[12] This race/generation is mentioned and connected to the recipients of the *Apocryphon of John* in NHC 2.2:20, 2:24; 25:23; 29:10; 31:31–32 and in BG 22:15–16; 65:2–3; 73:9–10; 75:20–76:1.

[13] Williams concludes in this study that the designation 'the immovable race' appearing in several Sethian works is not to be understood as a self-designation used by the race of Seth, nor should one think of a race of humans predetermined to be saved. Rather the term 'immovable race/generation' draws on a long religious and philosophical tradition using similar terminology to designate those who

discusses the term *histémi*, which is often used in the New Testament, and which we have seen is a term that *Book of Wisdom* pairs with *parrhésia*. The theme of immovability drew on depictions of philosophers such as Socrates and Pythagoras who were often portrayed as standing firm and immovable in thought, as well as hero monks, such as St. Antony, who fought evil powers in the desert with his immovable character. Christian monks also practiced the art of upright standing, as a meditation technique (Williams 1985), perhaps most vividly expressed by the Stylite ascetics.

Williams does not comment on the use of *parrhésia* in his study, even though one Sethian text, *Second Treaties of the Great Seth*, utilises the word when expressing the ideal of immovability. In *Second Treaties of the Great Seth* we read of souls that have been resurrected and others that have been discarded. The resurrection is described as an awakening that shakes the world which is in chaos. The resurrected souls are not affected by this shaking because "they walked with *boldness*" (⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧ ⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧) (NHC 7.2, 58, 28–34; Pearson 1996: 172). Again, this time in *Second Treaties of the Great Seth*, *parrhésia* is connected to *a way of carrying oneself*, a firm way of walking which stands in contrast to the chaotic and distressed state of living in the world, stuck in a body subjected to fate and lower powers.

In conclusion, the embodied aspects of *parrhésia* are continuously emphasised by the ancients. Placing these aspects of *parrhésia* in light of contemporary ritual theory concerning the importance of bodily perspectives in human identity creation and meaning making we gain the final piece of the puzzle as to why the bodily aspects of *parrhésia* are so often emphasised. As the anthropologist Richard Hilbert has argued, the body is like a mirror of one's interior makeup, important for both social standing and one's identity (Hilbert 1984: 365–378.). Put differently, in Thomas Csordas's words, thus, there is a distinction between the body and embodiment: "the body is a biological, material entity, while embodiment can be understood as an indeterminate methodological field defined by perceptual experience and the mode of presence and engagement in the world" (Csordas 1993: 135). With this difference in mind we are given the necessary keys to unlock the paradoxes of ancient descriptions of the body as the lowest form of existence while at the same time treating it as a vital tool for mirroring one's social and moral standing. Speaking boldly meant nothing if the boldness was not also embodied. While the biological body could be viewed as not containing value in itself it was still only through it that value could be manifested. Thus, such mundane embodied expressions as standing upright and firm could be, if only the context was right, imbued with the most meaningful representations.

Let us now revisit the context of Valentinus' Fragment 1 and add to its interpretation the meaning of *parrhésia* as upright posture, elucidated in light of theories of embodiment. As a contextualisation, let us begin by looking at some parallel texts and their depictions of the creation of Adam and then finally turn to a reinterpretation of the meaning of *parrhésia* in Valentinus' specific interpretation of the creation scene.

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have reached a certain level of self-mastery, knowledge, evolvement, likened in Sethianism with being

4 Revisiting Valentinus' Fragment 1

Valentinus Fragment 1 deals with the creation of man, the formation of Adam's body by lower angels. Already here, Valentinus is allegorising the Genesis version which identifies the creator as God. But Valentinus did not view the formation of materiality as a result of God's direct actions, but rather a creator god and his minions. Valentinus was far from alone in applying this creative interpretation on Genesis. In Sethian literature we find the same symbolism used. In the Nag Hammadi text *On the Origin of the World*, Adam crawls on the ground for a long time after the angels have created him and only becomes upright through the help of his female counterpart. Eve commands Adam to wake up and he opens his eyes and stands up (NHC 2.5, 115:27–116:8). The lower powers' control over humans is met with standing up against them, literally.

In *Gospel of Truth* we encounter a scene that reminds us of the creation story that emphasises the first humans' ability to stand upright (Pearson 2007). The passage begins with humankind generally being described as in a lifeless state and beset with nightmares but the knowledge of the father, we are told, wakes one up. Then a short passage follows mentioning a spirit that rushes forth and "having extended his hand to him who lay upon the ground, he set him up on his feet, for he had not yet risen."[14] This ends the torture the demiurge-figure called Error is inflicting on the humans.

In the *Gospel of Philip* the "perfect man" (⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧ ⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧) is described as having power over subordinate forces and that it is the power inside that makes living things "stand upright" (⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧) (NHC 2.3, 60:15–31). In the end of the text this is reiterated; we read that as long as peoples' insides are not exposed people "stand upright" (⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧) and live; salvation comes by knowing the spirit that is inside oneself (NHC 2.3, 82:30–84:13). The word used for "standing upright" is *aherat* (⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧), the Coptic equivalent of *histémi* (ἵστημι) (Crum 1939: 537b). Again, standing upright is used as a symbol for facing lower powers that attack the human.

I argue that in Valentinus' Fragment 1 we find the same themes and that this is expressed with the use of the term *parrhésia*; an ability which we have seen includes firmness and uprightness of posture. In several other Nag Hammadi texts the term *parrhésia* is an ability that is used to stand up against evil powers, in the same way as in Fragment 1. In *Authoritative Teaching*, *The Epistle of Peter to Philip* and the *Second Apocryphon of James parrhésia* is connected to "authority" (⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧) and "strength" (⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧), abilities that are to be used to resist the chaotic cosmic powers (NHC 8.2, 134:26–137:13; NHC 6.3, 28:14–22; NHC 1.2, 11:11–17).

As it happens, *parrhésia* is a term that is used once more in the few fragments that we have preserved of Valentinus' writings. Here, too, *parrhésia* is directed against lower

awakened to one's true self, see Williams 1985: chapter 7.

[14] ⌧⌧⌧⌧ ⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧⁻ ⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧ ⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧ ⌧⌧ ⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧. ⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧ ⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧⁻ ⌧⌧⌧⁻ ⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧. ⌧⌧ ⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧⌧ (NHC 1.2, 30:19–23. Transl. Attridge and MacRae in Attridge 1985: 101).

powers attacking the human. In Fragment 2 we read that the human heart is infested with evil spirits and that it is only through the Son that one can disperse them. Jesus is identified as the Father's *parrhésia*: "There is one who is good, his boldness is the manifestation of the Son" (εἷς δέ ἐστιν ἀγαθός, οὗ παρρησία ἡ διὰ τοῦ υι οῦ φανέρωσις) (Clement, *Stromata* 2.114:2–6). *Parrhésia* was obviously an ability that Valentinus associated with standing up against the lower powers of the cosmos. Valentinus was also clearly inspired by the theme of immovability. In Fragment 3 he describes Jesus in much the same way as the immovable philosophers used to be described – and how later monks would be described – as transcendent to the point that the bodily functions did not limit him (Clement, *Stromata* III, 59) (Brakke 2006; Williams 1984).

Thus, with *parrhésia* Valentinus signalled firmness of mind and body, abilities that were used in order to resist the powers of the cosmos, to signal Adam's superiority. It is here argued, first of all, that the bodily aspects of the rhetoric concept *parrhésia* have been overlooked in the reception of ancient rhetoric in Christian and Jewish literature, and that through highlighting the insights brought to us by ritual theory of embodiment we are able to elucidate the central role played by the body in processes of transformation. Secondly, it is argued that the bodily aspects of *parrhésia* support the reading that it is Adam who expresses *parrhésia* in Valentinus' Fragment 1. Most evidence points to the fact that the seed of the inserted finer substance causes Adam to "utter words surpassing its form" (ὅτε μείζονα ἐφθέγξατο τῆς πλάσεως) and that this behaviour is qualified with the word *parrhésia*.

The interpretation of Fragment 1 put forward here – that Valentinus' use of *parrhésia* includes bodily connotations of uprightness – is supported in the following principal ways: (1) this use of *parrhésia* occurs in other ancient Judeo-Christian texts as well, for example in Leviticus, *Book of Wisdom*, and *Second Treaties of the Great Seth*, as a term denoting the upright and firm physical and oral demeanour of a free/saved person; (2) similar creation scenes as in Valentinus' Fragment 1 depict Adam as first unable to stand up, but then gaining firmness (of body, mind, and speech), which is identified as the cause of the anger and distress of the angels; and lastly (3) *parrhésia* as well as the symbol of a firm body (among Cynics, in monastic literature as well as the Nag Hammadi library) are employed as weapons directed toward cosmic authority (powers who gain access to humans through the body), a topic which seems to have interested Valentinus. These insights reflect fruitful application of ritual theory and embodied perspectives on ancient material.

In light of the above discussions, let us revisit the opening scene in Valentinus Fragment 1 and offer an alternative translation:

> And as it were, fear of that form came over the angels, when he uttered words surpassing his form and spoke standing uprightly, because of the one who invisibly planted a seed of the higher essence within it.

Adam is depicted as uttering superior words because a depositor – probably the Logos-Saviour – inserted a higher substance in him. This is qualified with the word

parrhésia, which suggests that Adam was speaking boldly and freely – which would have included an upright and firm posture. Ismo Dunderberg is correct in stating that parrhésia should be understood as an ability directed toward authority. With the addition of the above considerations, we gain the embodied nuance of this authority, which fits the scene in Fragment 1 perfectly, and which most likely is the very reasons Valentinus chose to use the word parrhésia for depicting this scene in the first place. The angels moulded Adam's body into an inferior form, into a slave unable to stand up to their authority. But the insertion of a divine substance enables Adam to gain his freedom and allows him to speak like a free person, that is, unhindered by cosmic authority, boldly and uprightly.

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Chapter 13: "Man Who Catch Fly with Chopstick, Accomplish Anything"[14]

Ritualised Bodily Learning and the Pursuit of Excellence in the Martial Arts

Tao Thykier Makeeff

1. Introduction

"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit." This quote is often attributed to Aristotle, but was actually penned by Will Durant in his 1926 book *The Story of Philosophy*. The quote is found in Durant's chapter on Aristotle and is preceded by these lines: "Excellence is an art won by training and habituation: we do not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence, but we rather have these because we have acted rightly" (Durant 1926: 87).

In the present chapter I approach similar notions of excellence and personal growth as habituation in relation to ritualised bodily training in the martial arts. I suggest that such training shares features with activities that we tend to refer to as rituals or ritual-like, and practices that might be defined as ritualisation. Furthermore, I propose that the distinction between ritual and ritualisation, although theoretically important, may also lead us astray. In this chapter I use variations of the term ritual(isation) to cover both concepts, in order to show how distinguishing too strictly between the two potentially obscures our understanding of their similarities, as well as the fact that both are inherently bodily phenomena. I argue that martial arts training differs from many other athletic pursuits in key areas, since martial arts teachers and practitioners tend to employ vague definitions of their end goals, and hence approach those vague or plural goals through obscure methods. Furthermore, borrowing concepts from Game Theory, I suggest that martial arts often function as non-zero-sum games that employ ritualised bodily learning in the pursuit of excellence and personal growth. Fi-

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nally, I propose that ritual(ised) repetition of physical movements changes the human body, leaving an imprint of the actions repeatedly performed deep in the performer, effectively creating an embodied echo of the individual's ritual(isation). My chapter intends to spark interest in the study of martial arts practices within the field of Ritual Studies and related academic fields, and to provide inspiration regarding the potential interdisciplinary value of such research.

2 Martial Arts and Ritual

Much like phenomena such as ritual, ritualisation, and religion, there have been many attempts to define the term martial arts by scholars. Most recently Meyer (2020) has produced an entire monograph on the subject, in which he suggests the so-called Six-Attribute Model of defining what martial arts are, or indeed what they are not, and which martial arts might be classified as related to, or distinct from one another. Since my own research is not narrowly limited to a study of martial arts as an isolated practice but investigates martial arts as an integrated element of culture, that exists in, and is inseparable from other cultural phenomena, such as politics, gender, religion, music, and historical reception, my work builds on a more open-ended approach to defining martial arts which includes military arts, combat sports, duelling, and even firearms practice, inspired by the recent work of Peter Lorge (2012: 3–6). However, I also agree with criticism of the very need for, and possibility of establishing a fixed definition of martial arts, as recently formulated by Trausch (in Bowman 2018).

It is interesting to note, that irrespective of whether one uses a narrow or open-ended definition of martial arts, key features seem to resonate with crucial elements of ritual definitions. For example, Roy Rappaport's definition of ritual as "the performance of more or less invariant sequences of *formal acts and utterances* not entirely coded by the performers" (Rappaport 1992: 5) might just as well be a description of martial arts practice. Similarly, when Bell describes ritualisation as "a way of acting that is designed and orchestrated to distinguish and privilege what is being done in comparison to other, usually more quotidian, activities" (Bell 1992: 74) she might as well have been describing a karate session (historical or contemporary), a duel of samurais or Victorian Era aristocrats, or even a contemporary no-holds-barred cage fight. Interestingly, Bell herself seems to have distinguished ritualising behaviour from martial arts, at least from the uninitiated spectator's view, in somewhat reductionist terms:

> If examples of ritual-like activity can throw light on what goes into the activities of ritualising, they may also clarify the significance of the distinctions people draw between various types of activities, including ritual and non-ritual actions. However, ritual-like heavyweight boxing may appear at times, for most people it is not the same thing as Sunday church service, and the differences are far from unimportant to them (Bell 2009: 139).

Here Bell seems to base her distinction on a presumption of statistics; 'most' people have a more thorough perception of Christian services than of boxing. However, this argument seems to privilege a culturally specific definition of 'most people' and ignores the fact that, although there might be some merit to the argument, the number of people who follow competitive boxing, and recognise it as a highly ritualised cultural practice, is by no means small. Furthermore, the academic study of martial arts disproves the hypothesis that it should not be perceived by practitioners and spectators as ritualised, ritual-like, or as ritual. Regarding boxing, this has been elaborated upon most notably by the sociologist Loïc Wacquant in his seminal work *Body & Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer* (2004). Furthermore, the fact that the period from the early 1960s until the late 1990s, when Bell wrote the aforementioned passage, is widely recognised as the Golden Era of heavyweight boxing, with a large number of legendary fighters such as George Foreman, Lennox Lewis, Evander Holyfield, Cassius Clay/Muhammad Ali, and Mike Tyson, and an enormous growth in boxing literature and documentary films, as well as the popularisation of pay-per-view-fights watched by millions globally, should also indicate, that even if the number of Christians who participated in Sunday services during those decades were higher, heavyweight boxing – and martial arts in general – should not be ignored, but deserves to be recognised as an important cultural phenomenon, and as an arena of ritualisation. The relationship between martial arts and ritual have been addressed by many martial arts scholars in recent years (Lorge 2012; Spencer 2012; Bowman 2018; Bowman 2019). However, there seems to be considerably less interest in this topic by ritual scholars. It is my hope that the present chapter will stimulate increased focus within the field of Ritual Studies, on the potential for scholarship on this rich area of study.

3 Why Should We Care about Martial Arts?

Despite my arguments above, some readers who agree with Bell might object that martial arts are a marginal phenomenon, which is irrelevant for academic study, say in the context of Ritual Studies. But I suspect that such perceptions rest on a lack of knowledge of the field. In fact, millions of people train martial arts and many more watch martial arts competitions. In recent years commercial martial arts promotions such as the UFC and One Championship have catapulted MMA (mixed martial arts) to be hailed as the fastest growing sport in popularity as well as earnings.[1] Unfortunately statistics on martial arts participation are not done consistently every year, and to the best of my knowledge, there are no adequate global surveys, but individual local surveys from the US and the UK still provide a clear impression that martial arts are popular and play a part in the lives of many people. Studies from the US show that in 2020, some 2.45 million people above the age of six had trained MMA for fitness (Lange 2021). The same survey showed that from 2011 to 2020 the number of participants had risen from 1.7 million in 2007 peaking in 2015 at 2.61 million. A

[1] See: Internet site, `https://hub.parimatch.co.uk/campaigns/mma-earnings/`. Accessed 22/04/2023.

Simmons Market Research study of Karate in the US concluded that within a year more than 18 million people in the United States had tried karate at least once, and that adults were "three times more likely to try karate classes compared to children" (Gaille 2018). Another survey by Statista showed that about 3.6 million people above the age of six participate actively in the martial arts industry in the US each year (Gaille 2018). In addition to this, an earlier 2002 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) estimated the number of US practitioners of the Chinese martial art taijiquan for health to be around 2.5 million (Birdee et al. 2009). Similarly, a recent UK survey from 2019 found that there were around 225,000 people participating in martial arts in the UK (Daniels 2021).

It is also interesting that, although on the surface martial arts seem to be about fighting, motivations for practicing martial arts are not exclusively oriented towards self-defence, but also, to a very high degree, towards self-development. A 2010 study by Yong Jae Ko and Yu Kyoum Kim looking at how motivation factors influence participation in martial arts, based on data from the 2004 Battle of Columbus Martial Arts World Games IV (a large US martial arts event), indicated that martial arts participants are very much driven by growth-related motivation (Ko and Kim 2010). Although this personal growth might in some cases be comparable to the growth one could pursue in other athletic disciplines, a defining factor in many martial arts is that personal growth is tied to elements of religion and spirituality, which is illustrated both by the use of religious elements in practical pedagogics and in the vast field of martial arts literature, that combines religion or spirituality with the description (and depiction) of physical movements and techniques.

4 Martial Arts and Religion

The relationship between religion and martial arts is complex, and certainly warrants further study. However, the fact that there is a relationship is simply beyond doubt. As Bowman has argued, definitions of what the primary quality or purpose of martial arts are vary: "Some see judo as a martial art; others insist that it is really 'only' a sport. Some see taiji as a martial art; others argue that it is at best a kind of calisthenics, maybe even closer to a religion than to combat" (Bowman 2019: 9). The intricate relationship between martial arts and religion is not a modern phenomenon. Even the etymology of the term *martial art* demonstrates this. The word *martial* (warlike, pertaining to war), which has been part of the English language since the late fourteenth century comes from the Medieval Latin word *martialis* which is inspired by the name of the Roman god of war, Mars. However, its combination with the word *art* comes somewhat later. The first mention of the term martial art is found in the English fencing manual *Pallas Armata: The Gentleman's Armorie* from 1639, written by an author only known as 'G.A.' Earlier fighting manuals from the fourteenth and fifteenth century such as the *Florius de Arte Luctandi*, the *Liber de Arte Dimicatoria*,

and the *De Arte Gladiatoria Dimicandi* use the term art, and it has been suggested that the use of this term in historical fight manual literature may have been inspired by Aristotelianism (Price 2015). The meaning of the term martial arts has changed through time, and although the *Pallas Armata* uses it to refer to combat techniques used by individuals, it has also been used to refer to the wider notion of warfare strategy, which we find examples of in translations of ancient Greek literature, such as Pope's *Iliad* (1715) and Sotheby's *Iliad* (1831).

There has been a tendency in Anglophone culture, and parts of the world affected by Anglophone culture – the reader notes that I choose to abstain from the troubled term *The West* – to think of East Asian martial arts as being particularly religious in nature or associated with religious practices. Many might associate Japanese martial arts such as karate or aikido with Zen-Buddhism or Shinto or have some notion that Shaolin kung fu is practiced by monks, whereas taijiquan has some affinity for Daoist cosmological theories, such as the complementary dualism of yin and yang or the symbolism of the *Yijing*. This is not entirely wrong, although terms such as *The East* or *The West* make little sense, as they only mask actual geo-cultural distinctions and complexities, and perpetuate artificial and hegemonic divisions of the planet, when in effect these are the product of colonial histories and economic power, rather than expressions of pre-existing categories. Furthermore, the fact that popular (as well as some specialised) perceptions of the integral relationship between martial arts and religion, are shaped by popular culture, such as movies and magazines, rather than by data-based research, warrants a certain degree of caution, when assuming that *Asian* martial arts are more religious that other martial arts. Rather, I suggest, they have historically been described as such, and have been presented as shrouded in mystery, due to orientalist tendencies – tendencies which, in a twist of fate, have also had an impact on how such arts are reproduced and reinvented in their respective countries or ethnic minority populations. As pointed out by Farrer and Whalen-Bridge:

> The term "martial arts" signifies "Eastern" and can be accessed to champion, as a counterdiscourse to effeminizing Orientalist clichés, the contemporary paradigmatic image of the Asian-yet-masculine martial arts icon (think of Bruce Lee). To the degree that this reactionary response is highly predictable, so does the cumulative effect of Asian martial arts discourse serve, in spite of its advocates' best intentions, to reify and falsely unify the notion of a centered, stable, objective Asian culture (Farrer and Whalen-Bridge 2011: 2).

Similar to how martial arts have been instrumental in perpetuating notions of *East* and *West*, they are often used, in conjunction with religion, in what Hobsbawn and Ranger (1983) have famously referred to as the invention of tradition. We see a strong tendency in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to reinvent or reimagine, what is promoted as *historical* martial arts based on fragmented or even non-existing source

material, often in conjunction with religion. These are strategically tied to national, geographic, and ethnic identities and are often based on the previous experience of the founders in other martial arts. There are examples of this from around the globe, from the creative reinvention of Scandinavian so-called 'Viking' martial arts or Slavic Cossack fighting to the First Nations Peoples and Hawaii. Perhaps not surprisingly, martial arts are not only seen as complementary to religion in the construction of group identities. A similar perspective has been offered by Berg-Chan who, discussing kung fu, has suggested that it acts as a "'mediator' for the embodiment/performance of a particular kind of knowledge, that we may call religious in light of the discursive connection drawn to the wider discourse on religions (...) and (Asian) spirituality" (Berg-Chan in Bowman 2018: 77). Hence, it could be argued that ritualised martial arts or martial arts rituals often function as vehicles for the strategic and ritualised performance of both gender and invented cultural and nationalist traditions (see: Judkins in Bowman 2018: 93), as well as methods for personal growth. A similar observation has been made by Grimes, discussing the motives for, and outcomes of the modern re-invention of rites of passage:

> Among many disaffiliated North Americans of European descent there is a growing hunger for compelling ritual experience, especially initiation with its apparent promise of adult identity and spiritual competence. Among people who hold such a longing, initiation does not require solidarity with the ancestors or increased social responsibility; it is rather a means of personal growth and self-enhancement (Grimes 2000: 112).

In the same text, Grimes also makes great observations about tendencies of exotification, which in many ways are similar to the points made by Berg-Chan and Judkins:

> The European American world is known for its aversion to ritual, a distaste cultivated by periodic waves of iconoclasm ("image breaking"), the Protestant reformations, Puritan antiritualism, and American utilitarian pragmatism. Because of this heritage, a half-conscious hunger for ritual drives many to stalking the rites of other times and places in the hope of "finding," "discovering," or "borrowing" them. This desire may express deep spiritual longing, or it may be a fad, but it is persistent (Grimes 2000: 112).

Beyond the role of martial arts as mediators of religion, we also find tendencies to view martial arts as threats to religion, and often, the martial art is perceived as more threatening if it is viewed as culturally alien to the religious context:

> It is dangerous to allow the mind to be influenced by the philosophies associated with the origins of karate and other forms of martial arts. Training that carries overtones of a false religion should be avoided. Some martial arts, such as jujitsu or kenpo, are effectively neutral in terms of spiritual

> content. Others, such as aikido, can be more difficult to separate from non-biblical spiritual practices. Therefore, it is wise for the Christian to use caution before participating in this kind of activity.[2]

My own impression, based on years of research and participation in the field, is that the primary apprehensiveness against martial arts as potential threats to religious purity are found among Christians, although I have also come across debates between Muslims about whether martial arts practice is *halal*. However, beyond the mentioned examples, to the best of my knowledge this tendency seems to be less pronounced.

5 Martial Arts, Personal Growth, and Excellence

When viewed as collective pursuits, the uses of, or resistance against martial arts as vehicles for ritual(ised) historical reception and the construction of nationalist or ethnocentric narratives are highly interesting. But for the purpose of the present chapter, I propose a closer look at the role martial arts play in the ritual(ised) identity construction of individuals. As Gillian Russel (2010) points out, despite dubious historiographies and lineages, people seem to deliberately want to remain ignorant about their martial art, to the point where investment in such counterfactual perceptions seems to be based on an almost religious respect for their practices:

> A piece of the puzzle is that a lot of people treat their martial art as sacred. Not just special, and important and worthwhile – like say, a vocation – but like a religion. Their sensei is basically the agent of the Founders on Earth, infallible on all matters martial, and the writings of the founder are treated as the word of god. Members feel guilty if they don't go, and risk being regarded as morally deficient if they leave (Russel in Priest and Young 2010: 132–3).

Russel also argues, that even when the martial arts in question do not directly have a religious underpinning, there is a notable problem with investment: "Not everyone treats their martial art like a religion; but another, more inevitable, problem is that those who already have beliefs in the area tend to have a lot invested in those beliefs, and the people whose testimony we are most likely to trust have inevitably invested *years* of effort" (Russel in Priest and Young 2010: 135). As she rightly points out, there seems to be a particular tendency in the martial arts to defer to history in ways which are qualitatively different from other athletic pursuits:

> Just as there is a tendency to defer to seniority in the martial arts, so there is a tendency to defer to history. When a budoka says "Kentsu Yabu

[2] See: Internet Site, `https://www.gotquestions.org/martial-arts-Christian.html`. Accessed

> said you should practice your kata thirty times a day," there is a good chance that they aren't just relating an interesting historical fact; that they are actually *telling* you to practice your kata thirty times a day. Such an inference – Famous Historical Master said such and such, therefore you should believe such and such – doesn't pass muster in other areas. Try telling a long-distance runner that Pheidippides (the original marathoner) said that athletes should not spend time thinking about their equipment, but should focus their minds on the gods. They might say something like "Oh yes, that's interesting": but they *wouldn't* infer that they should stop replacing their running shoes every four hundred miles (Russel in Priest and Young 2010: 138–9).

This discrepancy between how martial arts and other athletic pursuits engage with history and authority reveals a defining feature of martial arts; the exotification of practices, lineages, and teachers. In the following pages, I invite the reader to reflect on how and why this might be.

6 Taijiquan and Tennis

What is the difference between tennis and taijiquan? This may seem like an odd question, that some might intuitively feel tempted to answer with a single word: everything. But what is even more odd is, that tennis and taijiquan have actually followed very similar trajectories culturally and historically, but are now popularly viewed as distinctly different types of physical activity. Quite often, taijiquan is referred to as an 'ancient' Chinese art, and practitioners often wear historically inspired clothes and use paraphernalia, such as swords and other weapons that are inspired by pre-Republican China. Tennis on the other hand is popularly considered a contemporary sport, although some people may know that it has been practised in one form or another for centuries. Similarly, the attire and paraphernalia used in tennis may well be inspired not only by practicality, but also by fashion trends or sponsorships, but tennis players would likely not wear sixteenth century clothes although tennis was once played by sixteenth century people. But why is tennis not referred to as an ancient physical tradition when taijiquan often is? After all both arts could be argued to have ancient histories (although this would stretch the definition of the word *ancient* in both cases) and both arts crystallised in their present form rather recently. Proto-tennis is mentioned in early 16th century texts such as the Christian mystery play *The Second Shepherds' Play* where the shepherd Daw gives a tennis ball to the new-born Jesus and earns salvation, and in the Arthurian text *The Turke and Gowin*, where Sir Gawain battles a large group of giants in a game of tennis. Similarly, taijiquan can be traced to the same period, but was only steeped in myth and religious cosmology in the 1800s.

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Although modern taijiquan does have competitive aspects, both in the format known as push hands (*tuishou*) where two contestants wrestle or push each other and in the solo performance format (*taolu*) where contestants compete in aesthetic and technical mastery of choreographies, both *tuishou* and *taolu* have somewhat vaguely defined scoring systems. Furthermore, since the vast majority of taijiquan practitioners do not compete in either of these formats, the primary competitive aspect of taijiquan lies in the much more subtle negotiation of mastery and knowledgeability of the art which takes place in informal communicative situations, which, thinking with Bourdieu (2010 [1979]), is perhaps best understood as a competition of distinction, taste, or cultural capital.

Unlike taijiquan, although it also contains elements of cultural value representations and historical and mythological references, tennis is not oriented (primarily, at least) towards similar vague purposes. It is about scoring points. It has clear rules, a clear purpose, and a clearly defined scoring system. To borrow a concept from Game Theory, tennis is a zero-sum game, whereas many traditional martial arts are non-zero-sum games with unclear definitions of win or loss. Success is negotiated, not fought for within strictly formalised settings. The distinction between sport and art aligns to some extent with the distinction between zero-sum games and non-zero-sum games. In both sports and zero-sum games there can only be one winner, and the winner is the one who defeats the loser(s). Conversely, in non-zero-sum games, everyone can potentially win, or there can be several winners and winning does not rest on the necessity of there being losers. However, even zero-sum games may be manipulated, so that morally just participation is interpreted as an equally great – or even greater – victory than being the formal winner. This manipulation (or inversion) of zero-sum games in the martial arts, through personal interpretative ranking of outcomes, is summed up neatly by the quintessential martial arts life coach Mr. Miyagi from the *Karate Kid* movies: "You show good fight, win lose no matter, you get respect. No more bother." In another one-liner, Miyagi points out that the interpretative potential for inversion in zero-sum games also poses the risk of actually losing, even if one formally has won: "Never put passion in front of principle, even if you win, you'll lose."

7 "Anything Is Possible When You Have Inner Peace"

Adam D. Frank (2006) has pointed to the "search for the little old Chinese man" as a key feature of orientalist and romanticist notions of taijiquan. This resonates with a wider tendency in both martial arts practice and its representation in popular culture, to glorify elderly Asian teachers as vehicles of wisdom, bodily and beyond. In many ways, Mr. Miyagi has helped shape popular notions of the wise Asian martial arts teacher more than any other fictional character. Curiously, Pat Morita the Japanese-

American actor and comedian who portrayed Mr. Miyagi, had never practiced karate before landing the part as a Hollywood movie karate master, which somehow underlines that the character's importance in the Karate Kid films is not as a teacher of martial arts, but as a teacher of the art of life, a purveyor of some kind of undefined *Asian wisdom*. This exotification was underlined by the fact that he played the part with a Japanese accent, although he spoke fluent English, and was asked by producer Jerry Weintraub to use his given Japanese name, Noriyuki, in the credits and billing, in order to sound "more ethnic," rather than Pat, the name he was generally using as an actor and comedian at that time (Schuler 2005). In the *Karate Kid* movie, the racial stereotype of the wise old Asian teacher who has mastered himself, is contrasted with his student and protégé, the young, hot headed Italian-American Daniel LaRusso, who struggles to control his hormones and his temper. As Miyagi quite explicitly tells LaRusso, learning karate is not really about learning karate at all, it is about mastering life and achieving balance through excellence: "Lesson not just karate only. Lesson for whole life. Whole life has a balance. Everything be better." As Paul Bowman (2019: 7) a leading martial arts researcher, paraphrasing Scott Park Phillips, a martial arts teacher and performing arts scholar (2016) puts it, "Martial arts are not about learning how to win a literal war – they are always about other things."

I agree with most of this statement, but would probably either add an 'almost' or an 'also'. Martial arts are almost always about other things – or at least they are always also about other things. Those other things may vary. Often learning (or teaching) martial arts is also about learning (or teaching) subjective and selective versions of history, invented traditions, and cultural niche skills. But I would argue, that a unifying trait is that they are almost always also about excellence and personal growth. This may then manifest itself as historical or cultural 'knowledge', as morality, virility, athleticism (or lack thereof), or asceticism. Furthermore, a common trait, particularly in those martial arts that define themselves as *traditional* – and often tend to downplay formalised competition – is that the criteria for excellence are not clearly defined, but tend to gravitate towards notions of *balance*, *harmony*, *emptiness*, or *inner peace* which in turn are implied to grant access to unlimited rewards. This is put quite bluntly in the animated movie *Kung Fu Panda 2*, when Shifu, the little old martial arts master tell his student, the panda Po, that: "Anything is possible when you have inner peace." We find a similar interpretation of the ultimate goal of martial arts practice in the writings of the controversial martial arts teacher and author of martial arts books and erotic novels Ashida Kim: "Ninjitsu is a way of doing anything or nothing – simply being. Invisibility is merely the focus of the art." (Kim 1981: 152) Somewhat enigmatically, Kim states that being invisible, a seemingly impossible feat, is merely secondary to doing "anything or nothing." Implicitly, we are led to understand that the primary purpose is excellence to the point where there are no limits to one's excellence and hence to one's freedom of choice, being able to do anything you want.

This notion – that excellence achieved within the context of learning martial arts is perceived to lead to general excellence in other areas of life – is also underlined by the

popular notion in martial arts circles of being a "black belt in life" or "at life" (Higgs 2019). This transfer of excellence, ability, or to borrow a term from Bourdieu, *social capital* from the isolated domain of training (and possibly competition) to a wider context is often used to infer that experts at martial arts also, almost automatically achieve excellence in attributes such as leadership, (self-)discipline, morals and ethics, positivity or even a higher degree of sex appeal or success in business – in effect that they become better and more successful human beings. The idea that martial arts do not (only) teach people how to "win a literal war" as Bowman puts it, but teaches them how to be winners in general, is not restricted to the martial arts. In competitive sports in general, there seems to be a tendency to interpret success in athletic competition as a marker for successfulness in other areas of life, such as business.

8 Ritualised Bodily Learning

I am a historian of religion but I am also a martial artist. I have practised various armed and unarmed martial arts for more than two decades and, coincidentally, this is roughly the same amount of time that I have been involved in higher education and research. I began my study of martial arts only a few months after entering the Religious Studies programme at the University of Copenhagen in 1999. At university, I was invited by a fellow student to train Chinese martial arts with a small group taught by a Danish teacher who had recently returned from Xiamen, China, where he had become a disciple (*tudi*) of a martial arts coach at the local sports university. Since then, I have practised many other martial arts such as Filipino stick- and knife fighting, Japanese aikido and iaido, Indian gatka, Korean taekwondo, Russian systema, Olympic wrestling, kickboxing, Thai boxing, Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, and mixed martial arts. I even wrote a thesis about martial arts and religion in 2011 and published a paper on the topic before embarking on the PhD in 2014.

The reason I mention this is that, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, it was not until 2014, when I came under the tutelage of my PhD supervisor, the anthropologist of religion and ritual scholar Anne-Christine Hornborg at Lund University that I began to reflect on my own long history of martial arts practice as a form of fieldwork. Until then, I had only focused on textual studies, although I had used my knowledge of the field of martial arts to reflect upon the context of texts and the social aspects of martial arts and religion. But I had not yet approached my own practice from the perspective of reflexive ethnography. This all changed when I met Professor Hornborg. In the course of our weekly conversations over the next four and a half years, Anne-Christine helped me understand and negotiate my own insider-outsider status in the field of martial arts, and her wise, and dialogue-based approach to supervision helped shift my understanding of how martial arts are akin to rituals, in that they deal with learning through the body, as well as performing it, and with it. It wasn't that our conversations actually dealt with the topic of martial arts all that much. The topic of

my dissertation was the reception of Greek Antiquity among Contemporary Pagans. But her keen understanding of ritual theories, her openness to new fields of inquiry, and her impressive fieldwork experience all influenced my understanding of ritualised bodily learning. Furthermore, she supported my idea of studying a subcultural martial arts milieu as part of my own fieldwork in Athens, Greece (2013–2017).

Hornborg spent a considerable part of her late career studying the religious and ritual aspects of coaching culture and her observations about coaching and rituals in new spirituality could in many ways be said to also apply to martial arts. In particular the commodification, and therapeutification of notions of inner potential: "The new spirituality is a particular feature of neo-liberal society since it invites 'inner potential' to be transformed into a commodity to be bought from coaches or neo-spiritual therapists, to enable individuals to 'use' the universal spiritual force to gain prosperity and self-development" (Hornborg 2011: 266). Another important point, that I had also observed repeatedly when training with beginners in martial arts, was formulated very succinctly by Hornborg. Most bodily practices remain unconscious to most people, but once internalised, become part of our baseline interaction with the outside world: "Mostly, we are not aware of how our body learns and memorises in daily activities and in interacting with the environment. Although bodily practices remain unconscious to us, once we have learnt something through our body, it continues to play an important role in how we situate ourselves in the world and how we perceive others" (Hornborg 2005: 359–360). I believe that Hornborg's observation that rituals among the Mi'kmaq do not just represent societal structures, but that they also "actively negotiate with and rework the individual's lived world" (Hornborg 2005: 381) could also be said to apply to the role of ritual behaviour in martial arts practice. In addition, one must consider the very corporeal nature of martial arts training – and of ritual – which leads me to propose that such practices not only change the lived world of individuals, but the very physicality of the individuals themselves.

In addition to Hornborg's own influence on my approach to the academic study of martial arts, her efforts to invite Ronald Grimes to Sweden meant that I was able to learn from him as well, and engage in stimulating conversations, that I still cherish the memory of enormously, both on my wider topic, and on the topic of martial arts and ritualised bodily learning. As it turned out, in addition to Professor Grimes' vast knowledge of physical traditions and innovative approaches to the body and ritual, he had previously practised karate, which I believe is hinted at in his paper entitled "The Theatre of Sources" (1981) on Jerzy Grotowski's project and artistic period of the same name, that began around 1976. In the paper, Grimes refers to movement exercises taught in the project, that he compares to taijiquan and yoga, and describes as a "generative grammar" that contained the "kinesic seedbed out of which other events sprang as offshoots." Grimes furthermore describes these exercises as "a summary of the 'gestural competence' of the project, in the way that katas constitute a grammar of karate competence" (Grimes 1981: 69). Despite the inherently physical and corporeal understanding of ritual practices in Grimes' work, he does seem to separate rituals

as events, from the physical engagement in them by their performers: "A ritual is an event. Since an event is not a stone or a building, it persists for a moment and then disappears. Since the 2007 Santa fe Fiesta died in the doing, I can only represent it, not present it" (Grimes 2014: 96).

This point by Grimes made me reflect on the relationship between ritual and choreographed or formalised movement, such as that of the martial arts. Since the ritualised choreographies of martial arts are quite often repeated until they are internalised and literally become part of the performer's body – just as the performer's body becomes part of them – it could be argued that martial arts movements and choreographies might be viewed as rituals that can in fact be presented and re-presented, and are in fact even present – to some degree – when they are not performed, as muscle memory and nervous system conditioning deep in the body of the performer. This echoes points made by Hornborg:

> I take a critical stance to intellectualism, which has defined the body as a passive object and, as such, only a reflection of ideas and symbolic meanings manifested in ritual practices. By contrast, phenomenology has shown that it is with a mindful body and somatic modes of attention that we approach the world and that bodies are active in learning and remembering. It is not only our mind that constructs identities and "imagined communities"; our body is at work simultaneously, and the Cartesian split between mind and body has generated blind alleys in ritual studies (Hornborg 2005: 356).

The martial artist and researcher of comparative religion, Daniele Bolelli has addressed the mind-body relationship, the ritualised nature of martial arts training and the process of bodily internalisation through repetition through an autobiographical perspective:

> The practice of martial arts is a ritual that helps me to remember who I am. Remembering who I am is the only thing I only need, but it is an never-ending task, because forgetting is very easy, and equally easy is not realising I have forgotten. (...) Even the physical effectiveness of martial arts depends on consistency. Certain movements, repeated hundreds of times, become part of our natural reflexes to the point that they can be executed completely by instinct, without the interference of any rational thought. The body remembers even when the mind is clouded (Bolelli 2008: 63).

The approach to the ritual nature of martial arts training – or any ritualised training one might argue – that I have outlined here might be called holistic, in the wider sense that it attempts an all-encompassing understanding of these activities. Rather than defining ritualising, ritual, or ritualisation as phenomena activities, either as defined by their verbal qualities, or as nouns, I suggest that we cannot separate the actor from

the activity, the body from the ritual(isation), the verb or grammatical object from the grammatical subject. Even after a martial artist dies, in a sense their internalised ritual(ising) remains for a while, embedded in their corpse, in the specific wiring of their nerves, brain, sinews, tendons, bones, muscles, calluses, and scar tissue. This is not only the case with martial artists, but with all living things that engage in ritual(ising) or in any kind of repeated action, one might argue. The prolonged process of repeated movements changes the flesh and becomes it. The body becomes a reflection or a physical echo which lingers for a while even after life has left it, and with it, the last remains of its ritualised bodily practises, its repeated efforts in the pursuit of personal growth and excellence.

9 Conclusion

There are better ways to catch flies than using chopsticks and there are better things to use chopsticks for than catching flies. A basic tenet of *traditional* martial arts is that they address unspecific or tangential goals, often through practices unrelated to actual fighting, and instil in practitioners a trust that having achieved excellence as a human being, through ritualised repetition of combat play or the like, will somehow magically enable one to deal with any situation, even a real fight. However, although this seems paradoxical, in many cases the goal is not real fighting, and hence, better methods would be difficult to devise, since undefined goals simply cannot be reached through specific means. Rather than pursuing specific goals through specific training, many *traditional* martial arts (also) pursue vaguely defined goals through abstract/ non-specific training. The notion of being a 'black belt at life' succinctly sums up one of the key features of much martial arts training: personal growth and the pursuit of excellence. In such martial arts training, ritualisation serves the purpose of assisting in the internalisation of value systems as well as the honing of self-discipline, which in turn are transformed to reflect more abstract qualities inherent in the practitioner.

It is a paradox, that many practitioners of the martial arts would probably be worse off in a physical altercation after years of martial arts practice, because this training is so formalised and ritualised, that it convinces the practitioner of a fictitious and formalised notion of fighting. Practitioners have been conditioned to understand violent encounters through a lens of culturally specific invented history and cosmology, and to adhere to ethical systems that make sense in culturally specific training situations. They have become masters of formalised play-combat, and in the process, have actually moved themselves further away from the reality of real violence. However, considering that research has shown that the primary motivation for martial arts training is not the survival of real-life violence, but the refinement of character and the pursuit of excellence and personal growth, winning a fight against another person is less important than winning the fight against oneself.

In conclusion, whereas it would be normal to criticise a tennis coach who made students worse at playing tennis than they were before they began their training, the same logic does not apply in all martial arts. Due to the vague definition of goals and the focus on ritualised bodily learning and the pursuit of excellence and personal growth, in many martial arts, all participants are winners, particularly if they become 'black belts at life' and through the endlessly repetitive training, their excellence is ritually imprinted on their very meat and bones, to the point where their efforts linger as physical echoes of ritual(isation) even after death.

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Part 4: Rituals in Regional Perspectives: African Christianity and Islam

Chapter 14: Al-ṣalāt: the Ritual of Rituals in Islam(15)

Jonas Otterbeck

In this chapter, I contribute to the age-old discussion of rituals as central to group meaning-making (Durkheim 2008; Geertz 1966),[1] arguing that this is an important way to understand rituals, if put in context. Further, I suggest that if the focus on meaning-making is combined with theories inspired by discourse studies in the Foucauldian tradition the result can also be useful for those with a greater focus on the individual's relation to rituals. To illustrate this, I have chosen to engage in a very detailed description of the ritual of rituals in Islam – *al-ṣalāt*,[2] the daily prayers – while making theoretical points. Finally, I present the key findings.

1. Approaching *al-ṣalāt*

There are numerous Islamic rituals. Some are well-known and almost universally practiced, like *sawm*, fasting, while others are debated. For example, while Sunnis generally embrace the *tarawīḥ* – collective extra evening prayers during Ramadan – Shiites typically do not. Yet other rituals may only be known and performed by a certain group, locally or regionally. *Al-ṣalāt*, on the other hand, is unanimously embraced in the discourse of theology of Sunni Islam and the majority branch of the Shiites even though the pronunciation and term may vary in different regions; *namāz*, for example, is the widely used Persian word for *al-ṣalāt*. There are also types of prayers that are separate from the daily prayers and known by other terms; in fact, there is a rich and precise terminology for different types of prayer from private contemplation to communal rituals (Parkin and Haedley 2000).

According to a *ḥadīth* in *Ṣaḥiḥ Bukhārī*, the task of *al-ṣalāt* was given to Muslims by Allah on Muhammad's ascendance voyage to the heavens (*al-mi⊠rāj*), which is claimed to have happened in his lifetime. In a didactic story, Muslims are first prescribed by

[1] Parts of this article overlap with my previous publication in Swedish called "Det rituella livet [the Ritual Life]" in S. Olsson and S. Sorgenfrei (eds), *Islam: En religionsvetenskaplig introduktion* (2021, Stockholm: Liber).

[2] The Arabic word is often written salah in English.

Allah to perform *al-ṣalāt* fifty times a day. Muhammad leaves Allah's presence and encounters Moses waiting for him, eager to know what Allah is asking of the Muslims. Moses convinces Muhammad to return to Allah as fifty times per day is a too heavy burden. After the fourth visit – when tasked to pray five daily prayers – Muhammad refuses to reappear before Allah as he feels embarrassed (*istaḥyaytu*), even though Moses encourages him to do so. The message to Muslims is clear: it could have been more than five a day – be grateful.

The Arabic noun *ṣalāt*, or its plural *ṣalawāt*, is mentioned eighty-two times in the Quran. A typical Quranic quote containing this noun is 20:14: "Indeed, I am Allah, there is no deity but I, therefore serve me (*a☒budnī*) and establish/keep up (*aqimi*) the prayers (*al-ṣalawāt*) for my remembrance (*dhikrī*)." Several of the most crucial ideas about *al-ṣalāt* are present in this quote. There is only one god, people are as servants to Allah (☒*abd*, pl. ☒*abīd*) and should engage in the remembrance of Allah (*dhikr*) through prayer, not least *al-ṣalāt*. Performing *al-ṣalāt* is one of the main, recurrent rituals of *al-☒ibadāt*, the duties before Allah, and part of all the lists of the pillars of Islam (most Sunni lists have five, most Shiite lists have six or seven).

The message is repeated in the Quran, in the writings and preaching of Islamic scholars and within the social groups and institutions to which people with a Muslim background belong. It is a hegemonic message with the strongest possible plausibility structure backup that resonates through Muslim lives. Historically, it was not news when it was introduced. The idea of a sole deity to which believers are in a submissive relation, a relation that requires of the servants to pray and actively remember the deity, has long roots stretching way back before the prophecy of Muhammad. It is evergreen in the region, acknowledged by both historians and the historiography of the Quran: for example, in 14:37 in relation to the prophet Ibrahim or in 2:38–9 in relation to Ādam and Ḥawwāʾ.

However, the Quran does not describe *al-ṣalāt* in detail, neither the movements, nor the words to be uttered, nor the times of prayer (only that there are prescribed times, 4:103). To establish the exact form, Islamic scholars have sifted out details from the Quran and the sunna – that is, the narratives about behaviour, rulings, and interpretations mainly by Muhammad, but also his companions, that can be found in the collections of *aḥādīth*, the reports about this. The most famous collections of *aḥādīth* are well structured into sections, often called *kitāb* (book). For example, in my edition of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, nine volumes with parallel English and Arabic text, much of Volumes One and Two is devoted to rituals surrounding different forms of prayer, not least *al-ṣalāt*.

Different schools of interpretation have established overlapping versions of how to perform *al-ṣalāt*. However, all agree on the importance of it and that if a Muslim repeatedly fails to perform it, that person only remains Muslim in name. In the grave, angels will treat such a person harshly after this is admitted. Thus, two of the most powerful disciplinary tools known to humankind, that of inclusion/exclusion and reward/punishment – in this case, both in this life and the afterlife – support the idea

of *al-ṣalāt*. The choice to perform *al-ṣalāt* or not can be used as a fine illustration of Foucauldian theories of disciplinary discourses (Foucault 1972, 1997). The risk of social exclusion, including the threat of being subjected to sanctions, rumours, violence, and punishment in hell, contrasted with the promise of social inclusion and paradise, invite internalised disciplinary mechanisms, consciously or not, to play out. Promises and threats have a performative quality. Whether fulfilled or not, they have the potential to act discursively upon believers, creating hopes, expectations and fears (Kapchan 2016), at least up to the point when the surrounding society relaxes its pressure or loses the plausibility structures supportive of *al-ṣalāt*. Without such support it is likely that theological ideas striving for hegemony will not have the same reach.

All schools of interpretation will also emphasise the importance of performing movements and speech acts according to a script, making them highly formalised and difficult to disrupt (Bell 1997: 140). Deviation will invalidate prayer. In fact, deviation may be seen as challenging the legitimacy of the act as inherited knowledge from the first community of believers (Bowen 2000). Most Muslims will know the rules and regulations of *al-ṣalāt* through the writing and teaching of Islamic scholars or simply by being taught by parents, peers, and teachers and by copying others. Further, the internet is full of advice but also questions that indicate an ongoing argument about *al-ṣalāt*, not least in environments without a hegemonic Islamic order.

I do not wish to give the impression that *al-ṣalāt* is performed the same way globally. Neither do all Muslims perform *al-ṣalāt* as a part of their faith. I refer the reader to the excellent edited book by Parkin and Headley (2000) for examples. However, for most Muslims what follows should be recognisable.

2 The Times of *al-ṣalāt*

Al-ṣalāt is performed at set times based on the sun's movements across the sky in relation to the conditions in Mecca (which is at latitude 21.4); Table 14.1 explicates these more precisely. Today, two things help regulate the time of *al-ṣalāt*: the call to prayer (*al-adhān*) and exact calculations of the times are widely available on clocks inside mosques, on leaflets, online, or through a digital app.

Table 14.1 When to perform *al-ṣalāt*

+———+————————————+————————————+ | *fajr* | Dawn, before sunrise | 2 | +———+————————————+————————————+ | *ẓuhr* | Immediately after zenith, | 4, or 2 if it is | | | before the middle of the | *al-ṣalātu al-jumu*☒*a* | | | afternoon | | +———+————————————+————————————+ | ☒*aṣr* | From the middle of the | 4 | | | afternoon before sunset | | +———+————————————+————————————+ | *m / After sunset before dusk / 3 / / aghrib* | | | +———+————————————+————————————+ | * | After dusk until (preferably) | 4 Twelver Shiites merge | | ʿishāʾ* | before midnight | *ẓuhr* and ☒*aṣr* as well | | | | as *maghrib* and | | | | ☒*ishā*☒. Consequently, | | | | they perform *al-ṣalāt* | | |

| five times but on three | | | | occasions. | +———+———————————+———
————————+

3 *Al-adhān*

As a reminder that *al-ṣalāt* is impending, a call to it is made by a male *mu☒adhdhīn*, although obviously this is not the case everywhere Muslims live. Where Muslims are in a minority, it is common with restrictions of this public call. Further, in North America, Israel, and several countries in Europe, calling over loudspeakers is not allowed or is restricted to the *jumu☒a* prayers, the Friday midday prayer. But even in some places where Muslims form a majority, restrictions may apply: for example, in Tajikistan, calling *al-adhān* using loudspeakers was banned in 2009.[3]

There is both a signalling aspect and a message to *al-adhān*. The former was clear from the very beginning, according to the *aḥādīth* (see *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī* vol. 1, book XI, 577). The first generation of Muslims made suggestions that a call could be made with bells like the Christians or with a horn like the Jews, but ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb suggested that a man should do it and Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ, known for his strong voice, was assigned the task. Although these reports were written down later, they follow a pattern suggesting a need for the early community to mark its difference to other groups. This was done by developing a semiotic repertoire that included its proponents' own distinctive way of calling to prayer. Once, it was men with strong voices who called the *al-adhān*, today the exclamations are amplified with megaphones or loudspeaker systems to overpower the noise of modern cities.

Regardless of people's relation to the call, as it is sound waves it puts people in a relation to it when heard, just like church bells or sirens. The sound of *al-adhān* is intertwined with complex perceptions about aesthetics, the sense of belonging, tradition and continuity, duty and the very flow of time. It is also connected to ideas of territory and domination, as can be seen both in Muslim discourse and anti-Muslim discourses in Europe adamant about not allowing *al-adhān* (Shavit and Spengler 2016). The following is recited, according to the Sunni Hanafi school:

> *allāhu akbar* (4 times) Allah is greater.
>
> *ashhadu an lā ilāha illā allāh* (2 times) I testify that there is no deity but Allah.
>
> *ashhadu anna muḥammadan rasūlullāh* (2 times) I testify that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.
>
> *hayya ☒alā al-ṣalā(t)* (2 times, the final t is silent) Come to prayer!
>
> *hayya ☒alā al-falāḥ* (2 times) Come to salvation (or "joy")!

[3] It was banned in Tajikistan according to Law No. 489 of 26 March 2009 on Freedom of Conscience

al-ṣalātu khayrun min al-nawm (2 times)

Prayer is better than sleep (only at the fajr prayer)!

allāhu akbar (2 times) Allah is greater.

lā ilāha illā allāh (1 times) There is no deity but Allah.

Just before *al-ṣalāt* begins there is another call, the *iqāma*. The same phrases are said, only faster and at a lower volume, only heard in and around the place of *al-ṣalāt*. The *mu☒adhdhīn* adds a phrase after "Come to salvation," *qad qāmati al-ṣalāt* (2 times), meaning the prayer has begun. In Twelver Shia, the calling is different in some respects, and includes the phrase "I testify that ʿAli is Allah's chosen friend (*wālī*)" after the one about Muhammad.

Core ideas of Islam are reiterated in *al-adhān*: the idea of Allah's unique greatness, Muhammad's role as messenger and the importance of prayer. The message is so well-known that many non-Arabic speakers, Muslims as well as non-Muslims, will be aware of it regardless of their ability to understand the embellished recited words. It can even be appropriated in the emotional aesthetics and nostalgia of non-Muslims living in Muslim contexts. Obviously, some do not like the sound of *al-adhān* (Shavit and Sprengler 2016), yet, as the call is made repeatedly during a day, it risks not being noticed while being heard. The semiotics of this archetypical Islamic sound and its message can easily be bracketed in the flow of everyday life.

4 Purifying the Body and *al-ṣalāt*

The body is regulated by ideas about the ritual purity of the believer (*ṭahāra*). To obtain ritual purity, the adherents perform ablutions (*wuḍū☒*), a cleansing ritual in which the hands, oral cavity, nose, face, head, ears and feet are washed in water, most parts being washed three times. The body's right side is purified first which reinforces a ritualised separation of the body into a preferred right side and a secondary left side. This also manifests in some ritualised behaviour connected with the left and right hands and feet and is thus not an isolated phenomenon. Before beginning *al-wuḍū☒*, believers declare, in their heart, before Allah, that they have the intention (*niyya*) to perform it, adding *bismillāh* (in the name of Allah). After *al-wuḍū☒*, the words of the testimony (*al-shahāda*) are said, attesting that there is only one deity, and that Muhammad is the messenger. If people are already certain that they are ritually pure they may skip it under certain circumstances.

The body and its clothes can easily become ritually unclean. For example, clothes stained by urine, menstrual blood, semen, or the saliva of dogs (but not oil, paint, or dust) are unfit to wear at *al-ṣalāt*; however, it is enough to try to get rid of visible stains with water. The body itself can also become ritually impure according to a basic

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logic. What leaves the body in the form of urine, faeces, vomit, menstruation blood, semen, excessive farting, *et cetera* may cause ritual impurity, as do certain activities, especially sex. Some ritual impurities can be handled by *al-wuḍū*☒, but some, like intercourse, require *ghusl*, the washing of the whole body. Strong smells and bodily needs and urges are supposed to be bracketed out in *al-ṣalāt* although bodily odour from stale sweat is not targeted as ritual impurity. The selection is culturally specific. Limits are in large part arbitrary and illustrate Mary Douglas' "dirt as matter out of place" (1992: 35) thesis excellently.

This ritualisation of the body and accompanying ideas about ritual purity are complexly interwoven in everyday life and resonate with age-old notions of the cleanliness or impurity of dogs, right and left hands, menstruation, sex, *et cetera*. To understand the body in relation to *al-ṣalāt* and the idea of the place of prayer, relations to both time and space are of importance.

5 Performing *al-ṣalāt*

The prayer consists of words and movements grouped in *rak*☒*āt* (cycles of regulated movements, sing. *rak*☒*a*) performed in the direction (*qibla*) of Ka'ba in Mecca. The words of *al-ṣalāt* are usually said in Arabic. According to Islamic scholars, it is important to perform *al-ṣalāt* without rushing it. It should preferably be performed with others but can also be performed alone.

Al-ṣalāt is regulated according to a dualist gender system. Two sexes are assumed, and space and roles are arranged accordingly. Classically, when a woman leads prayer, only other women are supposed to pray with her. Historically, few have challenged this but in recent years, a couple of activists have broken with the pattern, the most famous of whom is Amina Wudud, who led a prayer for a gender-segregated group in New York in 2005 (Calderini 2021). At home, on the other hand, women with religious authority have been known to lead mixed prayers, and I have witnessed such occasions. Obviously, *al-ṣalāt* can be performed at the mosque, but also in other places. Following classical theology, it is perceived as a duty for Muslim men to pray together in a mosque during the *jumu*☒*a* prayer, but not for women; in fact, in some areas – Afghanistan, for example – women have not been allowed in mosques. In many mosques, however, there is space for women in special rooms or sections, sometimes with a separate entrance and a designated room for women's ablutions. A lot of women wear headscarves during *al-ṣalāt* – or arrange them to accord more closely with pious ideals – even if they do not do so in everyday life; the same goes for some men who wear a prayer cap (Otterbeck 2010).

The advice of how exactly to perform *al-ṣalāt* differs slightly between different schools of law. For example, only Shiites lay their foreheads on a flat, round clay stone from Karbala or any other place of importance to Shiites when they pray, although all orders are adamant that the corporal performance is as important as the words, if

not more important (Parkin and Headley 2000). Faulty practices invalidate the prayer. Below is a description in accordance with the Hanbali school, which does not provide different advice for men and women (otherwise common) apart from spatial separation.

Al-ṣalāt begins with worshippers standing, silently proclaiming the intention (*niyya*) to pray. They bring their hands to their ears with palms facing forward, and state, "*allāhu akbar* (Allah is greater)." They cross their hands over the abdomen just under the navel (typically Hanbali), placing the right hand over the left. They fix their gaze on the floor at the place where their forehead will touch the ground and then recite silently, "*subḥānaka allahumma wa bi ḥamdika wa tabāraka ismuka wa ta☒ālā jadduka wa lā ilaha ghayruka* (Glory be to you, O Allah and praise be upon you. Blessed be your name and exalted is your majesty and there is no deity but you)." They quietly add, "*a☒udhu billāhi min al-shayṭān al-rajīm*, (I take refuge with Allah from the stoned Shaytān)," and "*bismillāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm*, (In the name of Allah, the merciful and compassionate)."

The worshippers then recite the first *sūra* (chapter) of the Quran, *al-fātiha*, in which the believer asks for guidance to the straight path (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*) and praises Allah as the lord of humanity and the worlds. After *al-fātiha*, the word *āmīn* (amen) is added after a short pause. Then they bow, put their hands on their thighs and say, "*allāhu akbar*," and then silently, "*subḥāna rabbī al-☒aẓīm* (Praise be to my lord, the magnificent)," at least once but preferably three times. The same applies to anything below when I stress at least once. They stand tall again saying, "*sami☒ allah li man ḥamidahu* (Allah listens to the one who praises him)," while raising their hands up to their shoulders, and "*rabbanā laka al-ḥamd* (Our Lord, to you belongs the praise)." The worshippers drop to their knees, fold the upper body forward and touch the ground with their hands, forehead and nose (the nose is typically Hanbali, but is only recommended), while saying "*allāhu akbar*" during the movement. This is called a *sujūd*, prostration, a word that shares etymology with the word *masjid*, mosque, the place where one prostrates. "*Subḥāna rabbiya al-a☒lā* (Blessed be my lord, the exalted)" is said quietly, at least once. Then the worshippers straighten their backs, remain kneeling with hands on thighs, and say, "*Rabbi ☒ighfirlī* (Lord, forgive me)," at least once. Then they prostrate themselves again and repeat the process, then straighten their backs and say, "*allāhu akbar*." A *rak☒a* has been performed.

After the second *rak☒a*, they quietly recite *al-tashahhud*, the confirmation of the faith:

> *al-taḥiyyātu lillahi wa al-ṣalawātu wa al-ṭayyibatu.* The tributes, the prayer and the good are for Allah *al-salāmu ☒alayka ayyuhā al-nabiyyu wa raḥmatullāhi wa barakātuhu.*
>
> Peace be upon you, O Prophet, and the grace and blessing of Allah be upon you
>
> *al-salāmu ☒alaynā wa☒alā ☒ibādillāhi al-ṣāliḥīn.*

Peace be upon us and upon the righteous servants of Allah

ashhadu an lā ilāha illa allāh

I testify that there is no deity but Allah,

wa ashhadu anna muḥammadan ☒abduhu wa rasūluhu.

and I testify that Muhammad is his servant and messenger.

After that they say, "*allāhu akbar*" and any additional *rak☒a* is performed. The last ends with the believers sitting and silently reciting "*al-ṣalawātu al-ibrahīmiyya*," a prayer that asks Allah to bless both Muhammad and Ibrahim and their families. Then they recite silently:

allāhumma innī a☒ūdhu bika min ☒adhābi jahannam, O Allah! I seek your protection from the torments of hell,

wa min ☒adhābi al-qabri wa min fitnati al-maḥyā wa al-mamāt, and from the torments of the grave, and from the temptations and strife of life and death,

wa min fitnati al-masiḥi al-dajjāl,

and the temptation and chaos of the false masiḥ al-dajjal [that is, the equivalent of the antichrist].

After this *du☒a*, supplications from the tradition can be added, tailoring the content to the individuals' needs: for example, "*rabbi ighfirlī wa li wālidayya rabbi irḥamhumā kamā rabbayānī ṣaghīra(n)* (My Lord, forgive me and my parents. My Lord, show them mercy as they showed me when I was a child)." Then they turn their faces to the right and say, "*al-salāmu ☒alaykum wa raḥmatullāh* (Peace be upon you and the grace of Allah [upon you])." This greeting is to the angel who writes down one's good deeds. The same is done to the left, greeting the angel who writes down one's bad deeds. This concludes the formal part of *al-ṣalāt*.

6 The Worldview

If understood, the spoken words reiterate the overarching worldview of Islam in line with *al-adhān*. Muslims are cast in their role as servant (*☒abd*) to Allah – the Lord of all things (*al-rabb*), the magnificent (*al-☒aẓīm*), the exalted (*al-a☒lā*) – as they ask for guidance to stay clear of temptation or strife *(fitna)* and hell *(jahannam)*. Some recurring names are significant to the world order. Muslims ask for protection from *al-shaytān al-rajīm* (the stoned Satan, that is, the rejected) and *masiḥ al-dajjāl* (the antichrist of Islam), the assumption being that these can actively lead believers astray, while Allah may help believers keep to the straight path. In addition, Allah is asked to

bless Muhammad as Ibrahim was blessed. The servants are in a precarious position in a linear drama starting with the double exile of Ādam and Ḥawwāʾ, on the one hand, and Iblīs/Shayṭān, on the other, that will continue until *yawn al-qiyāma*, the day of reckoning at the end of times when all shall be judged by Allah. It is well attested that the threat of hell and the promise of heaven is very much alive among contemporary Muslims and has been so throughout history (al-Issa et al. 2020; Lange 2016; Otterbeck 2010).

Even if not understood in detail, many words are likely to be familiar, especially to those repeating them daily, irrespective of their level of Arabic, as many formulations and expressions can also be found in everyday language in Muslim majority contexts. At the very least, the words will function as phrases and be internalised as such regardless of comprehension, and their meaning might dawn on later occasions (Kapchan 2016). But as the worldview is generally found in Islamic beliefs, the overarching meaning is likely only to escape the few.

7 The Embodiment

The involvement of bodies in rituals can be understood through the meaning-making aspects of the involvement but also through the affects surrounding embodied practices. The bodily movement of the prayer rituals are reminders of other semiotic resources that have entered Islamic tradition to create an Islamic corporality. The prayer ritual incorporates a very widespread symbol of submission, prostration. Already present in the first states and city-states of the Middle East, the gesture's meaning is deeply ingrained in the cultures among which Islamic rituals first took place. In this case, it evidently expresses the worshippers' submission to Allah. Further, prostration before power is common in popular culture and again difficult not to connect with submission, at least on a primary interpretative level (Eco 1994). Frequent prostration may cause a mark on the forehead (*zabība*) referred to as a sign of piety. The mark inscribes the embodiment and, additionally, serves as a reminder of the *al-ṣalāt* for the individual and in public.

Another important feature is the lining up. Straight lines collectivise the worshippers and even if coordination between practitioners is not quite the same as in an expertly performed military parade, many act in reasonable coordination. Acting together with others increases the level of compliance with the expected, disciplining the participants to find a direction in their performance of the bodily discourse of *al-ṣalāt*.

Being non-Muslim myself, I have only performed *al-ṣalāt* once, in Xanthi in Greece in the noughties. Out of curiosity, I visited a small mosque but found no one who shared a language with me. As it was around prayer time and the ten men who were about to pray likely found no other reason for my presence than prayer, they invited me to join them. As declining would have been impolite, I lined up and went through the movements with the rest of them. I had attended *al-ṣalāt* frequently enough to

know what to do but not fully what to say. Imitating is, however, not the same as embodying. Instead of a smooth series of movements anticipating the move to come, I strung together poses from memory, reactive to the people around me. Internalised rituals are embodied competences; the ability to sit, stand, bow, or kneel according to orthopraxy is the result of practice in both senses of the word: training and performance. While words can be internalised and yet ignored or not understood, movements are more immediate. The preparations through ablution, getting to a mosque or unfolding a prayer carpet, the compartmentalisation in time and space, the collective directionality, and the almost universal symbolism of subjection through prostration are hard to ignore.

8 The Sounds of *al-ṣalāt*

The sounds of *al-ṣalāt* are not restricted to *al-adhān*, although that is iconic. The sound of the collectively pronounced words, the silences between words, the rustling of clothes when people prostrate themselves is part of a sonar texture. Participating in *al-ṣalāt* is a listening act, to use a concept from Kapchan (2016). The control of sounds is embodied through the listening act that accompanies practice. The formation of the words, the right strength of voice, the right silence at the right place, require technologies of the self (Foucault 1997), which imply discipline, training, and repeated performance. Sounds have the potential to create long-lasting emotions merging with the idea of the sacred. While I knew the movements of *al-ṣalāt* and the expected sound performance when praying in Xanthi, I had yet to be sufficiently advanced in my listening to be able to fully participate with the right words. Indeed, *al-ṣalāt* is also a symbolic listening act as the participants raise their hands to their ears, ready to listen. Furthermore, the ritual contains a normative statement about Allah's listening: "Allah listens to the one who praises him." The listening becomes symbolic of the interaction.

Also to be considered is the aesthetics of sounds. Some will have nostalgic relations with the sounds of particular mosques, not only their decoration and architecture. Grand mosques, like churches, provide soundscapes that are as specific as fingerprints. Sound travels in particular ways and architects strive to control this (Gül 2019), while, clearly, smaller mosques or *muṣallā* (prayer halls) may not offer this experience. Affective listening acts suggest that religious authenticity involves sound texture.

9 The Power of *al-ṣalāt*: *Some Sort of Conclusion*

Al-ṣalāt allows believers to allocate a fixed time, in a certain space, under specific conditions, to connect to Allah. The routine repetition of ritualised, embodied movements produces a "ritualized body" (Bell 1992: 98). The speech acts repeat and reinforce the central creed of Islam. The listening acts firmly situate the participants in relation

to the many sounds of the ritual. Taken together, this allows for a role-taking regulated by discourse that can be seen as liberating and spiritual but also inhibitory and invasive, depending on perspective. From a scholarly perspective we need to acknowledge the ritual as powerful and ordering without attributing to it the interpellation powers suggested in Althusserian theory (1971).

In *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed (2006) discusses the power of directionalities in how a life is led and envisioned. The directionalities are formed in relation to powerful discourses upheld by significant others and institutions that together form plausibility structures: social structures that make the discourses of what is expected – now and in the future – potent and formative; they serve to orient. Opting for alternatives, resisting, may mobilise disciplinary techniques and position people as deviant – disoriented – and in need of help or condemnation.

In Islamic practices, many (exact figures are of no importance for my argument) are schooled into a close relation with *al-ṣalāt*. Early in life, a directionality is laid down. A childhood of viewing, listening, perceiving, and playing *al-ṣalāt* is followed by periods of learning the performance, the practice and upholding of it, although slips are tolerated and rationalised – by narratives about youth, for example. *Al-ṣalāt* is present in language, aurally in the soundscape of cities, villages, and homes, visually in the cityscape through minarets and their mosques, and for many, it is emotionally embodied and discursively anchored in the directionalities expected. Thus, the practice and discourse of *al-ṣalāt* have great potential to become a part of what Muslims relate to actively in their subject formation, irrespective of whether attempting to perform or shun the ritual (Mahmood 2006; Topal 2017). Not taking part in this may challenge the meaningfulness of the ritual to others and may cause people to rethink the boundaries of whom they include in their perception of 'we' (Henkel 2012).

In a study about *al-hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca, Abdullahi Hammoudi (2006) claims that the immense force of the rituals takes on a supra individual quality. In his anthropoetic description, the rituals make the pilgrims perform the worship. The formalised steps, words, deeds, and emotions, inscribed in the body through socialisation, training, and memorisation, are extracted from the pilgrims' bodies more or less irrespective of their independent will. Once someone commits by attending, the choreography of a ritual like *al-hajj* or *al-ṣalāt* leaves little room for improvisation and directs the participants onwards (Henkel 2012). The ritual becomes larger than the group, in a Durkheimian sense.

Hammoudi adds that after performing *al-hajj*, the newly attained status of being 'hajj Abdullahi' had a lasting effect on his self-perception. In a thought-provoking article, Samuli Schielke (2019) poses the question of whether Allah has biopower, considering that the narrative of the existence of Allah is understood as true and is grounded in social structures. An internalised understanding of the existence of Allah makes *al-hajj* and *al-ṣalāt* relevant and acute and thus Allah can be understood as exerting biopower, disciplining bodies, suggesting taxonomies for what is clean, good, and beautiful, and ordering time and space.

Depending on the perspective taken, *al-ṣalāt* can be described as an extremely powerful ritual that interpellates – exercises power – by itself, or as one enacted through the complicity of the micro power practices of myriads of people. I tend to prefer the latter but acknowledge the pedagogical elegance of the former. Regardless, it is difficult not to recognise *al-ṣalāt* as worldview-preserving. Instead of only looking at words and acts, my suggestion is to take a broader look at the integration of *al-ṣalāt* into the social contexts of people, their socialisation, directionalities, and discourses. The meaning-making of rituals is part of the discourses attached to systems of beliefs interlaced broadly with societies. People who live in a relation to a faith will have to relate to powerful rituals – their embodiment and discursiveness – if their relevance is backed up by powerful plausibility structures.

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Chapter 15: Ritual Fields and Participation in the Alevi Festival in Hacıbektaş[(16)]

Hege Markussen

1. Introduction

Twenty years after my initial visit to the Hacıbektaş festival, I visited the town together with the person that became my door opener to Alevi communities in Turkey. In the car, I asked him if he remembered my first visit to Hacıbektaş. He smiled and answered "Oh, yes! You sent a letter to our association saying that you would come to the ceremonies. I replied and offered my assistance." "I was grateful for your reply," I said, "before your letter arrived, I received one from a young man offering to take me to a disco." We both laughed and he shook his head. "I remember how lost you were when you came. I felt like a tourist guide." "How did you endure?" I wondered. He looked at his wife sitting next to him in the car and smiled "Well, you were our guest!"

Indeed, I was a confused guest during my first stay, and like a tourist I was guided around the numerous ritual activities in the town and in its vicinity. Since then, I have visited the festival a number of times in various capacities; as part of different groups from Alevi associations travelling by bus from Istanbul, as a sole researcher finding her own way through the crowded streets and hitchhiking back and forth between the city centre and the nearby areas, and as a guide myself for Scandinavian and Turkish guests. If I was to summarise my experiences of the festival it would be with the concept of 'simultaneity of rituals' coined by Olsson, studying the ritual life of the Bambara people in Mali:

> different actions take place simultaneously within the ritual arena. An individual cannot get an overview of the whole event. This also applies to the participants themselves; the individual actor takes part in certain ritual acts, but may see others out of the corner of the eye (Olsson 2000: 18).[1]

[1] Author's translation from Swedish.

The fact that there are multiple and simultaneous ways of participating in and experiencing the festival, all of which imply a prioritisation of certain ritual activities over others, is crucial for understanding the diversity of participants in the festival as well as the practical possibilities for researchers to produce participant-based knowledge of this ritual arena. The festival is, however, not only a composite of rituals confined to a certain time and space. It is also approached as a cohesive ritual in its own right. Visiting the festival, independent of which ritual actions or observations one choses to engage in – or even the choice of not engaging – counts as ritual participation in the festival. In this chapter, I move between these two ways of approaching the Hacıbektaş festival and explore its nature as *a* ritual as well as an arena of ritual fields for both devotees and researchers alike.

2 The Hacıbektaş Festival and Its Importance for Alevi Communities

The Hacı Bektaş Veli Commemoration Ceremonies and Culture and Art Activities (*Hacı Bektaş Veli Anma Törenleri ve Kültür Sanat Etkinlikleri*) takes place annually from the 16th to the 18th of August in the town of Hacıbektaş,[2] named after the thirteenth century saint Hacı Bektaş Veli. It has been a long-standing tradition from 1964 to the present day, with only minor interruptions in times of crisis.[3] The festival is one of the most important public ritual events for the Alevi minority constituting between 15–20 percent of the population in Turkey and with a considerable diaspora in Europe. As a non-recognised religious minority in Turkey, the Alevi communities have a history of stigmatisation and conflicts with the state dating back to the Ottoman period. In republican Turkey, they have been, and are still, considered Muslims (albeit unorthodox and awry) by the Turkish state and approached as carriers of authentic Turkish rural folklore by parts of the political establishment. Alevis themselves are divided in their view on their religious traditions; some consider it a mystical Islamic tradition, others a religion of its own, and yet others approach it as a specific outlook on life with rituals grounded in Anatolian customs. Since the end of the 1980s, Alevi communities in Turkey and in the European diaspora have engaged in identity political struggles to claim minority rights and increased societal visibility. During the later parts of the AKP regime, the polarisation in society has increased and the situation

[2] Hacıbektaş is located in the province of Nevşehir in Turkey, 236 kilometres south-east of Ankara and 15 kilometres from the Ankara-Kayseri highway. The centre serves as the home of approximately 5200 people (2021) and it is the central administration of about 30 surrounding villages.

[3] The military takeover after the 1980 coup resulted in an interruption of the festival for three years (Massicard 2003: 127). In 1999, the festival ended after one day of activities due to the Izmit earthquake on August 17. In 2020 and 2021 the festival programme was limited due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

for Alevis has deteriorated. The development of the organisation and content of as well as participation in the Hacıbektaş festival has reflected social and political changes through time and has developed into a major and conscious public display of Alevi presence in Turkey.[4] From this perspective, the Hacıbektaş festival is indeed a *festival* in Bell's categorisation of various types of rituals: "[...] in these rituals, people are particularly concerned to express publicly – to themselves, each other, and sometimes outsiders – their commitment and adherence to basic religious values" (Bell 1997: 120).

The festival is also an annual commemoration of the Sufi saint Hacı Bektaş Veli, who is one of the patron saints of the Alevis – and the founding saint of the closely related Bektaşi Sufi order. According to legends, he was a mystic from Khorasan settling down in the small village Suluca Karahöyuk (later to be called Hacıbektaş) in the thirteenth century. Legends also has it that while living there, he performed miracles and attracted the devotion of a growing crowd of followers. He was buried in the village and as a pilgrim destination, buildings were erected at the place, gradually growing into a dervish convent, *tekke*, concurrent with the gradual organisation of the followers into a dervish order, the Bektaşi *tarikat*. The order and the convent were closed down by the nascent Turkish republic in 1925 and reopened in 1964, restored as a museum. The initiation ceremony of the museum was the first Hacıbektaş festival.

The contemporary town of Hacıbektaş bears markers of the medieval presence of the saint. The town centre is defined by the *tekke* and museum close to the town square and the municipality building. This is where the opening ceremony of the festival takes place and the tomb is for most visitors the focal point of their ritual participation. The house where he lived has been preserved and restored and is visited during the three days of the festival. Within a radius of ten kilometres from the town centre you find a number of sacred places related to his life; the cave where he withdrew for solitude and contemplation (*Delikli taş*), the field of the five rocks (*Beştaşlar*) where he is believed to have summoned the rocks to witness for him in front of a judge (*qadi*), as well as a fountain of holy *zemzem* water.

For the three days in August every year, the whole town and parts of its vicinity turn into a ritual space *as actualised*, that is the space where rituals are conducted, participated in, or perceived as a specific ritual (Jedan et al. 2021: 62). Much of the area is public space open to all and to both ritualised and non-ritualised behaviour. The spatial structures of the mausoleum, the *tekke*, and the museum in the centre of the town are, however, typically constructed as to define spaces for ritual actions.

3 The Study of the Hacıbektaş Festival

The production of scientific knowledge on the festival has been based on ethnographical studies, mostly in order to reach a more general understanding of Alevi religious

[4] For an historical account of the development of the festival from 1964 to 1985, see Norton 1992.

and cultural traditions. Rituals are often assumed to have significance beyond visible actions and the researcher aims to uncover these through observation, interview, and participant observation. As such, visiting and participating in the festival has typically been a part of more comprehensive research on Alevi communities.

The multiplicity of ritual and other commemorational and festive activities is noted by researchers experiencing the festival – and also highlighted as a constituent character not only of the festival but also of the diversity of Alevi communities in Turkey and abroad. Understood as a public display of cultural performances and social identification, the festival demonstrates its effectiveness as a ritual through the means of experiencing community, and confirming and strengthening social identity. As such, the festival form has during the latest decades developed into a legitimate form of Alevi cultural performance (Soileau 2015: 93). However, this display of unity and identification may be most effective for outsiders visiting the festival, such as tourists, guests, politicians, and non-Alevi researchers, and even to the general public watching the opening ceremony on TV, reading about the festival in newspapers, or following accounts of the activities on social media. Basing her reflections on fieldwork at the Hacıbektaş festival in 1999 and 2000, Massicard notes ways in which tensions between different groups of participants were manifested through individual claims about other participants' character and intensions, calling them ignorant, superstitious, non-religious, and unfamiliar with the significance of the ritual actions they perform (Massicard 2003: 130). So, although we can talk about a certain kind or level of *communitas* among the participants, the festival as a ritual arena does definitely not transcend societal structures or tensions, but rather puts them on display and bring differences closer. Eickelman and Piscatori have noted similar processes on the social effects of the pilgrimage to Mecca, which they call a dialectic identification between unity and diversity. Heightened individual identification with the Islamic *umma* comes together with ambivalences, as one comes in direct contact with differences and becomes conscious of locality (Eickelman and Piscatori 1990: 3–25).

Although I do not wish to overemphasise the internal divisions among participants at the Hacıbektaş festival, these incongruences are important from a methodological point of view. In ethnographic fieldwork, the researcher often (at least initially) enters the field with the aid or by the guidance of locals. Common ways of attending the festival are by being someone's guest or being a part of a group of devotees travelling to the festival as pilgrims or as spiritual tourists. In both these ways of entering the field and attending the festival, the systematic gathering of knowledge is influenced, directed, and sometimes hampered by the host or the group that the researcher is travelling with. In the end, one might learn more about the worldview of the host or the group than gain complex knowledge about the festival as a ritual or as a ritual arena. This is a common aspect of ethnographic fieldwork and not particular to festival research or the Hacıbektaş festival. It is seldom solely up to the researcher to define the relationships within which ethnographic research is conducted. More often the researcher is ascribed a role which they then will enact. In his reflections on guesthood

as an ethical decolonising research method, Harvey points out the fact that the role of a guest means to step into a space *when invited* and follow protocols in this space established by the host (Harvey 2003: 131). Further, the researcher is often limited to people and spaces that the host finds relevant and accessible for the researcher and their project. For the ascribed position of (spiritual) tourist, the same kinds of limitations are in play, though with a stronger focus of being guided around the field. In sum, one might say that the ascribed roles influence the gaze of the researcher – not only because there will be limits for where to go and whom to meet, but also because the knowledge and understanding acquired will be influenced by the gaze of the host or the guide. So, it is not only simultaneity of rituals and the impossibility of being in two places at the same time which is central to the understanding of the ritual arena, as Olsson points out, but also the position that the researcher has been ascribed, has accepted and is enacting. This gaze is what I want to include in the understanding of the ritual fields of the Hacıbektaş festival.

4 The Ritual Fields of the Hacıbektaş Festival

The term *ritual field* has, within ritual studies, been utilised as a tool in various and not always compatible ways to systematise and understand ritual action. Hoondert and Post (2021), for example, apply an analytical approach to ritual fields as cultural domains in which rituals can be traced. These fields are defined by, and observable through, ritual repertoires as units of ritual practices that share a certain coherence in terms of form and design, or manifestation and participation. The examples they give of such domains are cycle of the year/seasons, cycle of life, religion, memory culture, artistic practices, and leisure practices including tourism (Hoondert and Post 2021: 2–3). This understanding of ritual fields is close to various categorisations of rituals recognised within ritual studies (Bell 1997; Eliade 1987; Grimes 1985). The fields of religion, memory culture, artistic practices, and leisure practices are all domains within which the Hacıbektaş festival ritual actions may be analysed and understood. It seems though that these fields are defined more based on assumed intensions of the participants rather than identification of specific practices. How else can one determine and separate the nature of religion, commemoration, art and leisure if not through the performers' intentions? As noted above, there is no unity of intentions of participation in the crowds at the Hacıbektaş festival, nor do the participants feel that they are all engaging within the same fields. So, whether attending the festival or performing rituals are a matter of religious, commemorational, artistic, or leisure activity is in the eye of the beholder, be it groups of devotees or participating researchers.

Acknowledging the impact theoretical reasoning may have on depictions of empirical realities, I would propose an understanding of ritual fields as domains in which specific ritual actions are scientifically studied. They are not solely academic fields, however, but rather clusters of ritual repertoires emically enacted and scientifically

and comparatively studied as specific types of ritual action. Here, I am influenced by Bourdieu's understanding of social fields with competing agency (Bourdieu 1990), although my focus is more on the knowledge produced in and about these clusters of ritual repertoires. In the following, I will explore three such clusters present at the Hacıbektaş festival. These are (1) pilgrimage and saint veneration, (2) celebrations of Alevi culture, and (3) ceremonies of recognition and politics.

When turning to the first of the three ritual fields to analyse the Hacıbektaş festival, that of pilgrimage and saint veneration, a more empirical understanding of ritual fields is pertinent to have in mind. Olsson (2000) has used the term ritual fields to convey emic notions of ritual actions related to farmers, hunters, and djinns among the Bambara in Mali. For him, ritual fields are verbally articulated fields of meaning and above all bodily fields of expression, where interaction between people and between people, gods, and others are depicted (Olsson 2000: 29). They exist within the life world of the group and allow for an understanding of agency that includes non-human entities. This inclusion of non-humans within the field, and in the communication that takes place within the field, is central for the understanding of the ritual repertoires of saint veneration in Hacıbektaş.

4.1 Ritual Field 1: Pilgrimage and Saint Veneration

A typical pilgrimage to Hacıbektaş in times of the festival would be an organised trip by one of the many Alevi associations in Turkey or in Europe; by bus from one of the larger cities. The bus would stop at other saints' tombs along the way and the leader of the group would typically be either a religious leader (*dede*) or an authority from the association.[5] Arriving in Hacıbektaş, preferably the day before the opening programme, the first stop will be the tomb (*türbe*) of Hacı Bektaş Veli where the pilgrims will enter the mausoleum and circumambulate the sarcophagus. The travel then goes on to sacred sites outside of the town centre, at a hill vernacularly called the Arafat Mountain. These sites are places where Hacı Bektaş Veli is believed to have performed miracles. At a fountain with sacred *zemzem* water where it is believed that water sprung out of the ground where Hacı Bektaş Veli scratched his finger in the soil, the devotees will line up to drink from or fill up bottles with the holy water. At a cave-looking formation where Hacı Bektaş Veli is believed to have withdrawn for solitude and contemplation, some will climb through the hole in the rocks to test their spiritual pureness. At the field of the five rocks (*Beştaşlar*) where legends tell that Hacı Bektaş Veli made the rocks to bear witness of his innocence before a judge (*qadi*), the pilgrims would throw stones at the rock representing the *qadi* to stone the devil (*Şeytan*). In the end, the groups of pilgrims, especially if they are travelling as representatives of an Alevi associations, will sacrifice sheep, prepare the consecrated food (*lokma*), and distribute among the crowds of visitors.

[5] For stories from participants of such pilgrimage bus journeys, see Soleau 2005: 101–102.

The pilgrimage exhibits a number of aspects easily associated with the major Islamic pilgrimage, hajj. Mount Arafat between the cities of Mina and Mekka, where the Prophet Muhammad is believed to have delivered his last sermon is a central stop during the hajj, as is the ritual of stoning the devil at Mina, to be followed by collective animal sacrifices. The circumambulation of the Kaba is the climax of the pilgrimage, and from the *Zamzam* fountain in the courtyard of the *Masjid al Haram* in Mekka the pilgrims drink sacred water. These similarities have been pointed out by researchers and devotees alike.[6] Some devotees call the Hacıbektaş *tekke* "the Kaba of the heart" (*gönül kabesi*) and consider the visit to this tomb and to the sacred sites as the real and authentic Islamic pilgrimage as these Alevis also consider their own religious traditions to be the real and unaltered Islamic path. Other Alevi devotees, who do not consider Alevi religious traditions to be within the realm of Islam, would not approve of such a comparison.

This is an example of how the pilgrimage may provide spaces for similar ritual expressions with divergent perceptions and meanings, closely associated with ongoing political, social, and cultural positioning in society. Whether Alevism (*Alevilik*) is to be understood as a part of the wide and heterogeneous world of Islamic traditions (as a mystical and Shia oriented branch), or whether it should be approached as a religion of its own based on the veneration of natural phenomena, is not a question entirely within the religious domain – and as much as it is an internal division, it is in its nature directed towards the surrounding society. First of all, it is a positioning vis-à-vis the Turkish state and its Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*) that insist on the Islamic character of Alevism and therefore do not find it necessary to support Alevi ritual houses (*cem evi*) or religious and ritual leadership (*dedelik*). Further, it is a way of relating to tension between Islamic and secular dimensions of the Turkish Republic since its inception until today, identifying the state supported version of Sunni Islam as the ultimate other and as a dangerous force in a polarised society. Secondly, although not a clear-cut divide between Turkish and Kurdish Alevis, the understanding of Alevism as a religion on its own terms based on the veneration of natural phenomena is prevalent among Kurdish Alevis, especially the ones from Dersim (*Dersimli*).[7] These groups are driving forces behind identity political struggles for Alevi minority rights in several countries in Europe, such as Britain, France, and Sweden.

Turning now to the veneration of Hacı Bektaş Veli at the Hacıbektaş festival as a part of deeply rooted Eastern Mediterranean traditions of visiting shrines of deceased saints, the focus is on the repertoire of rituals performed at the shrine and at the sacred places in the vicinity. Visiting the shrines of deceased saints with the ritual performances it entails is covered in the term *ziyaret*, which does not only mean 'meeting' or 'visit', but also entails ritual exchange and communication between individuals and between human and non-human entities. These interactions are structured by the

[6] See for example Markussen 2000, Markussen 2012; Soileau 2005.

[7] For more information on religious traditions in Dersim, see Gezik and Gültekin 2019.

notion of respect (*saygı*, *hürmet*) (Tapper 1990: 236) and can be observed in the gestures performed before entering the sanctuary: removing shoes, kissing the doorframes, and avoiding stepping on the threshold. Further, the deceased saint is associated with extraordinary powers and the shrine as well as sacred places attributed to the saint's miracles and appearances, are locations invested with the notion of blessing (*baraka*). There is a substantial repertoire of rituals to be performed at these sites: kissing the tomb, lighting candles, reciting prayers and poems, healing practices, dream incubations, knotting rags around twigs of sacred trees nearby,[8] and piling stones on top of each other.

One way to describe a saint's shrine is that it is a location of wishes (*dilek*), vows (*adak*), and sacrifice (*kurban*) (Kreinath 2019: 64). Wishes related to love, illness, infertility, exams, business opportunities, or the acquirement of material gods are made to the saint, vows of becoming a better person or increasing one's level of piety are made, and sheep are sacrificed in the saint's name, often after the fulfilment of a wish but also occasionally in advance as an additional encouragement to the saint. As such, the shrine of Hacı Bektaş Veli as well as the sacred sites where he is believed to have performed miracles, are locations at which devotees establish communication, relate to the agency of the saint and the material objects that his power works through, assume a causal relationship between themselves, the rituals, and the saint, and hope for the rituals' causal efficacy. Olsson's understanding of ritual fields as articulated fields of meaning and bodily fields of expression, where interaction between people and between people, gods, and others are depicted, is relevant to understand how this field of communication which reaches beyond human relations shapes the devotees' perception and experience of the site. Further, it also indicates how sites like these becomes sacralised through ritual action.

4.2 Ritual Field 2: Celebrations of Alevi Culture

Not all participants at the Hacıbektaş festival are there to commemorate Hacı Bektaş Veli nor are they there to receive blessings. Rather, they are there to publicly celebrate Alevi culture and identity. The official programme of the festival is filled with opportunities to delve into traditional and contemporary religious, cultural, artistic, and intellectual expressions of Alevi identity.

At the heart of the public display of Alevism is music, poetry, and dance. These are also constituent parts of the most important Alevi collective ritual, the *cem* ritual. Public mass-performances of the *cem* ritual are scheduled two to three times during the three days of the festival. They are organised by Alevi associations and led by

[8] This particular ritual seems to be the most common feature of saint veneration in the Eastern Mediterranean and has since the end of the nineteenth century been considered an ancient practice with wide distribution throughout the Eastern Mediterranean (Kreinath 2019: 56–57). Kreinath refers to the writings of Canaan 1927; Rouse 1895 and Astley 1910. Frederick William Hasluck (1878–1920) also studied this phenomenon, see Shankland (2010).

traditional religious leaders (*dedes*). One could say that they are public adaptations of a traditional annual village ritual that in urban contexts has been practiced as weekly Thursday or Sunday ritual gatherings in the Alevi associations since the 1990s. Some parts of the *cem* ritual, such as hymns (*nefes*, *deyiş*) invoking the Prophet Muhammad, Imam Ali, and Hacı Bektaş Veli, chants to experience emotions when mourning Imam Hüseyin's death at Kerbala and performances of the ritual dance, *semah*, work well in a public mass-performance format where most of the participants are spectators rather than performers. Other aspects of the ritual, such as when the *dede* symbolically establish consent in the ritual community (a remnant from when the ritual was conducted once a year when the *dede* visited remote villages), and rites of sweeping the floor with a broom, lighting a multiarmed candlestick (*çerağ*), and distributing water to the ones closest to the performance area of the ritual (*meydan*), are slightly harder to adapt to the crowd. At the festival, the *cem* ritual attracts a huge audience. Alevis who would not find their way to a *cem* ritual in an association on a regular Thursday or Sunday would, in the same way as they would get tickets for concerts and theatre performances, participate in the mass event.

This kind of poetry, music, and dance so central in the *cem* ritual are also the components that manifest Alevi culture in Turkey and Europe today. Musicians who in the *cem* ritual sit beside the *dede*, play the *saz* instrument and sing the hymns and chants, and as such act as one of the sacred components (*hizmet*) of the ritual, also release new music and give concerts for mixed (secular, religious / Alevi, non-Alevi) audiences. At the Hacıbektaş festival, concerts are staged in the arena and smaller (and more or less spontaneous) events of *semah* and *saz* performances are to be enjoyed in various places in the area. In research, there has been attempts to distinguish between Alevi music performed within a religious setting and performed outside of worship by labelling the performances as "ritual" and "non-ritual" respectively (Özdemir 2022: 241). Here, it seems like the distinction is not focused on the performers' intentions, but rather on the framework within which music and dance are performed as well as the repertoire of hymns and dances that are performed. Although I find it critical not to downplay the ritualised ways in which Alevi music and dance outside of a religious setting are performed, I can see the advantages of working with these categories of Alevi performances. Not least because the authority ascribed and on display in the different settings varies from traditional ritual leadership and a sacred ritual protocol for performances to aesthetic authority.

Co-existing forms of Alevi authority in Turkey and Europe have been analysed as a shift from traditional to more contemporary forms of authority related to migration and urbanisation of Alevi communities (Markussen 2012; Dressler 2006). In addition to the aesthetic authority of Alevi musicians, intellectual authority has been in the centre of these analyses. Since the 1990s, publications of books lining out the nature and history of Alevism with a pseudo-scientific content have mushroomed parallel to the development of the academic field of Alevi studies. The writers of these books are Alevis and non-Alevis with academic degrees (not seldom within engineering) and

a profound interest in Alevism and Alevi identity politics. In Turkish this group of writers has been established as "researcher-writer" (*araştırmacı-yazar*) and exercise a new form of intellectual authority among Alevis. They are invited to the Hacıbektaş festival and participate in scheduled symposia and panel discussions and their books are sold in market stands in the town centre.

4.3 Ritual Field 3: Ceremonies of Recognition and Politics

In the town centre, close to the museum, every year of the festival there is a photo exhibition on the 1993 Sivas arson attack, colloquially called the Sivas Massacre (*Sivas katliamı*). It displays the names of the thirty-three people who lost their lives in a festival organised by an Alevi association in commemoration of the Alevi saint Pir Sultan Abdal in the city of Sivas. It exhibits photos of the hotel where the guests of the festival (many of them musicians, poets, and *semah* dancers) were accommodated as well as of the mob of hundreds of rioters setting the hotel ablaze in front of live air television and inactive law enforcement.[9] This attack spurred the associational organisation of Alevis in Turkey and Europe and a movement claiming societal visibility and freedom from discrimination and hate crimes. Although an established tradition before the 1990s, festivals, both as saint commemoration and as cultural ceremonies[10] took on a more central role in the Alevis' quest for public visibility and recognition. As such, the Hacıbektaş festival is a public ritual and a display of the ongoing negotiation of public space that Alevi associations continuously engage in. Further, for many participants, the possibility to partake in Alevi ritual life in the open and in front of television cameras is a definite end to the times when they had to hide their identity and practice dissimulation of their beliefs and practices.

Approaching the festival from the perspective of a public ritual, the strength of the associational authority of Alevi communities becomes apparent. Alevi associations from various places in Turkey cooperate with Hacıbektaş Municipality and The Hacı Bektaş Veli Cultural Association (*Hacı Bektaş Veli Kültür Derneği*) to organise the festival. The influence and presence of the municipality and the associations is first and foremost manifested in the official programme. Participation in the events in the programme is formalised by scheduling, directing the audiences to particular arenas and stages, and limiting the number of spectators through ticket sales. The programme is put together to accommodate a heterogeneous audience with both religious and non-religious interests, but also to put Alevism on public display internally as well as for outsiders. Internally as an identity to be celebrated and for the Alevi communities to celebrate themselves through, and addressed to outsiders (both non-Alevi participants and people and institutions not represented at the festival) as a sign of the visibility of a minority to be reckoned with in society.

[9] For a description of the attack and the establishment of a museum at the site, see Çaylı 2022.
[10] For descriptions of an Alevi festival in Britain, see Salman 2020.

The opening ceremony of the festival is aired on national television and consists of speeches by spokespersons of the municipality, associations as well as politicians from political parties with a considerable Alevi constituent, such as the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP).[11] Alevi representatives and politicians address each other in their speeches and at the same time speak to and for the crowded Alevi audience. In this sense, the Hacıbektaş festival can be categorised as a *political ritual* in the words of Bell: "Ceremonial practices that specifically construct, display and promote the power of political institutions [...] or the political interests of distinct constituencies and subgroups" (Bell 1997: 128). According to Bell, political rituals:

> define power in a two-dimensional way: first, they use symbol and symbolic action to depict a group of people as a coherent and ordered community based on shared values and goals; second, they demonstrate the legitimacy of these values and goals by establishing their iconicity with the perceived values and order of the cosmos (Bell 1997: 129).

As a political ritual, the Hacıbektaş festival is an arena for practices demonstrating core Alevi values and traditions legitimised and sanctified in relation to the commemoration of Hacı Bektaş Veli. The festival puts Alevi interests and societal aims on display for politicians and others to relate to, whether it is to gain votes in the next elections or to better understand the driving forces in the Alevi movement. It is, however, not a one-way process that can be observed at the festival. There is, for example, a considerable interest from the Turkish state apparatus to claim the legacy of Hacı Bektaş Veli. Like his contemporary, Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi, the legacy of Hacı Bektaş Veli has been incorporated into the national Turkish cultural heritage as a moral and ideological inspiration.[12] The Hacıbektaş festival is supported by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (*Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı*) which has also taken the lead in suggesting Alevi traditions to UNESCO's World Heritage Programme. Since 2012, the Hacı Bektaş Veli convent is on UNESCO's *World Heritage Sites Tentative List*, and the year 2021, which is believed to be the 750th anniversary of his death, was declared the UNESCO year of Hacı Bektaş Veli. Along with incorporating the saint into a state-sponsored understanding of authentic Turkish culture, Alevism is also reframed as such. As an unfortunate consequence of claiming public visibility and seeking recognition from the political establishment, the Hacıbektaş festival as a political ritual also displays and confirms existing state and political institutions in Turkey.

[11] For a description of political representation at the festival through time, see Massicard 2003.

[12] For a thorough analysis and comparison of the lives and commemorations of Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi and Hacı Bektaş Veli, see Soileau 2018.

5 Conclusion

Participants at the Hacıbektaş festival come from near and far, as devotees, as spectators, as representatives, as interested outsiders, and as researchers. Their intentions and ways of participating are manifold and the festival is a complex arena of simultaneous ritual actions.

In this chapter, I have untangled some of these complexities by describing the festival from the perspectives of pilgrimage and saint veneration, celebrations of Alevi culture, and ceremonies of recognition and politics. I have called these perspectives *ritual fields* as they are not solely academic approaches but also enacted clusters of ritual repertoires at the festival. Further, they are pathways in which participants with differing reasons for visiting the festival may prioritise when they can or will not cover the whole spectrum of ritual and other activities during the three days. Pathways that guide the gaze and the understanding towards certain aspects of the festival, and away from other aspects. This is also true for researchers visiting the festival with the aim of gaining knowledge of Alevism.

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Chapter 16: Who Got the Rite Wrong? The Mavuno Alternative Christmas Service and Charismatic Ritual[17]

Martina Björkander

1. Introduction

> Today, will be completely different. Very different. Different from every Christmas service you've been to. Today we will be having an alternative Christmas service.
>
> Mavuno Christmas Service Fieldnotes, 22/12/2013

With those words, Pastor Kyama marks the transition from a fairly standard praise and worship session at the beginning of a Christmas service in Mavuno Church, to what will turn out to be a carefully orchestrated musical performance telling the Christmas story to the urban youth of Nairobi. What follows is a piano and voice concert with the pianist Aaron Rimbui and singer Kanjii Mbugua, aided by two male backing vocalists and Pastor Kyama as a sidekick, and joined towards the end by a female vocalist. The stage is carefully decorated for the season, with a grand piano at its centre. The concert is a mix of different styles, ranging from soul and pop to R'n'B and reggae, from power ballads to dance hall music, from Christian contemporary to Christmas carols. Together, the group of performers set out to bring the congregation on "a journey about love" (Mavuno Christmas Service Fieldnotes, 22/12/2013) that tells the Christmas story as one beginning with the love between two young people, Joseph and Mary, and evolves into a story of God's love for humanity. Pastor Kyama says somewhere in the middle of the concert, interpreting the journey to the congregation, "The Christmas story is a story of relationships. It starts with the relationship between

[17] © Martina Björkander, 2024 | doi:10.1163/9789004692206_018

a man and his wife. But then it grows. It becomes a story of the relationship between God and man" (Fieldnotes 2013). The music and the performance help to contextualise this story to young people, "making it real" (Fieldnotes 2013) by presenting different music to that normally played in church ('secular' music, for want of a better word) that allows the pastor to speak very openly about (sometimes forbidden) feelings. This is what makes the service 'alternative' and 'different'. At the same time, the service as a whole follows a structure that is common in charismatic liturgy and can easily be recognised as 'church' if looking at the total setup. A negotiation – even subversion – of ritual takes place, with the Mavuno team deliberately challenging the boundaries of what can be accepted as part of a church service, while remaining sufficiently within the rules to be able to come across as fully part of the born-again community.

In Kenya, a large proportion of the population belongs to various forms of pentecostal-charismatic[1] churches or sympathises with a Renewalist type of Christianity of different denominations (World Christian Database 2004).[2] The Pew Forum Research ten-country survey (2006), for instance, indicated that more than half the population subscribed to forms of Christian faith that emphasise the experience of the Holy Spirit, such as speaking in tongues or praying for healing. Among Catholics (25% of the total population) about a third were Renewalists, while as many as seven out of ten Protestants (63% of the population) professed a similar faith (Pew Research Center 2006: 83–84). Historically, various revivalist groups have had a large following in Kenya and, due to their visibility and respectability in society, their influence goes far beyond the actual membership. Central in these groups is the notion of being 'born-again' – receiving Jesus as personal Saviour and starting to live a new life – thus joining the community of 'the saved ones' (*wokovu*). Often this new life is interpreted in spiritual as well as moral terms; the new spiritual status is marked by living in a morally upright manner by, for example, abstaining from alcohol, drugs, and sex outside of marriage (Mugambi 2020; Parsitau 2009). There is a strong sense of fellowship yet also a high level of mobility among the groups and churches in the born-again category; religious belonging in Kenya is fluid, categories overlap, and people often move between groups or actively attend several different groups at the same time (Gez 2018). This is facilitated by the fact that ritual patterns – what Ogbu Kalu refers to as "the charismatic liturgy" (Kalu 2008: 121) – are iterated from group to group, including the presence of a central place for prayer, testimonies, and music (Prosén 2016; Kalu 2010; Parsitau 2006; Muindi 2019).

In this community, Mavuno stands out as innovative and experimental, as trying to break free from what is perceived as a Christianity that has become far too distanced

[1] Pentecostal-charismatic is used as an umbrella term referring to the tradition or strand of Christianity also known as Pentecostalism. Variations of Pentecostal and Charismatic are capitalised only when referring to specific phenomena/groups but not when used as generic terms. See further discussion in Anderson (2010), Jacobsen (2011), Anderson (2004), Kalu (2008), and Prosén (2021).

[2] Although the WCD statistics can be criticised for various reasons, they remain the most reliable available. The category of Christian Renewal/Renewalists includes the subcategories of Pentecostals,

from the real life of young people in Nairobi. These days the church is established and respected in the ecclesial body, but in the early years it was seen as something of a rebellious teenager, challenging the status quo not least through the music played. Mavuno began in 2005 when an older church, Nairobi Chapel, a non-denominational, evangelical mega-church, split into five different congregations that relocated to venues around the city. Mavuno established itself in the south-eastern part, along Mombasa Road, and at the time of the Alternative Christmas Service they were holding their services at the Bellevue Drive-in Cinema in an all-weather tarpaulin tent that hosted around two thousand per service. Later the church moved again, this time to its own premises in Athi River. They have also planted several new branches in capital cities around Africa and beyond (for more on the church and its history see Gitau 2018; Mugambi 2020; mavunochurch.org).

From the outset, the church has focused on reaching out to the young, professional, post-college, English-speaking, upwardly mobile, middle-class adult. They see this demographic as an "unreached people group" (Pastor Kamau 2014) in that its members share a specific culture that is different from other groups in society. Other churches, they say, present the Gospel in ways that are foreign and alienating to this demographic, but young people must be given the chance to hear the Gospel presented in a language (including aesthetic language) that they can understand. In their services, the Mavuno leaders therefore experiment with musical styles, incorporating elements from popular culture and taking pains to create a relaxed and youthful atmosphere. As we will see in this article, they sometimes go much further than other churches are prepared to go in terms of ritual innovation and experimentation in order to negotiate both ritual itself and life beyond the ritual frame.

This article discusses ritual negotiation, innovation, and disruption using the Alternative Christmas service as a case in point. First, I briefly introduce some theoretical perspectives, before taking the reader to the ethnographic scene. Thereafter, the analysis takes place in two steps: the negotiation of ritual itself (how Mavuno uses music to challenge and change charismatic liturgy), and negotiation of life beyond the ritual frame (how Mavuno uses music to create a space for forbidden feelings within the liturgy). The essay ends with a few conclusions and suggestions for further research. The fieldwork material for this article was gathered as part of my PhD research and a full analysis of the ritual life of Mavuno church – its spirituality, worship, and liturgy – can be found in Björkander (2024).[3]

Charismatics, and Neocharismatics, and more or less overlaps the four-fold typology of global Pentecostalism, as described by Allan Anderson (2010). Compare statistics presented by Barrett and Johnson (2002).

[3] See also Prosén 2021.

2 Negotiation, Innovation, and Disruption in the Field of Rituals

In one of her articles, Anne-Christine Hornborg describes "ritual invention" as something of "an oxymoron, since 'ritual' foremost gives association to traditional practices and not to inventions" (Hornborg 2017: 18). Having said that, she goes on to describe a Mi'kmaq ritual that is clearly an invention (possibly performed for the very first time during her fieldwork), while consisting of elements from earlier rituals that make it come across as 'traditional'. What makes this new ritual performance work is the creative use of "interrituality" wherein "ritual acts function as scattered quotes, similar as we in texts find quotes or allusions to other texts" (Hornborg 2017: 18); indeed, the new ritual cannot be entirely novel or it risks being perceived as inauthentic or false. "Creativity thus consists of reassembling elements into a new ritual focus or synthesis" (Hornborg 2017: 17).

This tension between seeing ritual as fixed and traditional versus seeing it as innovative and creative is also addressed by other scholars. When Kathryn T. McClymond discusses ritual disruption, for example, she notes that there is a "significant disjuncture" between "how we experience ritual (flexible, adaptive to immediate circumstances, and extremely angst-free) and how we imagine ritual (fixed, rule-bound, and unforgiving)" (2016: 2). To McClymond, it is obvious that rituals do not always go according to plan – indeed, they may "go wrong" in all sorts of ways, intentionally or unintentionally – and that these disruptions are usually "no big deal" since "[r]itual, for the most part, is a remarkably elastic phenomenon" (2016: 2). The exception is when ritual actors act in subversive ways, challenging prescribed or anticipated behaviour by deliberately altering the ritual performance. These altered ritual performances, McClymond states, "draw attention to latent expectations of ritual actors and the ritual itself" as well as to "'behind the scenes' shifts or tensions in social or political systems at the structural level" (2016: 108, 175).

A similar perspective is presented by Ute Hüsken and Frank Neubert (2012: 1), who say that while ritual "in common understanding" as well as in "scholarly discourse" has long been seen as "stable in form, meaningless, preconceived, and with the aim of creating harmony and enabling a tradition's survival," these assumptions can be "seriously challenged" based on both ritual performances and texts. They add (2012: 1), "Not only are rituals frequently disputed; they also constitute a field in which vital and sometimes even violent negotiations take place. Negotiations – understood here as processes of interaction during which differing positions are debated and/or acted out – are ubiquitous in ritual contexts, either in relation to the ritual itself or in relation to the realm beyond any given ritual performance." These negotiations are part and parcel of ritual performance, since a ritual that did not address the ambiguities and challenges in life would soon become meaningless and irrelevant to participants. Drawing on the work of Seligman and colleagues, they point out, "'Ritual and ritualistic behavior are

not so much events as ways of negotiating our very existence in the world', and ritual provides the central space for playing out the constant tension between tradition and creativity" (Hüsken and Neubert 2012: 7, quoting Seligman et al. 2008: 8).

An important aspect of ritual disruption is ritual failure, which can be understood in several ways, either as a more general concept referring to any instance where ritual performance deviates "significantly from its usual appearance" (Schieffelin 2007: 7), or as a more technical term referring to errors either in the "'process' (proper performance of ritual) or 'outcome' (achieving the ends for which ritual is performed)" (2007: 3) of ritual. The emphasis differs not merely among scholars, but also between contexts and traditions. "This," Schieffelin says, "evokes questions about the degree to which, for a given tradition, ritual performance is about 'getting it right' vs. 'getting it done'" (2007: 3). As will become clear below, even within a given tradition there is no consensus on this matter; rather, it is an aspect that is part of the negotiation of ritual.

In this article, I discuss a case where ritual performance is creatively and intentionally altered in response to social changes in the lives of young people, thus challenging latent expectations of both 'church' and born-again Christians in the Kenyan context in order to expand the affordance of the charismatic liturgy. Hence, the ritual, as well as the world beyond the ritual frame, is negotiated through ritual performance.

3 The Alternative Christmas Service

A few minutes past midday on a Sunday morning, three days before Christmas 2013, a thousand people have gathered for worship in Mavuno Church Bellevue.[4] An hour later the hall is packed with another thousand. They are all well-dressed, with chic outfits, cool hairstyles, elaborate accessories, and an air of confidence to them. This is the 'in' church for young professionals in Nairobi, today is their Christmas Carol Sunday, and no-one misses a chance to dress up for the occasion. Contributing to the festive atmosphere are chains of electric light flowing above the audience towards the stage. The black and grey stage is decorated with a large Christmas tree, white stars, and Christmas presents in beautiful wrappings. In the centre is a black grand piano and gathered around it a few black bar stools. Soon we are going to be taken on a journey of love, but first the service starts as it does on a normal Mavuno Sunday: with praise and worship led by a worship team. A few songs are sung, both in Swahili and English, one by a Kenyan Afropop music group called Gospel Fathers, and one an English hymn from the seventeenth century: 'Fundi wa Mbao' (Gospel Fathers 2013) and 'What child is this?' (Chatterson Dix 1865), respectively. The music is rhythmic and melodic and the sound travels far beyond the hall. People stand as they sing, some sway on the

[4] The following account is based on ethnographic fieldnotes from a visit to Mavuno 22nd of December 2013. All quotes are from this occasion if not otherwise specified. The observation was part of my PhD field work and I have described the methods and ethical considerations at length in my thesis (Prosén 2021).

spot, clap along, or raise their hands. At times the worship team instructs them to dance along with their choreography, and most do. The team members are dressed in red, white, black, and green – the colours of Christmas, and also the colours of the Kenyan flag. Their clothes and styles are fashionable and hip, their energy high, and their dance a peculiar mix of references to street dance, hip hop, aerobics, and rural East African choir music. During and between songs the worship leader encourages the congregation to sing along, to worship and exalt Christ as the King of Kings. The whole praise-and-worship section ends in a crescendo of prayer, ovations, and music led by one of the leading pastors of Mavuno, Pastor Kyama.

When the music stops and the worship team leaves the stage, Pastor Kyama casually sits on one of the stools and after some announcements he moves on to describing what today's service will be like. With a smile on his face he says,

> Today will be completely different. Very different. Different from every Christmas service you've been to. Today we will be having an alternative Christmas service. Say to your neighbour: "Alternative Christmas service" (*Alternative Christmas service*).
>
> Tell them "It's gonna be different" (*It's gonna be different*). It's not going to be the same (*It's not going to be the same*).
>
> Yes, thank you! Today the message is in the songs and the Christmas readings. And in songs that are different from the ones we normally sing here, but nevertheless very related to the Christmas thing.
>
> Just tell your neighbour: "Different!" (*Different*) Different nice! (*laughter*)

He then welcomes a group of artists on stage for a piano and voice concert. The pianist, Aaron Rimbui, an established Kenyan jazz artist, starts playing. He is joined by singer and music producer Kanjii Mbugua, who was the first worship director at Mavuno and the brains behind their musical turnaround, and two backing vocalists – one of them the current Mavuno worship director, Mike Onen (Gitau 2018: 121–122; Gazemba 2014a; Gazemba 2014b). The first song they play is the soul ballad 'Fire and Rain' (Taylor 1970), followed by the Take That classic love song 'Back for Good' (Barlow 1995).

> *Whatever I said, whatever I did,*
>
> *I didn't mean it,*
>
> *I just want you back for good*
>
> *(Want you back, want you back, want you back for good)*

It is soulful and groovy, well-rehearsed and tight. Many in the audience sing along, knowing the texts by heart. Explaining that they will be taking the audience on a

journey of love, which is what Christmas is all about, Kanjii hands over to Pastor Kyama who reads Luke 1:26–27 from the Message translation, emphasising the words 'Joseph', 'Mary', 'engaged', and 'virgin'. Then Kanjii interrupts him saying:

> So, Pastor Kyama, you know, sometimes we really spiritualise this thing (*Kyama fills in jokingly, 'schpiritualische' … 'schpiritualize' …*) spiritualise this thing (*laughter*).
>
> Let me see, how many of us have been in love? Have been in the past, or are in love right now? Look around. And if your neighbour's hand is not in the air, just look at them *kidogo* [a little] and say like, 'For real? I mean, how old are you?' (*laughter*). So, we've all been in love. And the Christmas story is a story of love. This afternoon we will look at this story from Joseph's perspective.
>
> You know, these were real people with real feelings. Joseph was in *love*. [Pretending to be Joseph:] "There's a fly mama ... her name is Mary ... we're gonna get married ..." (*laughter*).
>
> So, you know, what I love about music is that sometimes it helps us, you know, it helps us say what sometimes we cannot be able to say. So, in my head, I'm thinking – I'm thinking! – Joseph must have been like

[he breaks into 'Comfort Zone' (Fletcher, Germain, Gordon, 2012) a reggae song sung by artist Busy Signal]:

> *Youuuuu.*
>
> *No odda one but you.*
>
> *Baby girl seh it feel so right so good, so good. Hotthead.*

Some of the audience giggle and shake their heads, looking bewildered. "What kind of a song is this to sing in church?" they seem to think. Kanjii stops in the middle of the song and says:

> I told you! It's gonna be different! (*laughter, hand-clapping, wolf-whistles*).
>
> I told you! Don't spiritualise this thing! It was love! (*laughs with audience, then continues singing*):
>
> *Mi need you mi say from mi heart*
>
> *Baby girl mi and you will neva part*
>
> *Gal mi seh you have mi inna comfort zone*
>
> *Everytime mi live without fi come back home*
>
> *Baby a nuh games mi a play*

I and I woulda neva eva stray

Girl mi seh you lock mi inna yuh comfort zone

Let mi solid as a rock you know mi tuff like stone

I believe that love is a powerful ting

The feeling deep within

And if you believe in love

Free up your mind, let this flow within

Cah no odda girl nuh hol'me hol'me hol'me so tight yet baby

None a dem neva please mi so

Treat mi so

Lawd you feel so right

No girl neva squeeze me squeeze me squeeze me so tight yet baby

None a dem neva groove mi so

Move mi so

Girl you shine so bright (Fletcher, Germain, Gordon, 2012)

The audience laugh and respond loudly, most seem to be having a good time, although a few stand and leave the hall. Kanjii seems determined to continue singing the songs although they are quite explicit and not part of the normal church repertoire; the backing vocalists are more embarrassed but keep on going. The next song is R'n'B and says, "Tell me it's real! This feeling that we feel ... It's up to me and you, to make this special love last forever more" (Bennett, Heiley, Jo-Jo 1999) and is followed by Kanjii jokingly encouraging people to take the opportunity to propose if their "significant other" is sitting next to them.

And so it goes on, with readings and songs and between speeches that retell the Christmas story from Joseph's perspective. How he was in love with Mary, how he felt strongly about her, looking forward to the marriage, how he reacted to her being pregnant by someone else ("The Holy Spirit? Like, seriously? Was that the best you could come up with?"), his emotional journey through attraction, anger, fear, vengefulness, and sadness. From Joseph's lowest point, the pastor connects to low points in his own life and the life of young people, smoothly shifting to a time of intercession and prayer, accompanied by instrumental music, and inviting God to heal and restore broken hearts. The audience have again turned into a congregation, and the atmosphere is no longer humorous and concert-like, but sincere and prayerful.

Elaborating on John 3:16, Pastor Kyama continues to share the Gospel as a story of love, a story in which God gave His Son to the world to mend broken hearts, because of His great love. His sermon is short but vigorous, and moves over to the next set of

songs, songs that are no longer about Joseph's emotions but geared towards helping the congregation deal with their own. One example is a medley that combines reggae with contemporary worship, with the words,

> *No weapon formed against me will prosper … God will do what He said He would do.*
>
> *He will stand by His word* (Hammond, Moore 1996)
>
> *Everything's gonna be all right*
>
> *Everything's gonna be all right* (Ford, Marley 1974)
>
> *I'm not going back, I'm moving ahead. …*
>
> *All things are made new, surrendered my life to Christ.*
>
> *I'm moving, moving forward* (Houghton, Sanchez 2007)

In typical charismatic manner, Kanjii encourages the congregation to sing along and to believe what they sing: "Believe it! Believe it!" The song becomes both a prayer and a declaration: asking God to help sort out the pain in life, especially love-related pain, and at the same time testifying and declaring that the new life in Christ is indeed a new life, a different kind of life, where a loving God is in control despite life's circumstances. Seamlessly the songs move over into an 'altar call', a time for responding to the message given. People who are not yet "in a relationship with God" are invited to give their life to Christ, to become born-again, while those who are, are urged to "respond with surrender and obedience" and give themselves as "living sacrifices." After a time of prayer, the service ends with another more light-hearted section consisting of traditional Christmas carols and hymns, this time led by Mwendie Mbugua, Kanjii's wife, and ending with 'Angels we have heard on high' (Chadwick 1862) including the traditional Latin stanza *Gloria in excelsis Deo* (Glory to God in the Highest). Like the shepherds in the fields, the congregation is encouraged to "Let loose" in praise and go out into life rooted in God's love through Jesus Christ. With a blessing from Ephesians, they are dismissed and leave the church with worship music playing softly in the background.

4 Widening the Frame – Negotiating Charismatic Liturgy through Music

What is going on in this case? How can we theoretically understand what the Mavuno congregation does in its Alternative Christmas service? Thinking of the ritual performance, it seems there are several processes at work here. First, charismatic liturgy itself is negotiated: What can be included and what cannot, as part of a Sunday service? And how can the liturgy be put across as novel, innovative, and relevant

to young people and at the same time as fully adequate, acceptable, and satisfactory as a church service? Second, the world beyond the ritual frame is negotiated: What challenges do young urban Kenyans meet in life? And how can they deal with them within a born-again framework? This section discusses negotiations over ritual, while the next examines ways in which the Alternative Christmas service seeks to address real-life issues.

Vibrant worship music is part of the charismatic liturgy all around the world and has become in many ways the hallmark of charismatic Christianity itself. Indeed, it is hard to think of this brand of Christianity without thinking of its music. The central place of music has been noted by many scholars over the years (Ingalls and Yong 2015; Anderson 2004; Miller and Yamamori 2007; Cartledge 2007; Chitando 2002), among them Paul Alexander, who says that "music is a crucial aspect of Pentecostalism and part of its phenomenal appeal" (2009: 25). Structurally, pentecostal-charismatic church services often start with a block of congregational singing ('praise and worship'), followed by announcements and other community-related issues, then the sermon, and lastly an invitation to respond to the message (the 'altar call'). To this structure is added a range of micro-rites, acts, and utterances that can be utilised by the participants according to choice, as well as a range of ritual modes, embodied attitudes that convey the various affective states that are involved in charismatic worship (the 'flow'). It is the combination of a rather fixed, common structure and flexible, personalised expression that together make charismatic ritual what it is. This ritualised pattern has been described by Daniel Albrecht among others (1999; see also Cartledge 2007; Björkander 2024), and although there are variations, it is comparatively stable and recognisable in pentecostal-charismatic churches around the globe. Hence, when I use the expression 'charismatic liturgy' – following Ogbu Kalu (2008: 121) – I refer to a ritualised way of doing things in communal worship, and not a written text or fixed ritual scheme.

How does Mavuno negotiate the charismatic liturgy during their very special Christmas service? First of all, they frame the event as a church service by following the normal structure: starting with praise and worship, continuing with announcements, a sermon, and an altar call, and combining these basic building blocks with typical verbal and kinetic expressions. Hornborg, building on Catherine Bell, emphasises the importance of framing in order to convey to participants that this is indeed an authentic "ritual event" (2017: 22). The framing also includes a creative use of elements from various Christian sources, such as traditional hymns and carols, put together into a new whole, thus effectively referencing 'tradition' through interrituality (Hornborg 2017). At the same time, the Alternative Christmas service is indeed alternative, challenging the way things are normally done and creatively utilising content from non-ecclesial contexts. Elements from youth culture are borrowed and mixed into the new whole: from the way leaders interact with the audience, through the scenography, dance, and clothing styles, to the musical genres chosen. The event becomes an artistic performance as much as a ritual performance. Positively expressed we could say that when the ritual frame is intact, there is more freedom to include content from other

sources in creative ways. Negatively, we could say that the frame puts certain limits on creativity and innovation; there is a boundary that must be kept. Hornborg says, quoting Christoph Wulf, "There is an innovative and ludic character to be found in rituals which open up for ritual creativity in performances." But the "playful seriousness" must "respect certain boundaries and is thus able to combine duty and willingness, solidarity and individuality, as well as affirmation, idiosyncrasy, and criticism" (Wulf 2008: 406–7, quoted in Hornborg 2017: 23).

By including elements from youth culture, Mavuno challenges the boundaries of charismatic ritual, playing seriously with both content and form. While keeping the charismatic frame, and a fair number of traditional liturgical elements, they still push the limits for what a Christmas service may be, "thereby subverting the ruling norms by articulating and acting out alternative positions" (Hüsken and Neubert 2012: 6). The inclusion of secular music is the primary subversive act in this case. A total of twenty-five different songs were sung in the course of the service, just a few lines of some, others in their entirety. Approximately half of them had Christian lyrics, the rest did not. Compared to a normal service where all songs have Christian lyrics and are sung in order to worship and glorify God, teach Christian doctrine, or mediate people's prayers, the inclusion of songs with a completely different content was perceived as challenging and disruptive.

Apart from the repeated references to the service being 'different' and 'alternative' and the verbal appeals to the audience to participate in the songs despite their unusual content – with the pastors knowing that some could have reservations – there were other instances that pointed to the subversive character of the chosen repertoire. Reactions in the room, especially during some of the songs, told me that people found it embarrassing and improper to sing such material in church. When I later searched the internet for the music videos and lyrics to the songs, I understood why. Many of them are quite explicit, especially the videos, and, considering the number of people singing along with the songs, clearly knowing them by heart, it is likely that the videos are familiar to many. The most obvious example would be 'Comfort Zone' by Jamaican reggae artist Busy Signal, referred to above. Some of the audience giggled during it, and the backing vocalists seemed a bit embarrassed to be singing it in front of their peers. A few people in the audience demonstratively left the hall during it. I can only guess the reason, but it seems likely that they found it inappropriate or even irreverent as part of a church service.[5] However, the Mavuno team were determined to go on with their altered ritual performance. Parts of the song were sung with particular stress – "I believe that love is a powerful thing," emphasising the core message of the service, and "free up your mind, let this flow within" (Fletcher, Germain, Gordon 2012) – emphasising the importance of keeping an open mind towards the service's novel approach to Christmas.

[5] Possibly the reputation of the artist behind the song played a role as well, see for example: "Busy Signal Pleads Guilty" 2012.

Another song that raised some eyebrows and whose performance seemed to balance on the edge of being irreverent was 'I don't ever wanna see you again' by Uncle Sam. Here, they had changed the refrain in the following manner:

> *I don't ever want to see you again*
> *But tell me why did it have to be* ***my best friend (> the Holy Spirit)***
> *That you were messing around with*
> *I didn't want to notice it*
> *I was true to my love for you* (Morris 1997)

Joseph was presented as being angry with Mary about "messing around" with "the Holy Spirit" (Fieldnotes 2013). Most laughed at this pun, but not everybody was happy. Judging from the reactions, it was a bit too much for some. Theoretically, we find here an example of a situation where "the audience members are forced into uncomfortable positions, often bearing witness to a message with which they do not agree" (McClymond 2016: 108). The audience/ congregation is a crucial part of the performance and their presence and participation sanctions (at least to some degree) what goes on in the ritual (Hornborg 2017; Hüsken and Neubert 2012). Ritual performance is a powerful way to make a stand and create change, or as Maurice Bloch has said, "You cannot argue with a song" (1974: 55, quoted in Hornborg 2017: 19).[6] Therefore, the most efficient protest against the altered performance is to leave the ritual space.

From the reactions of the audience to the chosen songs, as well as some of the comments afterwards, it is clear that what goes on in the Mavuno Christmas service is slightly unnerving to some, and very entertaining to most. There is a lot of humour in how the story is told, and to many such a down-to-earth perspective on the Christmas events seems refreshing. Most seemed to be having a good time, enjoying a chance to 'be real' – to talk openly about life beyond church – in church. The next section discusses this in more depth.

5 Creating Space for Forbidden Feelings – Negotiating Life beyond the Ritual Frame

At the time of my field work in Nairobi, Mavuno's teen ministry (Teens Konnect) held a sermon series titled "Blurred lines" that resulted in both publicity and public conflict for the church. The series was advertised with huge posters around the city showing a young couple "in cosy comfort with each other," and addressed "what Mavuno perceived as an escalating crisis of teenage sexuality in Nairobi" (Gitau 2018: 107).

[6] As a curiosity I note that this quote has been part of almost every conversation I have had with Hornborg as a supervisor; it is clearly one of Anne-Christine's favourites.

Sermon titles chosen from pop culture, including 'Fifty Shades of Grey' and 'Friends with a Monster', hinted at the subject under discussion. The poster made headlines on evening primetime news, with many Christians condemning it and speaking of how low the church had fallen in using such a "pornographic" picture (Gitau 2018: 107). On the other hand, many media personalities and church leaders from the ecclesial community commended Mavuno for reaching out to young people and trying to talk to them about difficult topics, saying that the sermon series "barely scratched the surface of the problem of a tech-savvy society without checks and balances" (Gitau 2018: 107).

The sermon series and the public discussion that followed gave the Mavuno leaders a chance to clarify their position on sexuality and marriage, one affirming the born-again holiness ideals of chastity and monogamy, of abstaining from sex before and outside of marriage, and honouring fidelity within. This was also preached in the teens' service that I attended in March 2014, where the program included the song 'Ring Finger' by Mavuno-affiliated artist Rigga, who also spoke of his own struggle with sexuality, virginity, and purity (Mavuno Teens Konnect, ethnographic fieldnotes, 23/3/2014). Hence, the difference between Mavuno's teachings and those of other Renewalist churches does not lie in the actual viewpoints on moral matters, but rather in Mavuno's way of addressing them. What makes them different is their openness to talking about these issues in church and to confirming that it is a struggle for a young person to manage to adhere to these norms while at the same time living in contemporary society with its rapid, easy access to both dating and pornography.

In the Alternative Christmas service, the focus is not so much on chastity or fidelity (although these themes are present too), but rather on the emotional aspects of being in love and being hurt by love, as well as the connection between human romantic love and God's eternal love. Symbolised by "a real piano" on stage, Mavuno encourages young adults to "be real" (Fieldnotes 2013), to speak honestly about their real-life questions. In an attempt to integrate life outside of church with life inside – ultimately to achieve more integrity in life – secular music is used to make the connection. Church music does not normally address anger, fear, attraction, lust, or revenge, which is why Mavuno needed a different set of music to be able to speak about these emotional issues. Secular music, framed by a ritual setting and incorporated into a Christian story, provides the leadership with the opportunity to speak to young people about things that relate to their everyday life. Music, Kanjii said, "helps us communicate what we cannot say" (Fieldnotes 2013); it is a language that speaks more directly to the "affective and emotional core of our identity" (Smith 2010: 77) as human beings.

We may compare this with Magnus Echtler's depiction of a Muslim festival on Zanzibar, where groups of young men and women sing sexually explicit songs to each

[7] The festival has a pre-Islamic background and involves several activities that are not allowed according to Islam, including drinking, which are not allowed in Mavuno either. The Mavuno comparison strictly pertains to the festival's use of sexually explicit songs as part of a ritual.

other as part of a ritual performance.[7] These songs are immensely popular due to their "transgressive quality," Echtler says, since they "surpassed the strictures of gender relations without negating them, and therefore shocked and delighted Zanzibaris from other parts of the island who visited the festival in growing numbers" (2012: 65, 66). The obscene songs provided participants with an opportunity to speak about otherwise hidden or forbidden topics, and yet do so in the 'safe' environment of ritual performance. "Within the ritual frame they were empowered to sing what they could not voice on any other day," Echtler explains (2012: 66). Speaking openly about the human body, the songs revealed the social norms connected to gender relations in Zanzibari society, thereby negotiating those very norms. "[T]he songs violated the concealed 'social' body by revealing the sexuality of the 'natural' body. In breaching the cultural norms regarding the representation of the sexual body, the obscene songs voiced what could not be talked about, thereby taking a stand in the 'body politics' of gender relations in Zanzibari society" (Echtler 2012: 65).

In a similar manner, the Mavuno Alternative Christmas service violates prevailing social norms within the Kenyan ecclesial body – where certain emotions and topics are consigned to the closet – by revealing the sexuality of the 'natural' body. It deliberately surpasses the strictures of born-again life, yet does so within a charismatic liturgical frame, thus empowering participants to voice what they cannot say on another day. That this is indeed an exemption, undertaken in a safe environment and under the surveillance of pastoral leadership, is underlined, for example, when Kanjii at one point tells the audience that pastor so-and-so "has given you permission for today" to sing a particular song (Fieldnotes 2013). The participants should not go home thinking that these songs, and the life-style they describe, are now no longer off-limits for a born-again Christian. The ritual specialists serve a dual function here, both authorising what goes on in the service (the use of secular songs, speaking openly about all kinds of feelings) and yet reminding the audience about the moral obligations involved in living for Christ (chastity, fidelity, monogamy). These obligations are articulated, for example, in the altar call, where people who already belong to Christ are encouraged to respond with surrender and obedience.

Hence, secular music is used in a strategical way to make a stand, not so much on moral issues, as on the ecclesial unwillingness to speak openly about them. Mavuno wants to challenge the view that sees Christians as holy, detached from certain types of feelings, and standing above the emotional struggle of everyday life, and instead point to a God who is loving, forgiving, and able to heal and restore whatever challenges a person has undergone. This way, the Mavuno leadership is able to address difficult topics in a way that is relevant to young people in Nairobi. Life beyond the ritual frame is negotiated and new ways to approach born-again life are delineated, all within a ritual framework. Expressed in technical terms, we could say that the affordance of the Christmas service is widened from 'merely' communicating the Christmas story, to

ministering to the emotional needs of young people as well.[8] The possibilities inherent in the ritual are multiplied and expanded. The price Mavuno pays for this widening of possibilities – this Alternative Christmas service – is that some Christians find them irreverent and walk out the door. To these people, some kind of music – and possibly some kinds of feelings – are just not 'right' for the liturgical setting.

6 Conclusion

This article has discussed ritual invention, disruption, and negotiation using the Mavuno Alternative Christmas service as a case in point. We have seen how Mavuno deliberately alters the format of a normal Christmas service, creatively incorporating pop music and other references from youth culture to the liturgy, while still upholding the charismatic frame through the use of carols, hymns, and other traditional elements: transgressing the boundaries of charismatic liturgy, and yet at the same time acting firmly within its frame. Music is a key factor in this mix. The Gospel is presented in a context-sensitive way via music and yet music also marks the limits of such contextualisation.

Through this altered ritual performance, Mavuno challenges "prescribed or anticipated ritual behaviour" and "draw[s] attention to latent expectations of ritual actors and the ritual itself" (McClymond 2016, 108). The altered performance asks several important questions of the born-again community: What can be expected from a born-again Christian in terms of love-related emotions? Can a Christian be hurt? Bitter? Heart-broken? Sad? Angry? Attracted? In love? And what can be expected from charismatic liturgy? Can a service include secular music? Speak of sex? Joke freely about sensitive issues? Ultimately, what is the purpose of a Christmas service?

From the perspective of the Mavuno leadership, the purpose of the service is clear: to tell the Christmas message in the most appropriate manner to a young, urban Kenyan. To them, it is obvious that all kinds of emotions can be experienced by Christians (as well as by all humans) and that only a church that speaks truthfully and honestly about all aspects of life can reach out in a trustworthy manner with the Gospel. To them, the charismatic liturgy must therefore be agile enough to be able to move beyond its own boundaries in order to reach a higher goal. Including secular music is not a problem as long as it meets this higher ambition. Conversely, unless a Christmas service does communicate the Gospel in a manner that can be understood by the participants, it is mere liturgical grandstanding. Then, the question of the nature of an authentic ritual performance gets a different and deeper interpretation. Which Christmas service is the

[8] The term 'affordance' was coined by psychologist James J. Gibson, (e.g., 2014). It refers to a range of possibilities for interaction between object and subject. In this case, the service is the 'object' interacting with young urban Kenyans, and for which the possible 'usage' is widened due to the inclusion of music that is not normally part of charismatic liturgy. See also discussion in Monique Ingalls (2018: 23).

most authentic? The one with the correct songs and the correct liturgy, or the one with the most efficiently communicated message? Who in effect 'got the rite wrong': those who 'got it right' or those who 'got it done'? And so, ritual negotiation and invention continues.

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Chapter 17: A Ritual That Turned the World Upside Down[(18)]

The Kimbanguist Annulment of Ham's Curse

Mika Vähäkangas

1 Introduction

In December 1992, a member of the general public called the police to a patch of forest near a Stockholm suburb. There was something suspicious going on. Africans clad in sack cloth were conducting weird rituals – repenting in sackcloth and ash and even burning some clothes in a metal drum found lying in the forest. The police arrived but remained observing from distance until judging that these people were of no danger to anyone or anything. Little did they know that in the Kimbanguist cosmos, this ritual reordered the world's hierarchies, removing the curse of Ham that had kept the Africans downtrodden for millennia. This was truly dangerous for white supremacy.[1]

In this chapter, I interpret theologically the motives and meaning behind the ritual referred to above. This ritual needs to be seen in its historical, political, and cultural-religious context for it to make sense. Because it took place in the Kimbanguist communities around the world far before I had any contacts with the Kimbanguists, I was not able to participate in it. Additionally, as there are no detailed descriptions of the ritual itself, there is no possibility for a proper ritual analysis. However, the available information from interviews, observation, and literature provides grounds for locating this enigmatic ritual in the Kimbanguist cosmology. In this manner, one gains additional understanding of how this cosmology works.

The chapter will begin with a general introduction to the Kimbanguist church, its life, and beliefs, followed by a discussion on the role of the myth of Ham's curse in colonial history and in the Kimbanguist thought, including the Kimbanguist ideas

[1] Knowledge about the ritual is gained through an interview and an informal discussion with Stockholm Kimbanguists (fieldwork diary 09/07/2017, 3) as well as a telephone conversation in 14/02/2021. I have not come across any written data on the ritual except minor mentions in Bazizidi 2012: 331, 482 and Mokoko 2017, 248.

about 'the black race'. In the end, I will describe and analyse the ways in which the curse inflicted on the black race has been annulled in Kimbanguism and what it means in the Kimbanguist anti-colonial renegotiation of black racial identity. In this manner, I prove that the Kimbanguist adoption of the myth of Ham's curse in their cosmology is a subversive anti-colonial move rather than giving in to colonial lies or accepting an intellectual contradiction. Through their creative ritual and mythical reinterpretation of this biblical narrative and its subsequent reception, the Kimbanguists have been able to turn the tables in the mythical realm. A toxic myth is more effectively neutralised through reinterpretation than denial because denial would amount to denying the authority of the Bible or the mythical realm altogether.

2 A Paradigmatic African Instituted Church

The Bakongo encounter with Christianity has produced prophets from very early on. Dona Beatriz, or Kimpa Vita, was the first Christian-inspired Kongo prophet in the very beginning of the eighteenth century under the intensifying Portuguese colonisation. Her ministry of preaching the black Jesus and reuniting the Kongo kingdom led her to being burned on the stake (Thornton 1998). However, her example remained alive and the Bakongo remained waiting for another God's miraculous involvement in the course of history.

The Kimbanguist Church (*Église de Jésus Christ sur la terre par son envoyé spécial Simon Kimbangu*, EJCSK; the Church of Jesus Christ on Earth by His Special Envoy Simon Kimbangu) is among the first wave of modern era African Instituted Churches, having begun during the era of high colonialism. Like most churches of this period, it started through the ministry of one African prophet, Simon Kimbangu. 1921, when Tata (Father) Simon Kimbangu carried out his half-year ministry, can be counted as the year of birth of the church even if its formal structures and official recognition followed only much later, in 1959, on the eve of the Congolese independence. A number of competing smaller churches and groups also claim to carry on Tata Simon Kimbangu's heritage.[2]

This long lag was due to the merciless persecution that the Belgian colonial authorities exercised upon the followers of the prophet condemned to death but actually imprisoned for the rest of his life. The Kimbanguists were imprisoned, tortured, killed, and sent to faraway concentration camps where thousands perished but despite, or perhaps because of, this, the number of the followers expanded in all parts of the Belgian Congo and beyond. The clandestine nature of the church, or rather the movement, meant that there was no organisation, no commonly agreed ritual or doctrine

[2] For narratives and analyses of the life and ministry of Simon Kimbangu as well as the early Kimbanguist movement, see the following: Kuntima 1984 for the official insider narrative; Martin 1971 by a convert to Kimbanguism, sent to assess the church by the WCC; Ustorf 1975 for a historical-critical version.

nor formal membership. Quite unsurprisingly, the outcome was a wide range of interpretations of the Kimbanguist faith and the way it should be believed and lived out – whether entering an armed struggle against the oppressors, resorting to civil disobedience, or leading a quiet life not openly opposing the colonial rule (Ustorf 1975: 188, 198–208, 215–220; Andersson 1958).

The newly established major Kimbanguist church (EJCSK) became pacifist and avoided mostly direct political involvement. On the grassroots level, many Kimbanguists had the idea that in Tata Simon, God the Holy Spirit had incarnated. Officially, the church leadership propagated a relatively standard Protestant doctrinal position proposing that Tata Simon would be a prophet. In the original name of the church, the epithet of Tata Simon was prophet. Later, what was dubbed as popular piety and taking place predominantly in Kikongo and Lingala languages, gradually gained ground also in the expressions of faith in French. Even if the official written documents subscribed by the Kimbanguist church are contradictory – the old ones expressing a Protestant position, and the new ones deviating from that – the idea of Jesus not being the only divine incarnation has become dominant and de facto official doctrine of the church. According to it, Tata Simon was an incarnation of the Holy Spirit, and his three sons were incarnations of the three persons of the Trinity. The present church leader, *chef spirituel* Simon Kimbangu Kiangani, is regarded as the reincarnation of Tata Simon and thereby also an incarnation of the Holy Spirit (Simon 2022).

In life and ritual practice, the Kimbanguists follow strict and radical Protestant morals with, for example, pacifism, prohibition of alcohol, and sexual ethics stretched to the extreme – prohibiting nudity even when bathing. There are also some Kongo contextual emphases such as centrality of the rejection of witchcraft related activities (*Le catéchisme kimbanguiste* 2003: 85). Kimbanguist church services are solemn and contain a lot of Bible reading, praying, and singing. The songs are considered as divinely revealed, and there is a system of official discernment of songs that are of divine origin. According to Kimbanguist theology, also Kongo spiritual traditions contain true knowledge of *Nzambi a Mpungu* (God Almighty), and that is why Kongo traditions can serve as a source of theology alongside the Bible, the divinely revealed songs, the church leadership's teaching, and Kimbanguist church traditions.[3]After the official recognition of the Kimbanguist church, it soon sought contacts with the World Council of Churches, the most important global ecumenical body. The Kimbanguists were admitted into this world body in 1969, and eventually rejected from its membership in 2020 for doctrinal reasons when their faith was no longer regarded as Christian (Mokoko Gampiot 2017: 136–150; Simon 2022). Kongo worldview had taken over their biblical interpretation and ritual.

Today, the Kimbanguists are probably over twenty million, mostly in the Democratic Republic of Congo and its neighbours, with a heavy concentration in the Lower Congo

[3] Focus group interview Nkamba 12/07/2015: 19; Mangoyo 2003b: 13–19; Bazizidi 2012: 51–52, 335; Cfr. Mokoko 2017: 86.

and the Kongo cultural area – the area of the ethnic groups who identify themselves as the Bakongo. Kimbanguism has spread globally mostly through Congolese emigrants and exiles.[4]

3 On the Curse of Ham and Its Uses

In Genesis 9, there is an enigmatic narrative about Noah building a vineyard, preparing wine, and drunkenly passing out. His son Ham comes to Noah's tent and sees his father lying naked. He goes to his brothers Sem and Japhet to mock his father and to invite them to also witness the deplorable state of their father. The two brothers go to Noah and cover his nudity. When Noah wakes up, he curses Ham's son Canaan and his offspring.

Many Bible readers take this story at its face value but for even a little-critical eye, it raises some questions. Why would seeing Noah's nakedness be such a terrible sin that the offspring should be cursed forever? And, if the culprit was Ham, why were Canaan and his offspring the cursed ones? Therefore, calling the curse Ham's curse is incorrect because Ham was not cursed but Canaan. Ham only called the curse upon a lineage of his offspring. Thus, according to the present version of the narrative, the confusion between Ham and Canaan stems from the fact that there originally were two versions of the descendants of Noah – one counting Ham as a son alongside Shem and Japheth whereas the other has Canaan in the place of Ham. The version found in the modern Bibles harmonises this by making Canaan Ham's son (Rice, n.d.). Biblical scholars have divided opinions about the interpretation of this passage. Some maintain that seeing Noah's nudity is a concealed reference to Ham engaging in sexual activity with his father whereas some others maintain that it refers to Ham sleeping with Noah's wife. The latter would also explain why the cursed was Canaan, the offspring of the illicit copulation (Bergsma and Hahn 2005).

At any rate, this narrative has had an ethnic or racial bent from the very beginning. Canaan would be the ancestor of the Canaanites, the ethnic group competing with the Israelites. Thus, here, the Israelites get a metaphysical justification for their self-perceived superiority over the Canaanites. The Israelites and the Canaanites were contesting the same land. Israelites as the newcomers had to justify metaphysically their claim for the land because the Canaanites had a historical connection to the land (Mathee 2016).

Later, probably during the long time span from the antiquity to the medieval ages, the interpretation gradually takes on a racial character when Ham is depicted as dark skinned (New World Encyclopedia, "Curse of Ham," n.d.). This may relate to the fact that the name Ham resembles the word "hum," which means dark or brown leading

[4] *Le kimbanguisme, jeune religion née au Congo* 2017 gives the figure 32 million, while some Kimbanguist sources mention 17 million (for example, *chef spirituel*, the church leader, giving that figure, Fwd Nkamba 10/07/2015: 6); Mokoko Gampiot 2017: 9.

to a folk etymology on the basis of the two words sounding similar (Goldenberg 1997: 25). Thus, the story becomes a vessel of conveying white superiority and colonialism (Whitford 2016; Kidd 2006: 39–41). In a perverted manner, this racial and colonial interpretation may be considered faithful to the possible original intentions of this Biblical text. In both cases, in the case of the Jahwist author (and subsequent editors) and the modern racist and colonialist interpreters, this story is used as a justification for the subjugation of another people and taking control of their land. This suggests that this biblical narrative is a typical "text of terror" (Trible 1984; conferatur Rice n.d.).

Whether the racial interpretation of the myth is a Jewish or Christian invention is probably a useless blame game (see Knust 2014: 389, 399–406). What is noteworthy is that this curse became a handy tool in the toolbox of colonial mythology:

> *O father Ham, what did you do? We are suffering so much.*
>
> *By God we were punished...*
>
> *And thus Ham always works for his brothers.*
>
> *And now, we are your descendants, slaves on earth* (Mokoko 2017: 38, see also 36–38).

This song, which Belgian Catholic missionary sisters of Precious Blood taught to Congolese schoolchildren in the early twentieth century, refers to the three main functions that the myth served in the colonial Africa: First, it served to legitimise the colonial white supremacy thereby preserving white innocence. Second, it taught the blacks their position in the colonial hierarchy. Third, it served as a metaphysical explanation for the blacks of their misery. The last point was important because in many African contexts, the material reality reflects the spiritual realm. Therefore, a tribulation in the material world must have its equivalent in the spirit world. Usually, this equivalent would serve as an explanation for the material misery. This dimension made the myth credible and useful for black Africans because it helped them to make sense of the colonial oppression and exploitation.

Cheikh Anta Diop attempted to turn this myth from an instrument of black marginalisation into a source of black power. According to him, the ancient Egyptians were black, and the Israelites fabricated this kind of a myth in order to discredit the people that had once oppressed and enslaved them. Ham was used to bind the curse to the black race, and the involvement of Canaan served the purpose of discrediting the people with whom the Israelites contested about land (Diop 1974: 1–9). However fascinating that theory might appear, its obvious weakness among Christianised Africans is that its acceptance presupposes the removal of the Bible from its pedestal of infallibility. This is something very few Africans are willing to do (Jenkins 2006). A successful myth of origin (of black inferiority) seems to require more than a historicist reinterpretation of its background. Oppression anchored in the mythical realm is best encountered in the very same realm with myths and rituals.

4 Black Race as the Sinful Race

Kimbanguists are vehemently anti-colonial. Therefore, I subconsciously ignored the rather many overt and covert references to Ham's curse in the Kimbanguist literature – until my Kimbanguist friends in Sweden rubbed it on my face when telling me about the ritual described above. I was flabbergasted: How come these anti-colonial Africans had swallowed the colonial propaganda hook, line, and sinker? Additionally, they insisted that the historical and present sufferings of the Black race were their own fault. I was devastated and insisted that this could not be correct. How could they live with such a blatant intellectual contradiction of self-blame and anti-colonial sentiments? Let us begin to address this question by looking at the role of this curse in the Kimbanguist cosmology.

Kimbanguists are eager to point out that Africa is the cradle of humankind according to archaeological findings. The Africa-shaped stone found in the holy city and Simon Kimbangu's home village Nkamba is believed to be the exact spot where God created humankind (Fieldwork diary Nkamba 10/07/2015: 9–10; Mokoko 2017: 187). The Paradise was thus located in the Congo. This means also that Adam and Eve, the first humans, were black.[5] Therefore, the black race is the original parent race of all humanity. A Kimbanguist hymn, considered as divinely inspired, puts it like this:

> *These two, Adam and Eve, they are our ancestors.*
>
> *Black skin, God has loved you from the time of Genesis* (Mokoko 2017: 182).

However, being the original race implies also that the responsibility of the Fall and the original sin lies with this black parent race. The black race is, therefore, at least indirectly responsible for all human sinfulness, the point that my Kimbanguist friends were attempting to drive home to the reluctant me as described above.

God sent his Son as Jesus of Nazareth among the Jews to redeem the humankind from sin. Jesus was neither black nor white according to the Kimbanguist interpretation. However, the later incarnation of the Son or Christ as Simon Kimbangu's son Dialungana creates a connection between the second person of the Trinity and the black parent race.[6]

Unfortunately, the black race's woes are greater than those of the humankind in general as depicted in a divinely inspired song:

> *Am I the only person who ever sinned in this world?*
>
> *My God, White people too have sinned! …*

[5] Bazizidi 2012: 254–255; Mokoko 2017: 182, 240. Already Marcus Garvey had this idea, see Kidd 2006: 25.

[6] Fieldwork diary Nkamba 16/07/2015, 6; fieldwork diary Stockholm 10/02/2019: 3; fieldwork

You gave intelligence to the Whites,

And they have invented weapons to get rid of me (Mokoko 2017: 204).

In the Kimbanguist thought, these woes stem from Ham's curse. One strong dimension of Kimbanguist moral code is the prohibition of nudity. This does not only mean decent clothing but also that nudity is not allowed at any time, even when in shower, for example.[7] Nudity is seen both as a great sin and disgrace. This strict policy is sometimes explained as a precaution: one may die at any time, and it would be terrible were one found dead naked (Fieldwork diary Kinshasa 20/07/2015: 1). The roots of the dread against nudity can be found at least in three partly overlapping directions. First, the colonial propaganda used Africans' partial nudity as a proof of their inferior culture. Second, the nineteenth century revivalist Christianity – in line with Victorian moralism – was very restrictive about nudity. Third, the Genesis narrative on Noah's nakedness and Ham's curse has undoubtedly contributed to this idea, as well. For the Kimbanguists with their strict moral code concerning nudity, their ancestors' nudity serves therefore as a proof of their deep sinfulness.[8]

The sufferings of the particularly sinful black race under the curse of Ham are multiple. Slavery and colonial exploitation are paramount examples of that but also the sorry state of African economy and lack of technological advancement are additional dimensions of the cursed state. Whites, in turn, have taken advantage of the situation, being technologically more advanced, and colonised and exploited the blacks (Janzen and MacGaffey 1974: 131; from Diangienda's "Loyalty to Jerusalem" 1959). However, despite the curse, the whites' taking advantage of the Africans does not count as innocent. The Kimbanguists call the former colonialists to repentance for their colonial sins. Yet, the Kimbanguists' anti-colonial tone is very reconciliatory. One of the reasons may be the fact that Ham's curse provides them with a metaphysical reason for the African suffering thereby making the history more palatable even if not condoning the wrongs committed by the colonialists.

5 Redemption from the Curse

In John 14:16, Jesus promises to send the Comforter. In the Lower Congo 1921, many saw that promise being fulfilled (Bazizidi 2012: 107, 117–134) when Simon Kimbangu (circa 1889–1951), a man of humble background, started to preach the Gospel,

diary Stockholm 24/05/2015: 2; Nguapitshi 2005, 231. According to Kimbanguist biblical interpretation, there was even an earlier incarnation of Christ than Jesus of Nazareth, namely Melchizedek mentioned in Genesis 14; MacGaffey 1969: 133.

[7] *Le catéhisme kimbanguiste* 2003: 85: "Ne pas se laver, ni dormir nu." Fieldwork diary Nkamba 16/07/2015, 11–13.

[8] Fieldwork diary Stockholm 09/07/2017: 3. See also Covington-Ward 2016, 111. Bazizidi 2012: 579 connects nudity with the original sin and witchcraft – witches carry out their business nude.

heal the sick, and resurrect the dead. Multitudes flocked to the tiny Nkamba hamlet on a hill, carrying their sick and dead. God seemed to have sent a great redeemer in the abyss of merciless exploitative tyranny of the Belgian Congo. Before too long, the colonial administration arrested, tried, and convicted the religious enthusiast. The conviction was death sentence for high treason – trying to overthrow the colonial tyranny. This despite the fact that Kimbangu has never been recorded to promote violent opposition against the colonial system. However, his rising up as a religious leader challenging the white missionaries' religious leadership was threatening enough for the colonialists. The only freedom that the Bakongo had, freedom of religion, proved to be simply a freedom to choose between different white religious masters. The death sentence was transformed into life imprisonment, and he spent the rest of his life in prison in the south of the Congo, far away from home. He died in 1951 (Martin 1971; Diangienda 1986; Ustorf 1975).

Simon Kimbangu's imprisonment and thereby silencing and fierce persecution of his followers did not eradicate the Kimbanguist movement that went underground. Among the believers, the faith in Simon Kimbangu as the incarnation of the Holy Spirit was gaining more and more foothold. This development was obviously related to the question of Kimbangu's role in salvation history. If he was not only a witness to Jesus Christ, but God incarnate, then this was for a reason. In the same way in which Christ was incarnated among the Jews under the heavy Roman colonial yoke, the Holy Spirit was incarnated in the darkness of oppression when God saw mercy upon the Africans.[9]

If Jesus came to redeem the Adamite offspring of the sin following the Fall, Simon Kimbangu came to redeem Ham's offspring of the sin resulting from the ancestral evil deed and the following curse.[10] Implications of this were seen especially in Kimbangu's most famous prophecy: "The black will become white, and the white will become black" (Martin 1971: 116; Ustorf 1975: 186–187; Diangienda 1984: 82; Mokoko 2017: 66, 228–259; Mangoyo s.a.: 6). This prophecy has been interpreted in various ways, but the common denominator is that of black liberation.[11] Another prophecy relevant for our topic is the one in which Kimbangu prophesises African political liberation and spiritual liberation that will follow thereafter (Mokoko 2017: 241).

However, these two liberations were first only promises. The political liberation took place largely in the 1960s through the colonies gaining their independence. The spiritual liberation was yet to come (Mangoyo s.a.: 7). This liberation from Ham's curse became one degree more tangible in December 1992 when the Kimbanguists carried

[9] Fieldwork diary Nkamba 15/07/2015: 7; Mokoko 2017, 216–217.

[10] Fieldwork diary Stockholm 09/07/2017: 3; fieldwork diary Stockholm 12/10/2015: 1; Mokoko 2017: 124, 215–216.

[11] Centrality of race and visions of the Africans gaining a central role in the world and salvation history are not specific only to the Kimbanguists. For example, Nigerian Pentecostals have similar views; Wariboko 2014.

out the rite of repentance on behalf of the whole black race around the world.[12] A song sung in the ritual describes the agenda:

> *Our ancestors transgressed and never repented*
>
> *But we are begging Thee, why not listen to us? …*
>
> *For so many years I have been a prisoner,*
>
> *I, the Black race, jailed for 4,400 years*
>
> *To this day, why not listen to us?* (Mokoko 2017, 248–249).

In which sense was this act of black liberation from the curse a ritual? Of course, this was a holy symbolic act communicating a religious message, all of which would be in support of defining this as a ritual (Hornborg 2005a: 13–19). Often, one connects the idea of ritual with tradition, which practically means repetition. Yet, this act was not repeated. This ritual was obviously an invention for the participants. They were well aware that it had not been performed before because it was a once and for all event. Yet, due to its interritual nature – gleaning from the biblical imaginary of sackcloth and ashes (for example, *Matt* 11:21) – it had the air of tradition around it. Anne-Christine Hornborg points out that precisely this interritual tactic facilitates an invention to be tradition at the same time which, in turn, renders the ritual its credibility and thereby efficacy (Hornborg 2017). So, in spite of its uniqueness, this act can be counted as an innovative ritual in the Hornborg sense.

For the Kimbanguists, that ritual marked the beginning of the removal of the consequences of the curse. Africa is truly about to rise. The Kongo area will be united, and Africans will play an increasingly great role in technology and world history. At the end of the times, Kongo will be the refuge of humankind.[13] It all began in the Paradise and the focus of world history will turn back to Kongo in the very end.[14] After all, Nkamba is the New Jerusalem (Yelusalemi dia Mpa/Nouvelle Jerusalem) depicted in the Revelation, the last book of the Bible.[15]

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[12] Note, however, that both Bazizidi 2012: 331 and Mokoko 2017: 248 describe that the ritual cleansed the original sin. Melice 2001: 42–43, places the 1992 ritual in a continuum of rituals starting in 1961. The 1992 ritual would have consisted of four phases that annul the curses of Adam, Eve, and Cain. There exists thus a web of rituals and their interpretations.

[13] Fieldwork diary Nkamba 13/07/2015: 14; fieldwork diary Kinshasa 06/07/2015: 6; Fieldwork diary Stockholm 09/07/2017: 4. See also fieldwork diary Nkamba 14/07/2015: 5; fieldwork diary Stockholm 09/07/2017: 1–2.

[14] Fieldwork diary Nkamba 14/07/2015: 9. See also Mokoko 2017: 224, 247. These ideas are not only Kimbanguist but can be found also in Bundu dia Kongo, a radical religious-political movement; Covington-Ward 2016, 210.

[15] Janzen & MacGaffey 1974, 132 (from Diangienda's "Loyalty to Jerusalem," 1959); fieldwork diary Nkamba 13/07/2015: 10–11; fieldwork diary Nkamba 16/07/2015: 6; Mangoyo 2000: 26.

6 Annulment of Ham's Curse as Subversion of Colonial Hierarchies

The Kimbanguist use of the colonial myth of Ham's curse is thoroughly subversive. The narrative that marginalised the Africans does exactly the opposite in the Kimbanguist hands. The Kimbanguist approach differs completely from Cheikh Anta Diop's rational refutation of the myth. Instead of refuting it, the Kimbanguists appropriate it for their own theological construction.

When this story is placed in the totality of Kimbanguist salvation history of the Creation, the Fall, the Redemption, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the last things (Mokoko 2017: 85), the myth of Ham's curse turns upside down. It is no longer a proof of black marginalisation but rather of the centrality of the black race in God's plans. Even if I have never read or heard the Kimbanguists referring to the blacks as human beings *par excellence*, the idea of black Adam and Eve is a hint in that direction (Melice 2001: 42). Among rank-and-file Kimbanguists, there are tendencies to place increasingly many biblical events in Kongo, including even the giving of the Ten Commandments and Jesus's ministry. However, not all salvation history is black African according to the leadership of the Kimbanguist church. When I asked, the present *chef spirituel*, Simon Kimbangu Kiangani, answered that neither the Ten Commandments nor Jesus's ministry took place in Kongo. Regarding this answer's authority, it is good to be reminded that this grandson of Tata Simon is considered also his reincarnation and therefore incarnation of the Holy Spirit, therefore God (fieldwork diary Nkamba 16/07/2015: 6; fieldwork diary Stockholm 10/02/2019: 3; fieldwork diary Stockholm 24/05/2015: 2).

When the colonialist's accusing finger points at the black Kimbanguist accusing her for her sorry state, the Kimbanguist reaction is not to deny culpability. Quite the opposite – the Kimbanguist admits her guilt – and extends it almost ad absurdum. Yes, the blacks are responsible for their suffering due to their sinfulness (fieldwork diary Stockholm 09/07/2017: 4). Furthermore, they are not only responsible for their own suffering but also in a way responsible for the colonialists' sinfulness, too, through the Fall by the black Adam and Eve (Mokoko 2017: 202). Likewise, the white race has been specially blessed by God resulting in the colonial hierarchy (Melice 2001: 42). Yet, the black responsibility for the Fall does not erase the Belgian colonialists' responsibility for the atrocities in the Congo. Rather, the Kimbanguists are constantly calling the Belgians to repent. The whites misused sinfully their blessed and elevated position (fieldwork diary Stockholm 09/07/2017: 4; fieldwork diary Stockholm 09/11/2014: 5).

The original sin resulting from the Fall is witchcraft (Bazizidi 2012: 22; Mokoko 2017: 197–198), which is again strongly related to the Africans in the colonial tropes. Thus, by identifying the original sin as witchcraft, the Kimbanguists are further emphasising the racial dimension of the Fall. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that fighting

[16] *Le catéhisme kimbanguiste* 2003: 85: "S'abstenir de la sorcellerie et de la divination."

witchcraft is one major element of the Kimbanguist moral code.[16] However, in spite of the colonial trope referring to witchcraft as an African phenomenon, the original sin of witchcraft is not limited to the Africans only. Even the whites have their own hidden forms of modern witchcraft like Freemasonry and Rosicrucianism, which the Kimbanguists vehemently oppose.[17]

This admittance of guilt turns the black race into the central human player in the cosmic drama of Creation, Fall, and Redemption. Like Adam and Eve, and Ham, all progenitors are responsible for the sins of their descendants following the generational curse related to the progenitors' sin, so are the blacks as the original human race responsible for all misdeeds of their offspring. In this picture, the white colonialist depicting himself as the adult, and the colonised as children, turns into the child of the Africans that he is oppressing. In the Kongo culture where seniority and especially parenthood is held in high esteem, the white colonialist's attitude appears as abominable and even ridiculous. A child is never supposed to depict himself as superior to his parents.

Another dimension of placing the myth of the curse in the Kimbanguist salvation history is that even this myth contributes to returning agency to the blacks (Mokoko 2017: 262). When one assumes full responsibility for something – be it one's fault or not – one also assumes agency. However, in this case, Ham's sin and the following curse are so grave that without God's involvement, the blacks could not have been able to turn the tide of history. Therefore, the Holy Spirit needed to incarnate in the black African Simon Kimbangu (fieldwork diary Stockholm 12/10/2015, 1). Additionally, the efficacy of the ritual of annulling Ham's curse did not come from the power or holiness of the participating Kimbanguists, but from God. After all, God Himself in the form of *chefs spirituels* – leaders of the church – had ordered the Kimbanguists to carry out the ritual. The church had been led only by Tata Simon's sons, the youngest, Diangienda Kuntima from 1959 until his death in July 1992 followed by the middle brother, Dialungana Kiangani, until his death in August 2001 (Bazizida 2012: 90; Mokoko 2017: 180–181). The church leaders initiating this ritual and resembling rituals were thus incarnations of the Trinitarian persons. The concreteness of this liberation was further emphasised by the strongly embodied nature of the ritual involving changing of clothing, burning clothes, prayers on knees, *et cetera* (see Hornborg 2005b). Thus, very much in line with the holistic Kongo cosmology, the blacks' oppressed status based on the curse in the spiritual sphere was annulled in the spiritual sphere through embodied action in the physical sphere.

7 Conclusion

Kimbanguist revaluation of the myth of Ham's curse reveals their dual approach to both African traditions and blackness: On one hand, African traditions, especially

[17] Bazizidi 2012: 482, 573–577; Mokoko 2017: 240. Mokoko 2017: 201–202, 220 quotes *chef spirituel* Diangienda's speeches that condemn Freemasonry and Rosicrucianism.

Kongo spiritual traditions, are a source of Kimbanguist theology due to their inherent religious values. Additionally, the black race is the original race, and Africans are the firstborn among the humans, about to reassume the leading role in world history. On the other hand, African traditions are soiled by sin, especially witchcraft and immorality, both related to nudity. Additionally, the black race has been cursed. This duality in approach helps the Kimbanguists to argue for their spiritually superior position in relation to the other Africans. At the same time, the acknowledgement of valuable dimensions in African traditions facilitates the eclectic use of the African background which serves in rejecting the colonial oppression. The outcome is a new religious-political-racial identity (Mokoko 2017: 199). This new identity is irenic in tone because the opposing racial pole, the whites, are seen not only as the colonial sinners but recipients of God's blessings during the time of Ham's curse's efficacy and finally also as junior siblings (Mokoko 2017: 201–203). Colonialism was not a meaningless vale of tears but an important dispensation in the great divinely led drama of salvation. Mokoko quotes Diangienda as having preached: "If we are suffering, it is not the White man's fault. Don't be violent with them, for you [Black men] are the root of all suffering in this world" (Mokoko 2017: 211. Likewise, Diangienda 1984: 82). When the Kimbanguists appropriate the racist myth of Ham's curse as a reference to Africans, it is not denied but by the very act of acceptance the Kimbanguists turn the power hierarchies upside down and turn a vehicle of oppression into a liberative narrative. All this takes place in the ritual-mythical realm without discounting its importance or efficacy.

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This book brings together leading international scholars with the aim of exploring ritual perspectives in the study of contemporary religions. It combines significant theoretical and methodological reflections and applies it to four main fields relevant to the study of contemporary religions: indigeneity; new spiritualities and ecology; lived religion (with Islam and Africa as case studies); and finally, religion and embodiment.
The structure and content of the book takes its point of departure from the research topics and collegial network of the internationally acclaimed scholar of ritual studies, Professor Anne-Christine Hornborg. The book is dedicated to her.

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