

RELIGION AND THE BODY

RELIGION AND THE BODY

Based on papers read at the symposium
on Religion and the Body
held at Åbo, Finland, on 16–18 June 2010

Edited by
Tore Ahlbäck

Editorial Assistant
Björn Dahla

Published by the Donner Institute for Research
in Religious and Cultural History
Åbo, Finland

Distributed by Tibo-Trading Ltd
Pargas, Finland

Editorial secretary Maria Vasenkari
Linguistic editing Sarah Bannock

ISSN 0582-3226
ISBN 978-952-12-2590-1

Printed in Finland by
Vammalan kirjapaino
Sastamala 2011

Editorial note

For a few years now a new trend in the study of religion has been discernible in the choice of themes for the Donner Institute conferences. The object of interest is no longer old, established religions—and neither are recently established religious movements found on the agenda. The attention has thus turned away from organised religious practices. Instead, studies are focussed on non-institutional and non-organised practice of religion. This is obvious in the theme for the 2008 symposium ‘Postmodern Spirituality’, in the 2010 theme ‘Religion and the Body’—also the subject of the present volume of the series *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis*—and in the theme for the Institute’s symposium organised 15–17 June 2011: ‘Post-Secular Religious Practices’. In all these cases, human religious activities are explored in a secular context outside of established religions.

Our Call for Papers for the symposium ‘Religion and the Body’ included the following brief definition of the theme: ‘One of the places where religion and culture intersect is the body. The body can be manipulated using various methods that are also used in a non-religious context. Examples of such are asceticism, fasting and other dietary restrictions, and various psycho-techniques such as yoga. The body is also mutilated for religious reasons, as in the case of circumcision.’ Having given some 15 examples of phenomena within this theme the definition continued thus: ‘The theme of the body has been topical for quite some time—for example, within gender studies. . . . We should, however, point out that we are thinking of the concrete body, not of the body in a metaphorical sense.’

The symposium ‘Religion and the Body’ attracted a great deal of interest; it was well attended and well organised—we now hope that the conference publication will be well received.

Table of contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| JARL-THURE ERIKSSON Truth, body and religion | 11 |
| VEIKKO ANTTONEN The sacredness of the self, of society and of the human body: The case of a Finnish transgender pastor Marja-Sisko Aalto | 13 |
| MADIS ARUKASK Resurrection, revenance, and exhumation: The problematics of the dead body in songs and laments | 28 |
| ASMA BARLAS Abraham's sacrifice in the Qur'an: Beyond the body | 55 |
| MÅNS BROO Defiled and deified: Profane and sacred bodies in Caitanya Vaiṣṇava theology | 72 |
| OREN ERGAS 'Religion' and 'body': Reclaiming the missing links of Western education | 79 |
| CÉLINE GRÜNHAGEN The female body in early Buddhist literature | 100 |
| JUHA HILTUNEN Spiritual and religious aspects of torture and scalping among the Indian cultures in Eastern North America, from ancient to colonial times | 115 |
| TUIJA HOVI Praising as bodily practice: The neocharismatic culture of celebration | 129 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| VISA IMMONEN & JUSSI-PEKKA TAAVITSAINEN Finger of a saint, thumb of a priest: Medieval relics in the Diocese of Turku, and the archaeology of lived bodies | 141 |
| JAY JOHNSTON The body in Wellbeing Spirituality: Self, spirit beings and the politics of difference | 174 |
| ISABELLE JONVEAUX Asceticism: an endangered value? Mutations of ascetism in contemporary monasticism | 186 |
| SANDRA JUNKER The disorderly body: Considerations of The Book of Numbers, 19 and ritual impurity after contact with a corpse | 197 |
| MATTI KAMPPINEN The concept of body in religious studies | 206 |
| JENS KUTSCHER Towards a solution concerning female genital mutilation? An approach from within according to Islamic legal opinions | 216 |
| GÖRAN LARSSON Islam and tattooing: An old question, a new research topic | 237 |
| MICHELLE LELWICA The Religion of Thinness | 257 |
| MIKAEL LINDFELT The body, religion and sports: Through the lenses of postmodern religiosity | 286 |
| MIRA NICULESCU Women with shaved heads: Western Buddhist nuns and Haredi Jewish wives: Polysemy, universalism and misinterpretations of hair symbolism in pluralistic societies | 309 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| PETER NYNÄS | |
| Multiple bodies in the spirituality of the gay porn star McCree: Reflections on corporeality and subjectivity | 333 |
| JO PEARSON | |
| Embracing the lash: Pain and ritual as spiritual tools | 351 |
| FERDINANDO SARDELLA | |
| Religious experiments in colonial Calcutta: Modern Hinduism and <i>bhakti</i> among the Indian middle class | 364 |
| ANDREW SINGLETON | |
| The rise and fall of the Pentecostals: The role and significance of the body in Pentecostal spirituality | 381 |
| SOFIA SJÖ | |
| Struggling bodies and body struggles: Explorations of body and religion in contemporary Nordic film | 400 |
| TERHI UTRAINEN | |
| The post-secular position and enchanted bodies | 417 |
| MALCOLM VOYCE | |
| Buddhism and the formation of the religious body: A Foucauldian approach | 433 |
| Biographical notes | 462 |

Truth, body and religion

Q*uid est Veritas.** These are the words spoken by Pilate who, as he washed his hands, tried to find something to accuse the man of who had been brought before him by the Jews. The anagram of this classic Latin sentence is: *est vir qui adest*: that is the man in front of you. The coincidence of this anagram fascinated me as a teenager. The confrontation between Jesus and Pilate was illustrated in *Ripley's Wonder Book of Strange Facts*, a book I had received from an elderly lady from New York during a visit to the USA in 1963, where I worked as a counsellor at a Salvation Army Summer Colony.

So, what is truth? In a religious context 'truth' is like a mantra, a certain imperative to believe in sacred things. However, one of the great minds of the Medieval Ages actually gave the best possible definition of truth. According to Thomas of Aquinas (1225–74) 'truth is a measure of the resemblance between reality and human perception' (*veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus*). In nature there is no truth: everything is as it is in an eternal quest for harmony. The concept of truth and falseness arises, when we as humans compare reality, as we experience it through our senses, with the representation we have in our memory, a comparison of new information with stored information. If we look for the truth, we have to search in the human mind. There we will also find religion.

Some of us have heard the story of the boy who wanted to explore the nature of time. As the pragmatist he was, he started to disassemble his mother's alarm clock; without, however, coming any closer to solving the problem. The time-measuring device, the clock, does not communicate the meaning of time. For us humans, knowledge of time gives a context to operate within. The nature of meaning is one of the most intriguing questions in philosophy. The concept of meaning is closely related to the human mind. Non-human primates do learn things by experience, but are not capable of long-term planning. The intellectual leap of mankind which occurred some 50 to 100 thousand years ago, most certainly assisted by the development of language, lifted

* This paper is based on the words of welcome on 16 June 2010. Jarl-Thure Eriksson is the chancellor of Åbo Akademi University.

the mind from dwelling in the present to a metaphysical state, wherein it was possible to make time travel in the mind by remembering occasions from the past, or making strategic plans for hunting or attacks on neighbouring tribes. Meaning is putting a sense experience into a context and perceiving a dynamic narrative, either in terms of history, or the coming future.

According to the dualistic principle of Descartes, humans consist of a body substance and a soul substance. In the seventeenth century the soul had a deep religious meaning; one saw the soul as a ghost being somehow immersed in the bodily being. Today we draw a parallel between soul and mind, the mind being a result of cognitive functions. We still know very little about the working of the mind, about consciousness and about 'the self'. New information accumulates continuously. For instance, mirror neurons seem to have a bearing on empathy and social abilities. It might even be that the network of these neurons has a cross-connecting function by uniting different regions of the cortex. As a further result, the conscious mind experiences the real world as a scene wherein you yourself are an actor.

In his large work *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, about the rise and collapse of cultures, Oswald Spengler includes religion as an important ingredient of each form of culture. Spengler uses seasonal changes as a metaphor for the maturation of civilizations. During the spring mythical tales have an amalgamating influence on the community. Summer signals the appearance of religious thinkers writing down ethical rules. The autumn brings enlightenment and philosophers searching for reason. An increasing secularization announces the coming of the winter phase, the last stage before collapse. From archaeology and history we also know that religion plays a central role in the interplay between the ruler and his subjects. But we also know that without a religious infrastructure, there would probably be no cultural development at all.

In summary, the religious characteristic of the human mind emerged in parallel with its intellectual faculties, perhaps assisted by the development of the mirror neurons. On the inner scene humans saw themselves as members of a social group. Threatened by natural catastrophes, diseases and tribal violence it seems logical that human beings incorporated superior powers into their mental scenarios. As time went on it appeared that the religious thought by communication between individuals also had an efficacious effect on society, religion providing a social glue between individuals.

Descartes was the prisoner of an archaic mode of thinking; he saw the body and the soul as two separate entities. His final problem was to understand how these two interacted. He did not recognize the soul as the working of the mind, the force that actually gave man life and made him human.

VEIKKO ANTONEN

The sacredness of the self, of society and of the human body

The case of a Finnish transgender pastor Marja-Sisko Aalto

Introduction

A Finnish professor turns on a TV in a hotel room in Damascus, in Islamic Syria in December 2008. He happens to switch onto a Russian channel, broadcast from Moscow, the capital of a mainly Orthodox nation, and comes across a report on a Finnish Lutheran male pastor who has just undergone sex reassignment surgery. The body and gender of this Lutheran minister made headlines not only in Finland, but her case transcended religious and national borders. The change of sex of a Finnish transgender pastor attracted media attention to Lutheran Christianity on a worldwide scale, which compared to other religious traditions seldom makes it to the world news. In this article I shall discuss the sex reassignment undergone by Marja-Sisko Aalto, a Lutheran pastor from the town of Imatra, in south eastern Finland, who in 2008, at the age of 54, was transformed into a woman. Throughout the following account, I will use the pronoun *she*, even when discussing her life prior the sex reassignment surgery.

Marja-Sisko Aalto (formerly Olli-Veikko Aalto) was born in July 1954 in Lappeenranta in south eastern Finland. There were eight children in the family: she was the seventh son and after her a daughter was born. Marja-Sisko's family was Lutheran, though her parents did not observe religious customs very strictly. In 1973, Marja-Sisko entered the Faculty of Theology at the University of Helsinki. In 1986 she started working as a pastor in Imatra. She has been married twice and has three daughters from her first marriage. Since early childhood, she has experienced that her natal, or genital sex—that of a man—does not correspond to her own perception of her sex. Marja-Sisko's decision to change her sex and become a woman gave rise to heated debates within the Lutheran Church and in the media. Shortly after returning to her work as a pastor in the small town of Imatra, Marja-Sisko felt an urge to resign from her office because her colleagues, bishops, friends and members

of her congregation expressed their suspicion and turned their backs on her. Throughout this process, Marja-Sisko has been giving interviews and has appeared frequently on TV; a documentary about her was shown on national TV in March 2010 and she also writes a blog.

This particular case of sex reassignment raises intriguing questions about the role of the human body in religion, as well as about issues that may have analytical value in making sense of the problematic experiences faced by individuals with non-binary gender identity, whether lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender or intersex-identified individuals. I ask the question as to why would perceptions of a pastor's body matter more than her theological competence and a sincere will to put love into practice? Why is it that her physical, sex reassigned body is perceived as an anomaly, which no longer fits her previous position in the congregation? When Marja-Sisko Aalto brought her sex reassignment treatment into the public domain, she had a sincere wish—based on her Christian conviction—that the Evangelical Lutheran Church as her employer would accept her choice in making this fundamental transition in her life and create conditions for her to continue her work as a pastor. After all, her personal identity and personality traits, as well as her strong commitment to the Lutheran Church have remained the same as before. However, during the last two years following the start of her sex reassignment process, Marja-Sisko Aalto has become stigmatized and to a certain extent, has experienced discrimination. Persons in leading positions in the ecclesiastical administration have repeatedly turned down her applications for various positions, until finally she was elected as the notary of *diocese* for *Kuopio* by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in September 2010.

I argue that in order to find answers to these questions, we need to theorize why our cherished notions of the self, of society and of the human body, work the way they do. As scholars of Religious Studies, we are aware of the fact that sociocultural practices, including religious practices, are located in our bodies. The necessary link between the ideal and the real, the symbolic and the imaginative, the appropriate and inappropriate, the pure and licit as well as the impure and illicit, which characterizes religious thought and behaviour, is founded on the corporeality of human beings. Our societies are constituted on categorical boundaries on the basis of which people tend to stigmatize those who are not imagined as part of 'us'. By 'us' and 'we' I refer to the imaginary we, who tend to think that only we have normal bodies, intelligent brains, rational thinking and capacity for love and emotional responses.

Even prior to Marja-Sisko Aalto's return to her congregation after the sex reassignment surgery and treatments, the major issue faced by her was that

the key persons in the parish had already decided that her physical body no longer fitted the notion of the social body. Let me cite the late British cultural anthropologist Mary Douglas, who writes that

[t]he social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived. The physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society. (Douglas 1996: 69.)

We need to rehearse our academic training in Religious Studies, cultural anthropology, sociology and psychology in order to find ways of understanding why our notions of the self and society are religiously charged. We need to understand why we think and behave in the way we do, as members of religious organizations and as members of nations and societies. I shall argue that the religious charge stems from marking boundaries between the categories of the self, of the society and of the human body. In my interpretation, it is the anomalous, taxonomic status of the transgender pastor within the normative Christian categorical thinking that creates awe and fear.

I will start with some remarks on the relation between religion and the body and briefly discuss terminological issues. In the second part of the article, I will return to Marja-Sisko Aalto and her life story. The discussion is based on my interview with her in April 2010. In the last section I will discuss the Finnish cognitive scholar Ilkka Pyysiäinen's reflection on folk biology as an explanation for making sense of the public image regarding a priest's gender. I conclude by looking at Marja-Sisko Aalto's case from the perspective of marking boundaries between the categories of the self, the society and the human body. At the end of the day, however, I have no definite answers and solutions. I can only theorize Marja-Sisko's case from a variety of vantage points and trust that they resonate confidentially with the information that she has extended to me.

Religion and the body

Within the field of religious studies, we need to acknowledge the fact that cultural practices, including religious practices, are located in our bodies. As historians of religions, we are well aware of the fact that interpretations of corporeality vary immensely according to religious traditions, cultures and societies. The body of Jesus Christ, *Corpus Christi*, lies at the heart of

Christianity. A human being is regarded as an image of God, carved in our flesh and body by the force of biblical tradition. However, throughout the history of Christianity, the human body has posed a theological problem for the Christian Churches due to its non-divine properties. While the human soul possesses a boundless religious potential through the notion of the spirit, the body is weak flesh and decaying matter, playing a less important role in the Christian worldview.

Salvation-related Christian discourse has been predominantly centered on normative or, citizen bodies, i.e. bodies which adjust and conform to general rules and regulations prescribed and controlled by the state, its social institutions and its laws (see Graham 2007). Over the last two decades an increasing number of LGTB-activists (lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual) have been drawing the attention of the public to claims of gender-variance citizenship. In societies like Finland, where the official Lutheran religion is intimately connected with the notion of the citizenship, non-normative gender and sexual identities appear to be a major source of cognitive dissonance for members of the society in general and for Christian believers in particular.

In discussing the role of religion in moulding attitudes towards variances in sexual and gender identity, we need to be clear about gender-specific terms and categories. 'Transgender' is a term that is used to describe people who transcend conventional gender boundaries, irrespective of their physical status or sexual orientation: the term includes intersex and third-gender people, androgynes, cross-dressers, drag queens, drag kings and gender queers (see Kidd & Witten 2008: 33). 'Transgender' is an etic category, i.e. an experience-distant category, which cultural agents subsumed in that category do not employ in their everyday parlance. Instead, they use terms of their own gender community: they refer to themselves as girls, fem queens, women, gay, and so forth. Transgender is thus an imposed etic category which is used by academics, social service providers, and by participants in the transgender liberation and lesbian liberation movements. The distinction between 'transgender' and 'gay' reinforces social hierarchies, as Anne Enke, the American professor of Gender and Women's Studies at the University of Madison, Wisconsin points out. Enke writes that

[a] long history of medical practices, academic theorizing, social movement efforts, and social service provision have worked hard to construct distinctions between sexual preference and gender identity or expression. But the institutionalization of the categorical distinction between transgender, gay, and straight not only separates sexuality and gender,

but simultaneously reinforces race and class hierarchies according to the privileged logics of heteronormativity and homonormativity. (Enke 2009: 199.)

The choice of a particular term marks an important difference: gay, lesbian and bisexual identities concern predominantly sexual preference, while transgender is used to pertain only to gender identification. Transgender-identified individuals do not necessarily put emphasis on sexual identity. Marja-Sisko Aalto has likewise posited that her change of sex has nothing to do with her sexual preferences. I will now proceed with a brief account of her biographical process.

A narrative construction of the self

I met Marja-Sisko for the first time in April 2010 in Helsinki, where she lived after resigning from her office in Imatra. During our two-hour discussion, she repeated many of the same ideas and told me about the same episodes of her life that I recognized from the documentary as well as various other interviews in newspapers and on TV. Some of the information can be obtained also from her blog in the Internet (<http://marja-siskonblogi.blogspot.com/>). Marja-Sisko's willingness to discuss her experiences publicly is a conscious choice and an act of civic activism—she seeks to raise consciousness about the existence of transgender-identified individuals. Simultaneously, through public accounts about her life and about the process of becoming a woman she is self-professing a social identity as a woman. In other words, and to refer to Judith Butler, Marja-Sisko is engaged in a process of discursively constructing herself as a woman (Salih 2003: 74). In the following, I aim to discuss how transforming one's sex is not only a biological, but also an ongoing narrative and performative process that involves narrating one's past from the perspective of the present day. Memory plays a significant role in the discursive construction of the self. Let me refer to Thomas Csordas who writes that 'memory is a powerful symbol of the self, such that access to memory is access to a privileged zone of communion with that 'other who becomes myself' (Csordas 1997: 110). The following analysis is based on my interview with Marja-Sisko Aalto as well as her public appearances.

In spite of having been born into a male body, she felt that she was female before she had words to express herself. Like many male-to-female (or MTF) individuals, Marja-Sisko uses the notion of female, not feminine, as the

gender identifier. Being a very articulate and, rational person and having had an academic education, she does not talk about her traumatic experience of having been in the 'wrong' body with mixed feelings, but describes her life in a very self-confident manner.

I was a very different child. According to my mother, I reflected things a lot although I did not have words to express myself. When I was three I asked my parents, why I need to wear boys' clothes even though I am a girl. At the age of six I faced my first serious crisis when I talked with my parents about being a girl. I learned that it is disgraceful even to say it out aloud. I had to shut off such a big part of my life, to tear off an important piece of me. It was such a horrible idea for a 6-year old to hear that I was naughty and disgraceful for saying who I was.

One of the striking traits in Marja-Sisko's personality is her serenity and tranquility. Her personality has been tested several times. On an occasion of managership training at the end of 1980s, she achieved the highest points in the history of the psychology centre in testing her ability to tolerate stress. According to her, this trait, along with her Christian faith has helped her in life, at least externally.

In Marja-Sisko's childhood home, religion was an issue of values, attitudes and choices in life. Her grandfather from her mother's side had been a lay representative at the Synod and her mother had been in various positions of trust at the congregation in Lappeenranta for 30 years. It was taken for granted that children would participate in the various activities organized by the parish. There has been no religious crisis whatsoever in Marja-Sisko's life; her religious faith has evolved as an integral part of her family life. The only crisis, or rather struggle, has been a continuous attempt to reconcile the Christian faith and Marja-Sisko. Theologically, the words of St Paul have helped her to conceptualize her struggle: 'I am the clay who continuously quarrels with the potter.'

The family consisted of eight children: there were six big brothers before Marja-Sisko (i.e. Olli) and one little sister after her. To my question on religious motivation for a large family, Marja-Sisko replied to me that her parents were medical students during the war years. By helping to treat the dying young men they saw in practice the demographic damages of war to the society. They loved children and wanted to have a large family. Her father had been an only child and perhaps felt a need to compensate.

An interesting feature, or a narrative construct, concerns the role of dreams in coping with the discrepancy between her inner life and the facts of the real world. She recollects that from the time of being very young, dreams and images have assisted her in coping with her situation.

In my imaginary world everything that was prohibited in the real world became true. The most beautiful dream that I repeatedly had was the one in which our family went to visit neighbours. My parents were extremely sociable people, especially my mother. We visited neighbours and other acquaintances and things like that. The dream was about a very typical visit. My mother introduced us by saying that here are my six sons and two daughters.

In real life, Marja-Sisko's father could not cope in any way with the gender issue. Throughout his life, he wanted to make his son's gender identification invisible. Marja-Sisko illustrates that she could not discuss the issue in peace with her father. The cure that father offered was sport; in athletics the confusing thoughts would go away. Until Marja-Sisko was around 15 or 16 she was a good runner: at the time when she was a 'he', she ran 800 and 1 500 meters and progressed well in competitions. However, in the shower rooms, she was disturbed by the thought that she had to put on the clothes of a teenage boy. Her major hobbies today are still volleyball, reading, philately and choral singing. Marja-Sisko's singing register is second bass. At present, she is in speech therapy and in the process of learning to raise the pitch range of her voice to alto.

Rewinding the marks of manhood

Perceiving of herself to be a transgender, Marja-Sisko's life has been a continuous learning process. She was socialized to adopt a male gender identity. From the pre-school years onwards she has felt a great pressure to adopt and learn culturally normative masculine gender expressions, but at the same time also a need to express femininity. Thus, masculine body language and feminine self-conception have contradicted each other. Two decades ago, long before undergoing treatment, Marja-Sisko sought paid help to acquire skills regarded as feminine, or as she put it, 'the most basic things that girls usually learn from their mothers': how to apply make-up, how to stand, sit and walk as a woman, how to carry a purse or wait at traffic lights. 'There are a thousand such small things in everyday life.'

The situation after the sex reassignment treatment is still a blend of male-female traits. However, at the present time Marja-Sisko is happy with the changes she is going through. She does not need to shave so often, she can let her hair grow and change her hairstyle, her skin has softened, her breasts have started to take shape, her hips have got wider, the fat content in her thighs has increased. Transformation of the body is a slow process, but as Marja-Sisko stated, it is going in the right direction. She now rejoices at the kinds of bodily changes that caused so much pain and fear in puberty when they went in the opposite direction.

When classmates in school expressed their joy of getting more strength, of having grown taller, of getting wider shoulders, of growing beards and of getting lower voices, they were great things to happen, taking them closer to manhood. To me these were the most horrible things I could imagine. It meant a transition towards uncleanness. Having a razor was a mark of manhood. I enjoyed this mark only for being able to shave every hair off my face as carefully as possible.

Metaphorically, sex reassignment treatment signifies a second puberty to Marja-Sisko. She feels that changes in her body are now going in the right direction and they are a great source of joy. She says realistically that she cannot change her shoe size, or her height (she is 183 cm, i.e. 6 feet) according to her taste, but she can manage with them. She can never become a beauty queen, but she is happy to have looks of a woman of her age. Even though Marja-Sisko does not need to cover up anymore, she says that being in a crowd is a great place to hide.

Marja-Sisko has been married twice. She has three grown-up daughters from her first marriage with Birgitta. Her second marriage was to Sirkka, which lasted only for two years and according to Marja-Sisko, 'was a hopeless attempt to act like a man.' She has maintained her relationship with her previous wife Birgitta after the sex reassignment. According to Jeremy Kidd and Tarynn Witten, it is usually the case with the long-term partners of transgender-individuals that they choose to maintain the relationship after changing gender presentation and/or genital sex (Kidd & Witten 2008: 51).

The first Sunday sermon as a woman in Imatra was a wonderful experience for Marja-Sisko. She describes having a tremendous feeling of relief that came from being herself and not having to cover herself up anymore, to be able to do this work as a woman, despite the fact there was very little feminine in her. She said that in that sermon

my femininity was invisible. My hair had grown a little and I had a light permanent wave; underneath my alb there were black socks and trousers and the kind of light shoes that I am wearing now. Alb is a very gender-neutral cloth, but I knew what was underneath it and that it was the first time in my life that I was able to witness this occasion as a woman. Even though I played a minor role in saying prayers, reciting the Bible and assisting in the Holy Communion, it was an enormous joy. Some people who attended the sermon have also said that they observed the joy radiating from me. There were others, however, who thought that it was gross to see a big man who thinks that she is a woman. What a total misunderstanding! There are people who like to think that I have done this on impulse.

Analysis: Why does the body and gender of priest matter?

Why is a transgender pastor perceived as a problem, as gross, filthy, inappropriate and impure? And on the other hand, why does the Evangelical Lutheran Church become a topical issue in the public sphere, drawing media attention predominantly when sexuality and sexual orientation are at stake? Before Olli Aalto became Marja-Sisko during the autumn of 2008, at the time when her sex reassignment was being intensively discussed, Suomen Lehtiyhtymä, a group of local newspapers in Finland, designed a questionnaire for the priests of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Out of 106 priests who responded to the questionnaire, 27.9 per cent expressed the view that Marja-Sisko Aalto's case did not concern the Church as an institution; they saw it entirely as a personal issue. 36.5 per cent were of the opinion that a public discussion about Marja-Sisko Aalto's sex reassignment provided a window of opportunity for the Church to take a stand on burning present-day issues. For one fifth of the respondents, Aalto's confidence needed to be assessed prior to making a decision on her right to continue as a priest in Imatra. (*Turkulainen* 2008.)

In reference to the public discussion about Marja-Sisko Aalto, the Finnish cognitive scientist of religion, Ilkka Pyysiäinen has reflected upon the theological debate regarding a priest's gender. According to Pyysiäinen, gender is not an arbitrary social construct in a theological debate, but a folk-biological category, and as such is perceived as the enduring property of an individual. The notion of folk biology suggests that categories, whether of species of animals or plants, are independent of taxonomies based on scientific biology. In folk biology properties of various species are understood on the basis of

invisible, unchangeable essences that members of a particular species share with one another. An entity cannot move from one category to another one, since the essence cannot be changed, made to disappear, or be put to death. Six-year old children already think that a bird hatched from the egg of a duck is a duck, even though a chicken may have sat on it. As Pyysiäinen posits, Carl von Linné and his contemporaries thought that species are created by God and that their essences are unchangeable. The concept of essence is a conjectural construct, based on circular reasoning. It is determined on the basis of external cues, which are then explained in terms of essence. Stripes and typical ways of moving determine the category inclusion of a tiger, who is differentiated from other species on the basis of these prototypical features which are determined by tiger essences. In similar manner, theological arguments explain priesthood on the basis of unchangeable essences that are attached to priests once they receive ordination. In Catholicism, ordination is a sacrament in which a priest is given *character indelebilis*, a mark that cannot be taken away. In protestant Lutheran Christianity, ordination does not have the status of sacrament. However, a priest remains a priest even if he or she is dismissed from a specific position in a specific parish. Pyysiäinen posits that in theological reasoning, a priest has an unchangeable essence. Once a priest, always a priest. (Pyysiäinen 2009; see also Pyysiäinen 2005: 24–5, 28–9.)

According to my view, Pyysiäinen tends to think that the essence of a priest, or of any other religious specialist is perceived of as a container in which sacredness, a status set apart, is imbedded either inherently or as a result of specific procedures of statement or reinforcement. Pyysiäinen refers to the Dalai Lama as an example of the first case, and to a Siberian shaman of the second case. He also provides an option based on E. T. Lawson's and R. N. McCauley's theory of religious ritual form, which he uses to explain the acquisition of the essence from gods, or God, in ordination, since—according to the theory—'only a superhuman agent can change metaphysical presuppositions'. (Pyysiäinen 2009: 196.)

Pyysiäinen argues that theological reasoning—similarly to vernacular categorization—is based on folk biology. Conceptions of a priest's gender are susceptible to becoming linked with etiological narratives, i.e. myths of origin. Thus, customs, values and essences originate from times immemorial. Their eternal, unchangeable paradigmatic properties date back to the mythic *illo tempore*. Since theological categories of 'man' and 'woman' draw on folk-biological conceptions, Pyysiäinen is critical of applying them to real human beings. As a way out of this vicious circle, he argues for the view that theological concepts should be grounded more closely in scientific biology and also,

based on biological evidence that the heterogeneity of the gender category needs to be acknowledged. This would prevent us from viewing transsexuals as an embarrassing challenge that can be dealt with by considering them as a biological curiosity or even as an individual's sinful choice. Pyysiäinen cites two Finnish academic philosophers, Petri Ylikoski and Tomi Kokkonen, who advise us to look to the future instead of the distant past. They write that '(m)odern medical science enables sex reassignment surgery and hormonal treatments which were previously unknown and which alter the view of gender as an eternal and unchangeable essence' (Ylikoski & Kokkonen 2009: 391–5, cited in Pyysiäinen 2009: 198).

I welcome Ilkka Pyysiäinen's theorizing on the folk biological foundation of gender categories in theological argumentation in general and in understanding ambiguous responses of Lutheran theologians to the change of a pastor's sex in particular. However, three things need to be reconsidered. Firstly, the postulate based on biology and essentialism is a weak one without sociological and anthropological analyses of the semantic links between religion, the human body and society. Regarding the role of a priest's gender in Lutheranism, pastors receive their position by election. Sacredness is not an enduring property of Lutheran priests. It is not bestowed in ordination, since priests are elected by adult members of the parish. It is the congregation, a social collective, which grants the set apart, the sacred position, to a person qualified to become a nominee due to his/her theological training. A Lutheran priest is rather a *sacerdos* than a *presbyteros*.

Secondly, Pyysiäinen makes an unnecessary dichotomous distinction between modern and pre-modern thought regarding boundary-making between the categories of male and female. He relies only on theological sources in arguing that women were displaced during the early Christian centuries when congregations were hierarchically organized. He writes that '[b]ecause the displacement of women took place prior to the birth of scientific biology, it was clear who was a woman and who was a man' (Pyysiäinen 2009:, 196).

When applying scholarly theories and frameworks to the lives of real people, evidence from the history of religions helps us to locate particular issues in their historical context. Taxonomic classifications of scientific biology do not play a significant role in religion and in its ritual expressions even today. Prior to the emphasis of scientific biology as a prominent cultural paradigm, evidence from the history of religions testifies to the notion that gender-blending, cross-dressing and third-gender identification have taken place in cultures and religions the world over. In theorizing social drama and representations of liminality in ritual behaviour, the late anthropologist

Victor Turner repeatedly presented ethnographic data on universals of performance in which the society's normative control of biological development does not occur as anticipated. These universals can be detected also from Christian contexts, be they medieval, early modern or modern. In referring to his theory of liminality and gender reversals, Turner says that

symbols expressive of ambiguous identity are found cross-culturally: androgynes, at once male and female, theomorphic figures, at once animals and men or women, angels, mermaids, centaurs, human-headed lions, and so forth, monstrous combinations of elements drawn from nature and culture (Turner 1985: 295).

The history of religions provides a much more multi-faceted view of gender distinctions in the religious history of European cultures and societies, whether pre-modern or modern. Gender-blending and gender-variance is not a modern or post-modern cultural phenomenon. Caroline Walker Bynum posits, for instance, that 'a careful and comparative reading of texts by male and female authors from the twelfth to the fifteenth century suggests that it is men who develop conceptions of gender, whereas women develop conceptions of humanity' (Bynum 1986: 261–2). Bynum points out that in the Middle Ages,

women did not have a strong sense of binary opposites grouped around male/female contrast. They did not associate specific personality characteristics or roles—such as authority, rationality, nurture, emotion—with one or the other sex. Although they made use of the conventions of vernacular love poetry to write of themselves as brides, they also slipped easily into the male imagery where no reversal or even gender-specific meaning was implied. (Bynum 1986: 271.)

In the Middle Ages, role inversion was a prevalent practice among peasants and townspeople, especially during the calendrical rituals. Cross-dressing by lay women, who also gave it some religious significance, was common. However, cross-dressing by males was a rare phenomenon, 'because such acts represented a decline in status' (Bynum 1986: 272).

Thirdly, regarding the category of the self, this particular case of a Finnish transgender pastor shows that transforming sex is not only a biological, but also an ongoing narrative and performative process. By changing her sex, Marja-Sisko cut herself off, set herself apart, and made herself a whole, a puri-

fied person: in a word she *resacralized* herself. By making this move in her life, she has sacralized her *self* by marking off her own bodily boundaries and by becoming the woman that she has always wanted to be. Her sex reassignment has non-negotiable value to herself, even if it contradicts the social, citizen body on which her prior status as a male priest was founded. Her new social body is taking shape step by step, even if she still has, three years after the surgery, difficulties in crossing over the sacred buffer zones of the Lutheran Church.

Conclusion

Why is a transgender pastor difficult to approve of? According to my interpretation, it is Marja-Sisko Aalto's anomalous taxonomic status within the normative Christian theological thinking that creates awe and fear, thereby challenging a categorical boundary that sets the Church apart from the rest of the society in general and a Lutheran priest—whether male or female—apart from his or her fellow citizens in particular. The bodily behaviour of a priest plays an important role in separating and also maintaining the boundaries of the Church and its division into the two distinct domains of the interior and the exterior. The distinctiveness of the Church, i.e. its sacredness as an institution, is created by theological notions, and subsequently expressed in the Church Code, which are used to mark internal and external boundaries within the limits of its institutional power. The sacredness of a priest is predominantly a social notion and is intimately connected with metaphorical and metonymical relations between the Church, society and a corporeal individual. In my work on the issue of sacredness (see e.g. Anttonen 2000). I have promoted a view according to which the notion of the sacred should be treated as a relational category of thought and action, which becomes actualized in specific value-laden situations when a change in the culturally and contextually interpreted boundaries of temporal, territorial or corporeal categories takes place (Anttonen 2000: 278). In accordance with and in reference to my approach, Kim Knott has pointed out in her spatial analysis of religion that the 'sacred' is neither private nor public; it is transitive in associating both that which is public and that which is valued as private (Knott 2005: 99–102).

As Mary Douglas has pointed out in her book *How Institutions Think* (1986), social institutions play a significant role in conferring identity. They have the authority within their territories to include or exclude social agents with normatively unsuitable physical bodies, whether conceptual or phys-

al. The pastor's anomalous taxonomic status within the normative Christian categorical thinking has created awe and fear by challenging conventional, hetero-normative perceptions of gender boundaries and established conceptions of the society, which theological notions metaphorically represent.

References

Interview of Marja-Sisko Aalto by Veikko Anttonen on April 20, 2010. Digital recording in personal possession.

Literature

Anttonen, Veikko

2000 Sacred. In: Willi Braun & Russell T. McCutcheon (eds.), *Guide to the Study of Religion*; pp. 271–82. London: Cassell.

Bynum, Caroline Walker

1986 "...And Woman His Humanity": Female Imagery in the Religious Writing of the Later Middle Ages. In: Caroline Walker Bynum, Stevan Harrell & Paula Richman (eds), *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols*; pp. 257–88. Boston: Beacon Press.

Csordas, Thomas

1997 *The Sacred Self: A Cultural Phenomenology of Charismatic Healing*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Douglas, Mary

1986 *How Institutions Think*. New York: Syracuse University Press.

1996 *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*. London: Routledge. (First published in 1970.)

Enke, Anne

2009 Review: Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category. *Feminist Formations* (formerly the *NWSA Journal*) 21 (2): 198–203.

Grabham, Emily

2007 Citizen Bodies, Intersex Citizenship. *Sexualities. Studies in Culture and Society* 10 (1): 29–48.

Kidd, Jeremy D. & Tarynn M. Witten

2008 Understanding Spirituality and Religiosity in the Transgender Community: Implications for Aging. *Journal of Religion, Spirituality & Aging* 20 (1–2): 29–62.

Knott, Kim

2005 *The Location of Religion: A Spatial Analysis*. London: Equinox.

Pyysiäinen, Ilkka

2005 *Synti. Ajatuksin, sanoin ja töin*. Helsinki: WSOY.

2009 Teologia, tiede ja sukupuoli. *Teologinen Aikakauskirja* 114 (3): 194–201.

The sacredness of the self, of society and of the human body

Salih, Sara

2003 *Judith Butler*. Routledge Critical Thinkers. London: Routledge.

Turkulainen

2008 Papat ilahtuivat Imatra-kohusta. *Turkulainen*, 28.12.2008.

Turner, Victor

1985 *On the Edge of the Bush: Anthropology as Experience*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press.

Ylikoski, Petri & Tomi Kokkonen

2009 *Evoluutio ja ihmislunto*. Helsinki: Gaudeamus.

Resurrection, reversion, and exhumation

The problematics of the dead body in songs and laments

1.

Different types of folklore texts differ from each other by their function.¹ We can distinguish between genres meant to be believed (like legend) and genres recognized in advance as fiction (fairy-tale). At the same time, textual fiction may also have served practical purposes—such as the telling of fairy-tales during the late autumn and early winter for purposes of fertility magic—as used to be the case in the Estonian folk tradition. There are folklore genres that have functioned, among other things, as an accompaniment, comment on, or support to rituals or practices being carried out—for instance, an incantation during a cure, or a lament in death-related procedures, when a person must be separated from his familiar environment. The same textual formulae fulfil different tasks in different genres, which means that they also carry a different meaning.

Side by side with the criterion of truth versus fictionality, there exists in human life and the texts and practices accompanying it another, the axis of concreteness versus symbolism. The more culturally complicated human behaviour becomes, the more secondary modeling² it comes to involve—to the point where the actual original meanings begin to get blurred. Especially in modern times, many textual segments that once used to carry a specific meaning and yet were palpably understandable even when poetically encoded, may have become vague. A person living in a profane society ‘cannot’ believe explanations of the religious otherworld, a fact which, however, does not extinguish his existential desire to have knowledge about it. Symbolism

1 This research was supported by the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund (Center of Excellence CECT) and by the Estonian Science Foundation (research grant no. 7385).

2 About the concept of secondary modeling systems see Lotman 1967 and 1977, also Eco 1990: ix–x.

and abstraction here become a necessary buffer zone, trying somehow or other to fill a gap in human knowledge. For a person inhabiting a traditional culture, this mechanism of treating reality would probably have remained relatively impenetrable.

Going on from the above thoughts, I shall in the present paper consider some themes related to the bodily aspect of humanity in various genres of folklore, particularly in songs and laments, as well as in practices related to death and commemoration. As expected, the problems connected with the human body have in these genres undergone transformations of meaning, the understanding and interpretation of which may vary considerably. The material discussed in the article derives mainly from the Balto-Finnic and north Russian cultural area, partly from my own experience during my field trips. Parallels of a more eloquent nature have been added from other parts of the world. The following is a primarily comparative discussion aspiring to open up the perhaps forgotten background of certain phenomena.

2.

In fairy-tales, songs and laments, but also in the Estonian semi-literary national epic *Kalevipoeg*, there occurs the motif of entering into conversation with a person lying dead and buried in his or her grave. In the tales where the youngest brother, snubbed by his senior siblings, stays at his father's grave and gets advice and guidance from him, this motif is significant for the unfolding of the story, since the hero is thus provided with important information or encouragement. In *Kalevipoeg*, the eponymous nature giant, enriched with eminently human qualities by the epic's author, F. R. Kreutzwald, goes to his father's grave to find consolation, asking among other things that his father rise from the grave. This desire derives from an Estonian Kalevala-metric orphan's song, remaining rather a lyrical episode in the context of the epic. As expected, the father replies to the request in the negative, saying:

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Ei vôi tõusta, poega noori, | I can't get up, young son, |
| Ei vôi tõusta, ei ärata. | I can't wake up and rise: |
| Katki olen kaeleluusta, | my neck is broken in two, |
| Pihupõrma põveluusta, | my kneecaps are almost turned to dust. |
| Muru kasvand peale mulla, | The lawn has grown above the sod, |
| Aruheina peale haua, | fescue flourishes atop my grave; |
| Sammal kasvand peale kalju, | moss has overgrown my gravestone |

Sinililled silma peale, and hepaticas cover my eyes,
 Angervaksad jalgadele. dropworts grow above my feet.
 (*Kalevipoeg* VII:834–49, Kreutzwald 1982: 93.)

In the epic's composition, this episode, including no information of narrative importance, serves the purpose of temporarily relieving the strain of action. The father's reference to his broken bones appears plausible in an archaeological context, if we take it as a sign of the archaic custom of deforming the body of the deceased. Unfortunately the motif is not sufficiently grounded in original folk songs, whence Kreutzwald took part of his material. Thus, these lines rather strike a poetic key in the epic. Even though in the *Kalevipoeg*, the hero may have visions of unreal creatures, too, he (like Kreutzwald) does not in this episode really hope that the father might actually rise from his grave.

The motif of begging a dead parent or relative to rise from the dead likewise occurs in the folk songs of various peoples. Primarily, these are tales involving orphans or girls playing a game. The orphans may be visiting the cemetery on a day of commemoration and they address their deceased father or mother there. The Estonian Kalevala-metric songs speak about weeping orphans inviting their deceased parent to rise from the grave and come and comb their hair, or help them prepare their dowry:

| | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Meie kaksi vaeste lasta, | We, the two orphans, |
| Sa isata, ma emata, | you fatherless, me motherless, |
| Lähme isa aua peale, | let us visit the father's grave, |
| Lähme ema aua peale! | let us visit the mother's grave! |
| Tõuse üles memmekene, | Come, rise, mummy dear, |
| Tõuse mu pead sugema! | come and comb my hair! |
| Tõuse vakka valmistama! | Come and prepare the dowry! |
| Ema mõistab, kostab jälle: | Mother understands and answers: |
| “Kes on seda enne näinud, | ‘Who has seen this thing before, |
| Ehk on seda muiste kuulnud, | Who's heard of such in days of yore, |
| Et on koolijas kodussa, | a revenant staying at home, |
| Külma jalga küünissale? | a visitant in the barn? |
| Muru on kasvand mulla peale, | Grass has grown over the soil, |
| Aru ein aua peale.” | fescue grass over the grave.’ |

...

(H I 2, 308 (38) < Põltsamaa khk. – J. Lillak (1889).)

The situation is tragic in these songs, yet again the description remains a lyrical fiction. Hardly anyone in nineteenth-century Estonia would have believed in so literal a rising from the dead, either. The belief in fearsome animated corpses was there naturally. The above song also includes the term *külmjalg* (lit. ‘cold foot’) designating a ‘visitant’, ‘revenant’, a demoniacal dead one which the mother speaking from her grave does not want to become. Ülo Valk (2000) has attempted to bestow a religious dimension on this poetic dialogue, speculating that hardly could such a wish have been voiced in the songs, had the people not been aware of the prospect of bodily resurrection at the day of the Last Judgement. Thus, it would seem that the teaching of the Christian church was nourishing the songs’ wording, as it were, which otherwise might have remained abstract.

Ülo Valk’s position may indeed be plausible in the context of early modern Estonian culture, where ritual lamentation as a practice and a genre of folklore was already extinct. Yet the motif of children weeping and yearning for their parents’ revival derives not from the teachings of the Church, but from a lamentation practice that had already become extinct. Kalevipöeg, as well as the orphans of the Estonian songs, carries towels—attributes obligatory precisely for lamenters, ethnographically—in his hands as he goes to the grave. Verbal communication at the grave generically rather points to lamentation, as opposed to poetic declamation or a high-culture funeral oration. Another significant detail in the folk songs is the request to come and prepare the invoker for some important event. Here, that event would be a wedding, since preparing the dowry is among the central motifs illustrating why the mother is asked to rise from the dead. From the Setu wedding customs we know that an orphaned bride may have visited her parents’ grave to ritually invite them to attend the wedding (Hagu 2000: 210). In all likelihood, songs of the aforementioned kind may have been sung there, too—but even there, already, it would rather have been a symbolic act with no physical reality even imaginable. Similar songs are also to be found among the peoples of Ingermanland, as well as the Slavs, and they represent an interesting genre in transition from lament to lyrical mode. Primarily in the Setu tradition, the border between the lament and the (necromantic) Kalevala-metric song has begun to blur—verbally similar motifs may have sounded both in the laments and in songs, while the performance of the laments has both metrically and vocally grown more song-like (Salve 2000: 57–9; Hagu 2000: 213–16). The same kind of merging or transition can also be observed in the traditions of other East European peoples (cf. Katona 1981: 80–5).

We, at present, find it difficult to guess what the Setu woman might have imagined a hundred years ago while singing this kind of necromantic song. In the cultures where communication with the deceased through ritual lamentation held (and still holds) a central place—such as that of the Setu, the Votes, the Izhorians, the Ingermanland Finns, the Karelians, the Vepsians, but also of the east and south Slavonic peoples—such figures cannot always be reduced to mere poetry. I believe that the personal religious idiolects of people may be quite different in this aspect. The following Setu song presents an interesting example:

| | |
|--|---|
| Olli imel ütsi tütar, käsikannõl kandijal. Ärä täl koolust kaasa tulli, liivast viinaq veerüsigi. Miä täl tetäq, kohe minnäq? Minnäq täl koolulõ mehele, minnäq kaasalõ kalmulõ. Imekestä, helläkeistä – oodi tä kodo koolu tütärd, oodi majja Ma(a)na lasta. | Mother had a daughter, the bearer had one to bear in her arms. A husband came for her from Death, a proposer from the sands. What could she do, where could she go? Get married to death, be taken to wife by a dead one. Mother, the gentle comforter expected home the daughter of death, waited for the child of Manala to enter the house. |
| Oh imme, helläkeistä, maama meelimar 'akõista – tulõ-s täl kodo koolu tütar, tulõ-s majja Ma(a)na latsi! | O, mother, the gentle comforter, mummy, the sweet berry— came not home the daughter of death, the child of Manala entered not the house! |
| Imekene helläkene, kalmu tii tekk' tä kaputitsõ, liiva tii linikitsõ. Ime läts kalmu kaemahe, liivakohe leinamahe. Ärä sää! küündü küsümähe, ärä nõssi nõudõmahe: "Milles tulõ-s kodo, koolu tütar, tulõ-s majja, Ma(a)na lats?" Neiu lausi liivakust, | Mother, the gentle comforter, made a path to the grave of stockings, paved a path on the sand with kerchiefs. Mother went to visit the grave, went to mourn on the sands. There she began to ask, began to demand an answer: 'Why did she not come home, Death's daughter, why entered you not the house, child of Manala?' The maiden answered from under the sands, |

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| kabo kalmulta kõnõli: | the maid spoke from the grave: |
| “Imekene helläkene, | ‘Mother, gentle comforter, |
| maama, meelimar ‘akõnõ, | mummy, sweet berry, |
| ärä ma lännü, ega läpe-s, | I am gone—and am not allowed, |
| ärä astnu, anda-s aigu! | I’m departed—and given no more time! |
| Tooni panti tulda tegemähe, | (I’m) set to build the fire of Toonela, |
| vainu vettä vaeldama – | to change the water of death— |
| tuimas lätsi tulda tetešnänni, | I went numb as I built the fire, |
| vaibu vettä vaeldõhna.” | as I changed the water of death.’ |
| Ime sis ikulõ isosi, | Then the mother broke out weeping, |
| ime lainalõ lasõhtu: | the mother began to shed tears: |
| “Ärä mul olli ütsi tütär, | ‘One daughter I had, |
| ütsi tütär, armas latsi. | one daughter, a sweet child. |
| Miä_ks või võiva tetäq, | What is to be done now, |
| kua või kohe minnäq, | where is one to go now, |
| kui om Essu nii isknü, | how has Jesus ordained it, |
| kui om Looja nii loonuq? | how has the Creator created? |
| Ärä_ks minnäq looduvalõ, | One must go the way it’s created, |
| looduvalõ, säädüväle: | the way it’s created, the way it’s ordained; |
| või-iq loodut paedaq, | there is no way to escape what’s created, |
| kirotõttu kelle andaq!” | no way to back down before what’s writ down!’ |

(SL I 68: H I 8, 427 (42) < Miikse k – J.Sandra < Ogask (1896).)

The motifs of death and marriage are intertwined in this song in a manner common in archaic traditions.³ Particularly in the case of young persons, death has ritually, both in customs and in the folklore texts accompanying them, been presented as a wedding, and this is explicitly narrated in the quoted song, too. Furthermore, the mother here expects the daughter’s traditional after-wedding visit, as prescribed by custom, which, however, does not take place. Communicating with her again at the grave, she learns that it is not possible to return from the otherworld. The Setu song, however, does not explain this in reference to the grass that has grown on the grave, but according to the archaic Balto-Finnic beliefs about a next life in the netherworld—in *Manala*, *Toonela*. The end of the song compositionally searches for a compromise, while the

3 On the similarities between death and weddings, and of the corresponding rituals, see Danforth 2006: 157 ff.; Bajburin & Levinton 1990; Bernshtam 1979: 140–5; Buzin 2003: 156; Chistyakov 1982: 119–20; Honko 1974: 52.

contents express a yearning for Christian consolation. Where exactly do realistic notions concerning human existence and body end and symbolic, either artistic or high-religious substitutions begin? How is the human body after death conceived of in different genres and different ages?

Turning now to the laments for the dead, we can add to the poetic charge and/or religious argumentation of the given textual motifs a third important function: controlling the deceased one via communication and avoiding unexpected harassment from him. The physicality of laments and burial customs is certainly not merely symbolic, but stands in close connection to reality. In addition to the speech acts embedded in folklore genres, we can here also observe the positions and locations of human body, as well as the vocalizations and other specific activities included in the burial customs, both before and after the interment.

3.

Russian researchers in particular have emphasized the centrality of the voyage metaphor in the north Russian laments and burial customs. The journey of the deceased from one world to the other has been accompanied and commented on by laments depicting the topography of both this world and the other. Lamentation, weeping and other vocalizations, however, have not been allowed to sound all the time and uncontrolledly. Vernacular belief has taken the disruption of any kind of way-faring (outside as well as within the burial situation) to be unpropitious and undesirable—cutting off somebody's path or stopping someone on his way has foreboded misfortune both in rituals and in situations of daily life. Similarly, the disruption of any kind of procession has been thought to portend evil. The disruption need not have consisted in direct physical interference; producing a noise at the wrong moment has been considered equally dangerous.

The following concepts can be associated with death as a semantic sphere: keeping quiet, muteness, unclear speech, silence, secret(ive)ness (Nevskaya 1999: 123). Thus, the dichotomy of life and death is actualized in the behaviour of the vocal world, including the rules that govern lamentation and weeping at the various stages of the ritual. For instance, it has been emphasized that under no circumstances should there be lamenting during and immediately after the event of death. A different example is provided by south and east Slavonic traditions where death had to be immediately announced through a public lamentation, to be audible all over the village (Tolstaya 1999: 137). But

even there it was strictly prohibited to lament after darkness had fallen. Thus, untimely weeping has been considered to obstruct the deceased one's successful passage to the otherworld, to disrupt his voyage.

Here, a specific distinction must already be made between affective, emotional weeping as something that complicates departure, and lamenting as a regimented behaviour linked to customs both temporally and thematically, since in traditional culture laments had to be performed for all dead persons, with the exception of some anomalies, such as children or suicides. The unlamented dead person has been regarded as unclean, unabsolved of his sins (Tolstaya 1999: 136, 141–2). Usually lamentation has culminated during interment, when, among other things, messages have been communicated to previously departed kinsmen.

Silence, however, has characterized activities more closely related to death and the dead one, such as washing the body, making the coffin, or digging the grave (Honko 1974: 38–9; Tolstaya 1999: 143). The persons performing these duties have also been lamented in order to offer them magic protection during their contact with the dead or with death. Again, the role of the lamenter as a mediator and propitiator between the two worlds has been significant here.

Inappropriate excessive noise (singing, merrymaking) has also been prohibited during the first 40 days after death. The symbolic minute of silence practised at modern commemorations is related to this custom. The dead person and the sphere of death have been characterized by muteness and immobility—surprise over such behaviour by an intimate, as well as invitations for him to 'say a word', have been expressed in the first laments performed after the death.

Aside from the context of death and death-related customs, silence has also been characteristic of activities originally associated with the otherworld, or liminality—various tasks (sowing seeds, milking; Nevskaya 1999: 131) have had to be performed in silence; silence has been obligatory for the bride and groom during the wedding ritual, noise has been prohibited during the birth of a baby. Ritual silence, as well as other behaviours opposed to the ordinary, have been considered important during other crucial activities, too.⁴

4 Thus, for instance, in the choosing of the seasonal keeper of the Setu fertility idol Peko, a number of details pointing to ritual reversal and other anomalies (in boldface here) can be observed: 'The participants in this party number around 30 men, mostly of the same age, of a firm and serious mindset, who have sworn not to breathe a word about how they conduct their *praasnik* to any living soul. The *praasnik* itself proceeds as follows. The participants gather at some **night of the full moon**, usually

It has also been forbidden for wives to lament their dead husbands, this being regarded as a possible obstacle to getting married again (Tolstaya 1999: 141). Or, as a Vepsian woman put it in conversation with me: a wife lamenting her husband is like a cow lowing for a bull.

The physical aspect of the deceased one has been of equal importance. First of all, persons that had gone missing had to be lamented, too; among the Balto-Finnic peoples and the north Russians, a specially selected tree growing in the graveyard or the forest stood in for that purpose. Among the South Slavs, the physical representation of the deceased one at the commemoration has been required, too, with either his clothes, a wooden figure or even a live person (who had previously fasted) being used for that purpose (Tolstaya 1999: 143–4). In modern funeral customs, it is common practice to leave a vacant seat for the deceased one at the funeral feast; a custom which can also be interpreted as an (anti-)marker of his physical presence.

Again, the reversals concerning the deceased, clothing, and objects in funeral customs are noteworthy. Nikita Tolstoj has discussed the repositioning of the dying person in order to alleviate their agony. It has been customary to place the dead body on a lower earthen floor and to turn the body around, exchanging the places of its head and feet. On the one hand, what we see here is bringing the deceased closer to the earth; on the other hand, by changing his position he is assisted in transforming his essential self. The ways of alleviating the death of a special person—a witch—have been even more specific, since such persons have already been ‘other’ in this life (Tolstoj 1990: 119–20). As a prophylactic measure, the body or objects that had been in contact with it have been turned around after death. Chairs and stools on which the deceased was lain out have been turned upside down after the body was car-

when the moon beautifies the night with its silvery light. Each participant has taken along a sack of provisions, out of which, **behind closed doors and windows, sitting on the floor** with their **backs turned towards each other**, they **sullenly** eat, merely grunting and wheezing, **making no conversation**. After having eaten sullenly and without talking for about half an hour, each man ties up his bag tightly and throws it to a fixed place occupied by no other bags. Now they briskly run out of the room like naughty boys held up in the class too long by their teacher. Outside they gently, in a cat-like manner, begin to **romp, pushing and jostling among themselves**, chasing each other and leaping over the fence. This play goes on, if need be, till the day dawns again, or until someone gets hurt in the romping and **blood is drawn**, which is precisely what they expect of their game when it has gone on for some time, already. The one that is bleeding, either as a result of leaping over the fence, or because he has been scratched or hit by someone, will become the host of the *koräädsi-praasnik* for the next year, at whose place they will again gather in the accustomed manner.’ (Paulson 1997: 94.)

ried out. The same has been done to the cart or the sleigh on which the body was driven to the cemetery, but also to the dishes, for instance (Tolstoj 1990: 120–1). In the latter case, it has been considered important that no water remain in them, for fear that it may have got poisoned if the deceased's soul bathed in it. A parallel is provided by the Balto-Finnic *sauna* customs, where the water used in *sauna* always had to be thrown out—the dishes turned upside down—before leaving, what with the *sauna* also being regarded as a somewhat otherworldly place.

Where fear of the dead was common, the passages used for carrying out the dead body were peculiar, too. As a rule, a reversed orientation (*i.e.*, feet first) has been used when carrying out the deceased; where fear of the dead was prevalent, the body was carried out not through the door, but through some other opening, possibly made specially for that occasion. Fear of the dead has also had an impact on the choice of the site for the burial ground (across some body of water, on an island, on terrain different from that of the home place). The ways of burying and other (including post-burial) techniques designed for preventing the dangerous deceased from rising are widely known; although the most characteristic examples of them are recorded from the Balkans, instances can be found in the northern parts of Europe, too. In Vepsian customs the cross or stave marking the site of the grave can be placed in the middle of it (Vinokurova forthcoming). In addition to the association with the departed's soul/heart/midriff, a desire to physically nail down the dead one to prevent his unwanted return can be surmised here.

Right from the situation immediately following death, one of the main themes of lamentation (as an act of communication) has been the successful transfer of the deceased into the otherworld so as to avoid later complications and the deceased's becoming a revenant. One of the main problems of the Balto-Finnic peasant culture has been the establishing and (re-)marking of the borders between human culture and the various forms of otherworldliness (Anttonen 1996, 2003; Stark 2002, 2006). Thus, lamentation has constituted a diplomatic act representing communal (and to a lesser extent individual) interests. The diplomacy has necessarily continued after the burial, in the form of commemorative and occasional laments. The lamenter is the one that must bring herself closer to the world of the dead, or rather to its border. The position of the body, upright versus horizontal, expresses the human versus the non-human code of communication. Therefore, falling over or otherwise assuming a horizontal position is always anomalous and indicates danger (Stark 2002: 102–5). In case of the lamenter, a horizontal body position referring to a change of code is thus to be expected.

On several occasions, I have recorded Vepsian lamenters in cemeteries performing occasional laments, outside the fixed commemoration calendar, at the graves of their dead relatives. On all occasions, the lamenters have assumed a more or less leaning position. The most impressive of them, in that aspect, was a lamentation session I witnessed in the village of Yashozero, Onega Vepsia, the main part of which lasted for about half an hour and was extraordinarily charged with emotion (Arukask & Lashmanova 2009). Most of the time, the lamenter lay horizontally on the grave, later sitting next to the grave. The lament itself was directed straight into the grave, leaving no space for speculations about symbolism. It has been said that in such a position, the lamenter may hear the movements of the deceased one in the grave. On other occasions, the lamenters have rather leaned on the grave marker or cross, nevertheless displaying a visible change in the body attitude.

4.

I would point out two main causes as points of departure for lamentation in connection with death:

1. the need to restore interrupted social cohesion;
2. an archaic (albeit also very human) fear of the dead.

The first cause—the need to restore social cohesion—has been analysed with functional complexity by Alfred Radcliffe-Brown. In his famous study on the Andaman islanders, he notes that each lament and the embrace that precedes it (either upon a reunion after long separation, in celebration of making peace in tribal wars, at the end of a mourning period, upon the exhumation of the deceased, getting married, or in initiation rites; Radcliffe-Brown 2006: 151 ff.) is essentially a way of restoring relations that have been temporarily broken off. In the various situations of real life listed above, the former continuity has, in principle, been interrupted—friends have drifted apart, tribes have gone on the war-path, a person has died, the bereaved one has gone into mourning, the remains of the dead have been brought out of the grave, unmarried status has ended, a previous social status has come to an end. Understandably, in such situations the deeper task of the lament goes far beyond the expression of personal feelings, amounting to the bringing back into shared life of one who has been away—no matter what the new social form might be. The social ties that had temporarily been slackened, either because of circumstances or

affect, are again closely tied through the lamentation, and thus the lament would be an expression rather of unity than of rupture or end.

The change of social status is accompanied by a change of the ritual's main participants' identity or worldview. Having been interrupted, the social cohesion needs to be restored or, in other words, the person redefined by the ritual must learn a new social role that would harmonize with what is preordained for him or her. Following the preordained path has also conceptualized the terms of *one's own* (i.e. right kind of) *life* and *one's own* (i.e. right) *death*. Since in the animistic system of beliefs everything was shared and divisible, there has also existed a notion concerning the limit (that is, age) up to which a person has the right to stay in this world, which in its turn has legalized ritual killings and suicides. Not always would a person live the appropriate length of his days; it might also come to pass that he exceed the right measure (cf. Sedakova 1990). Rudiments of that conception can still be found in the comments of elderly informants who, although aware that from a Christian viewpoint their yearning for death is sinful, nevertheless sense that in the archaic, 'meted out' world it is in a way an even graver misdeed to live on as a feeble old person.

Women's ritual suicides after the death of their husbands—the breadwinner and protector—have constituted normative behaviour not only in Hinduism. The widowed woman's duty to follow her husband has been motivated economically, religiously and socially—she has become a burden to her community and it has been her duty to follow her master, together with the other appropriate possessions; on the social plane, however, ritual suicide may also have been associated with a preordained role behaviour. Such widows' suicides were also known in pre-Christian Russia (cf. Bernshtam 1979: 140–1), and as such, this concept⁵ may have made its way into northern Eurasian lamentational poetry.

The main addressee of the lamentation rites is the dead one—in the situation where he is, on commemoration days but also on the mornings he still spends in his home, woken up with specific lament formulae and certain observances, in order to go on communicating with him. One widely known way of waking the deceased consists in making sweeping movements—for example with a towel—over the grave and/or dead body. Sweeping or raking

5 On the ethnical level, this kind of preordained (by omens) submissiveness may have brought about voluntary self-destruction of whole ethnic groups feeling that their time is running out. A characteristic example of this in the folklore of the peoples of north Russia is the theme of the Chuds' self-burials (cf. Pimenov 1965: 117 ff., Oinas 1969, and many others).

can be interpreted as an imitative-magic rite aimed at provoking the elements of the four cardinal directions and of thunder—the powers necessary to re-voke the original act of creation in the world order. As Mircea Eliade has pointed out, each ritual re-enacts the original act of creation (1959: 68–9), as we can observe also in the given case. The activity imitating sweeping has, on the verbal level, been accompanied by corresponding lament formulae. The north Russian, Vepsian and Karelian laments begin by invoking the winds to come and wake up the deceased to make the communication with him possible:

| | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Уж ты дай-ко богородица, | Oh, Mother of God, give |
| Только ветры неустойные. | Restless winds only. |
| Уж вы повейте, ветерочки, | Oh, flow winds, |
| Разнесите-ко песочки! | Scatter the sand! |
| Ты раскройся, гробова доска, | You, stave of coffin, open up, |
| Покачнись-ко тело мертвое, | Incline yourself, dead body, |
| Ты, личушко же блеклое! | You, white face! |
| Уж ты дай-ко богородица, | Oh, Mother of God, give |
| В ясны очушки-то зреньице, | Sight to the bright eyes, |
| В уста же – говореньице, | Speech to the mouth, |
| В белы ручушки – маханьице. | Waving to the white hands, |
| В резвы ноженьки – хоженьице! | Walk to the fast legs! |
| ... | ... |
| (Vinogradov & Lozanova 1941: 109.) | |

The Vepsian lamenter says:

Puhoudaske pohjas poludespei, sotei tulleihudem,
hougeidaške nece korged koumeine kahthe čomha poludehe.
Polni polnikeizem, vesuu sina venceizem,
aveidaške sinä ičiiž zorkijad sil' mežed,
stanovideske sina minunke paksuile pagineizile,
enččikš i edeližikš kut mii sinunke pagizimej.
Polni sina polnikeizem, sina miispei eraganzid.
Kuz' pitkäd nedališt, nel'küme pimedad öhüt minä sindei karavulin da
varjoičin.
Emboi mina sindei kudes pitkas nedalis, nel'kumes pimedas ohuzis
homeita i primet'ä, polni sina polnikeizem.
Kuz' pitkad nedalist, nel'küme pimedad ohut

kavelid sina tundmatomid dorogoidme, tedmatomid tesaroidme.
Void-ik sinä vastatas ičemoi rodimijoide roditel'oidেকে,
ičiiz setjan da čižoihudenke.
Om minei kaks' veslad da viikuskod, oma hii edaheizuu viluu da randei-
zuu.
Uhtel veslou viikuskou om korged da koumeine,
a toizuu viikuskou emei tekoi om-ik korged koumeine.
Om han ottud pahale torale, om-ik hän bibučijaha soho pekstud
vei om-ik veslaha vedudehe uppotet, om-ik ledho maha segoitet,
Polni sina polnikeizem, ozutadeske minii uradas unudes
void-ik sina hiid vastata.

Blow from the North, sweet wind,
hew this sweet high mound into two nice halves.
My lovely other half, you, my merry wreath,
open your clear eyes,
strike up conversation with me,
as we used to talk of old.
My lovely other half, you went away from us.
Six long weeks, forty dark nights I watched and guarded you.
Six long weeks, forty dark nights I couldn't
see you or notice you, my lovely other half.
Six long weeks, forty dark nights
you travelled along strange paths, over unknown crossroads.
Could you meet your dear parents,
your beloved sister?
I have two brothers, but they're over on the distant cold shore.
One merry brother has a high sweet mound,
but of the other we even do not know does he have a high sweet mound.
He was drawn into a bad quarrel, but is he trampled into the swaying
swamps,
or drowned in a merry stream, or mingled with the earth?
My lovely other half, appear to me in wild dreams;
can you meet them?
(Zhukova 2009: 166–7.)

As noted, the primordial elements (roaring winds, rumble and clatter) have not only been described in laments, but also imitated in practice. The above-mentioned Onega Vepsian lamenter also made wind-raising sweeping move-

ments over the grave; upon arriving at the grave, she also pronounced the formula, ‘Здравствуй дедушка, Христос воскрес! Все покойнички пришли’ (Welcome, Daddy, Jesus has risen, all the deceased have come), as though thereby carrying out yet again the cosmogonic waking act, the specific function of which was to begin communication with the deceased in a customary manner (Bajburin & Levinton 1990: 82–3; Vinogradov & Lozanova 1941: 109; also Honko 1974: 29–30; Chistov 1994).

The microcosmic counterpart of the world’s (re-)generation is the waking of the dead person in order to communicate with him—in order to send messages to the other world, to ask for blessings on this world, to solve personal problems. In a Karelian epic song, Lemminkäinen’s mother wakes her son from the dead on Toonela river, by raking his body parts; in present-day Estonia visits to the graves involve as the first and obligatory act, cleaning and ordering it—sweeping and raking—before it is considered appropriate to address the deceased in our thoughts. Thus, the modern behaviour in cemeteries also exhibits archaic features which follow the blueprint of waking up the deceased one and communicating through lament. Even where lamentation itself has dropped out of the culture, or is ideologically suppressed,⁶ the communication code of laments and the corresponding register in relevant situations need not be lost.

This waking up of the deceased serves a preventative purpose. The lost one is thereby temporarily afforded the status of a guest to this world. Thus, his relationship with this side of the grave is temporarily legitimated, or at least an attempt is made to avoid his possible appearance as a non-guest—the revenant, the undead. The ‘vocabulary’ of lamentational motifs of various peoples is rife with prayers, threats, promises, and flatterings, all aiming (or having been aimed, in cases where the more modern lamenter no longer ‘remembers’ it) at gaining control over the comings and goings of the dead.

Accordingly, the lamentation session as such constitutes an example of legitimate communication with the dead, opened and closed by calling up the dead one, discussing various subjects with him and then sending him back. This guarantees control over possible unexpected projections from the otherworld, a problem that has always been acute in traditional (Orthodox)

6 Particularly the folk cultures with a Lutheran superstratum (as, for example, the Estonian and Finnish ones), have not, for religious reasons, favoured the Catholic ‘magical’ subordination of the dead to clerical jurisdiction (cf., e.g. Martin Luther’s ‘Disputatio pro Declaratione Virtutis Indulgentiarum’, theses 8–29), the impact of which is visible also in the gradual suppression and disappearance of lamentation as a practice in the Finnish and Estonian cultures, for instance.

folk culture (cf. Stark 2002: 75–6, 138–46). Even if a great part of the textual body of some given lament does consist of the lamenter's personal and deeply tragical complaints over her present situation and misery, it is nevertheless not quite identifiable with, say, a modern person-centred posing of the problem—as it is represented, for example, in the popular ballad genre (cf. also Arukask 2009). Laments combine the description of one's own personal distress and misery with chastising the dead—part of the sorting out of power relations between the two worlds, or the diplomacy relevant to it. Thus, a very practical magical combat between here and the afterworld goes on in lamentations, a combat in which the lamenter is a kind of gate-keeper and medium. Setu laments involve attempts at bringing death to justice, and the attitude towards a recently departed person may be quite aggressive. The note of accusation is also very characteristic of Russian laments performed immediately after death (Vinogradov & Lozanova 1941: 106–7).

It seems that it is in the central issues of the burial lamentations listed above—those of controlling the deceased's returns to this world, and of restoring social cohesion—that the greatest ruptures took place as a result of the arrival of Christianity and, still later, the process of modernization. One indicator of this is the problem of mourning or, more precisely, the difficulties faced by the bereaved one—in finding a new identity as an orphan or widow(er). It is not always that (folk) Christianity can provide a coherent solution to all such problems, or at least the quest for control over the deceased persons' behaviour may in some fields and some cultural areas turn out to be longer and more painful than in others. In those north Eurasian folk belief systems which have an Orthodox superstratum, from Setu to Siberia, the commemoration times and lengths of mourning period have, nevertheless, been settled. One temporal boundary may have been the Russian *сорочины* or Karelian *kuusnädal*—a 40 day period at the end of which the deceased one's soul was supposed to have departed from this world (Honko 1974: 40–1; Buzin 2003: 168–9; Joalaid 2000: 266–75). The first anniversary of death—the second significant boundary—has marked the end of customary lamenting and mourning. The observance of later anniversaries (3, 9) has already become more rare. It seems, however, that the ritual ending of the mourning period has not been managed with equal success, particularly from the twentieth century on—from which time, however, we only begin to get more complete folkloric reports.

5.

The relationship with the deceased is different in such cultures where the customs related to death involve the phenomenon of exhumation—the digging out of the deceased one's remains, after a certain period, and providing them with a new identity as it were, re-initiating them into the society of the living in a new role, either as relics or amulets. As described by Alfred Radcliffe-Brown in his study of the Andaman islanders mentioned above, the part of the deceased that does not belong into the otherworld can be brought back to his relatives here through yet other rites, including lamentations. That act puts a decisive end to any problems related to unwanted appearances of the deceased, but also to the need of grieving his absence. As Radcliffe-Brown writes:

The dead person is now entirely cut off from the world of the living, save that his bones are to be treasured as relics and amulets. Weeping over the bones must be taken, I think, as the rite of aggregation whereby the bones as representative of the dead person (all that is left of him) are received back into the society henceforth to fill a special place in the social life. It really constitutes a renewal of social relations with the dead person, after a period during which all active social relations have been interrupted owing to the danger in all contact between the living and the dead. (Radcliffe-Brown 2006: 154.)

Exhumation is not just an archaic cultural phenomenon characteristic of the 'third world' peoples, but familiar also to the peoples of southern Europe. The 'lament belt' stretching from the Balkans to the White Sea (cf. Honko 1974: 14; Nenola-Kallio 1982: 16) indeed marks the last area in Europe where lamentation has survived, but the more southerly area is different from the northern parts precisely in that exhumation is practised there. Loring M. Danforth has described exhumation and the lamentation practices accompanying it in modern Greek death culture, emphasizing its essential similarity to weddings. The deceased one's skull is given a kiss of greeting and money is placed on it as though for a wedding gift. The returning of the remains into the society is comparable to the bride's leaving her home and entering public life:

An exhumation is similar to a wedding in several respects. This is particularly true when the person whose remains are exhumed never married. The greeting of the skull at the exhumation by kissing it and placing

money on it corresponds notably to the greeting the bride and groom receive at the conclusion of the wedding ceremony, when those present greet the newly married couple with a kiss and pin money to their chest. . . . The analogy between exhumation and wedding is also suggested by the fact that the movement in both rites of passage is one of emergence. When the remains of a widow's husband are exhumed, she comes out into society. Similarly, when a woman marries, it is said that she will go out into society, or that her husband will take her out into society. (Danforth 2006: 162.)

Different forms of exhumation have been known in northern European burial customs, too. We know that skeletal remains found in Estonian stone-cist and *tarand* graves have exhibited signs of having been used for other purposes, or treated after burial (cf. Lang 2007: 154, 179–80, 216–17, 221–3). As for the manipulations performed with the deceased one's physical remains, only pre-burial washing has been preserved in the northern cultural area, as well as procedures of apotropaic or medical magic (as, for instance, combating the fear of the dead, or treatment of a 'Bible bump'/ganglion cyst, called in Estonian *kooljaluu*—'dead person's bone'). The pre-burial touching or stroking of the dead (in contemporary times even more frequently of only the coffin) constitutes one of the last surviving relics of a one-time propitiation practice in which again lamentation played an important role. The repertoire of laments used on the occasion of death and the procedures accompanying it (from washing the body to interment and commemoration), has been relatively well elaborated among various peoples. Different stages of the observances have been accompanied by different lament themes and speech acts incorporated in them (cf. Ajuwon 1981: 277–80). In the laments used immediately after death, in the Karelian Russian tradition it has been common to express astonishment or ask for the reasons for leaving behind one's living relatives, as well as rebuke him for it (Vinogradov & Lozanova 1941: 106). Weeping has continued during the various stages of preparations for the burial, made over three days. Upon carrying the dead body out, lamenters have described the journey ahead of him and invited him to make peace with the living in all the issues that might have arisen during his lifetime (Vinogradov & Lozanova 1941: 106–7; on the motif of a journey in Russian laments, see also Bajburin 1979: 116–17; Chistyakov 1982; Nevskaya 1990: 137 ff.). The laments used on the way to the cemetery have contained messages to dead relatives, and while lowering the coffin into the grave, once again forgiveness has been asked for everything.

In the Karelian tradition, lamentation could begin during the washing ceremony and again would involve expressions of astonishment—addressed to the washers—over the causes for their activity (Honko 1974: 38). The lamenter, being usually the person closest to the deceased one, has figured as an onlooker of the events, posing questions and making comments. Again, personal internal tensions have been solved in this form, while keeping the theme socially visible and at the same time holding a diplomatic ritual dialogue with the deceased person and through him, the afterworld. The same functions have continued, in different phrasing, through the following stages of the ritual and the corresponding laments addressed to the coffin-makers, grave-diggers, and bell-ringers, side by side with whom the deceased one himself and the community of the dead person have identified as addressees (Honko 1974: 38–40).

It can be said that particularly up to the burial and the funeral feast, as well as throughout the forty days during which the deceased person's soul has been thought to be moving between the two worlds, lamentation has thematically and functionally reduced social rather than personal tensions, or rather—the personal has been allowed to take place only through social functionality. Later, outside of the framework of commemoration days and customs, so-called occasional laments have been wept either at the grave or in the ordinary everyday environment, in which the bewailing of personal problems may tend to rise more and more to the foreground. Almost a half of the 185-verse occasional lament I recorded in Onega Vepsia, in the summer of 2005 (see Arukask & Lashmanova 2009), consisted of personal complaints about the lamenter's problems and fate and of recalling good times spent together with the deceased. Although in the given case more than a year had passed from the death of the lamented husband, the time had not reduced the lamenting widow's regret and grief; besides, she had problems connected with the appearance of the husband in her dreams and his nightly visits to their house. Thematic passages linked to the customs turned up rather accidentally in the lament, instead of structuring it. The occasional lament was concerned primarily with the lamenter herself and her husband, neither of whom had quite successfully made the passage from the liminal phase of the ritual—one in the role of the *orphan*,⁷ the other in that of the *deceased*.

Thus what I propose is that particularly in such cultures as do not involve exhumation in the funeral rites (which would cover the Balto-Finnic

7 About the concept of *orphan* in Russian death-related customs see Adonèva 2004: 216 ff.

and north Russian traditions), the two central problems of the lament genre mentioned before, i.e. 1) the restoration of social cohesion and overcoming grief, and 2) overcoming the fear of the dead that obsesses the community of the living from the moment of death—remain unsolved. The Christianization of Europe has here been accompanied by a suppression of the archaic death culture, taking place in at least two stages. The belief in bodily resurrection has required that the body be buried intact and kept in peace—which may well have seemed shocking, particularly during the earlier centuries of transition, since the deceased one in his bodily form has evoked the greatest fear among the living, a fear that obviously explains the early cremation rituals, but also other manipulations of the skeleton—the cleaning of its bones, taking its scalp, perhaps other similar procedures. The second stage would be constituted by the institutional separation of the worlds of the living and the dead, a separation suffered primarily by the Protestant cultural space and explaining pretty well the suppression and decline over recent centuries of the lamentation custom as a most immediate communication channel and speech act.

Regardless of what was said above, interesting motifs do occur in the Setu burial laments, which in my view could be explained by the phenomena of death culture discussed earlier in this article, and by forgotten parts of the ritual, such as exhumation. I shall point out some of the more conspicuous of them.

In the Setu laments (as well as songs) there are textual motifs obviously referring to parts of the human skeleton. The importance of the parts of the human skeleton in the vocabulary of Setu burial laments has also been stressed by Vaike Sarv (2000: 136). By way of example, I shall bring in a quote from a lament where a daughter is weeping over her mother:

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Kui näet iks mu, neio, ikvat, sääil silmi pühk'vät, mullõ anna_ks jäl käsi kääpäst, annaq sõrm sõmõrast! Käega_ks ma aja armujuttu, sõrmõga_ks ma sõna kynõlõ, sys meelüs iks mino meelekene, sütüs mino süämekene. (SL III 1848: H, Setu 1903, 20 (12) < Helbi k. – Jak. Hurt < Miku Ode (1903).)</p> | <p>When you see me, maiden, weep, wiping my eyes, stretch to me a hand from out of your grave, give me a finger out of the sand! To that hand then I'll talk sweetly, to that finger I'll say some words, then my mind will be calmed, my heart will be healed.</p> |
|---|---|

In this motif, pretty widespread in Setu as well in Votian burial laments, the longed-for post-burial physical contact with a part of the deceased one's skeleton guarantees a kind of satisfaction, or relaxation of tension, corresponding to the function of ritual exhumation as exemplified above.

The possibility of bringing the deceased one back into this world is expressed by washing the body:

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Neio, tii_ks ma lipõ linnasist, | I, the maid, shall make lye of malt, |
| tii_ks ma vii verditsõ, | I shall make fermenting water, |
| leotõllõ ma_ks mant maa lõhna, | I shall soak the smell off you, |
| kaputist iks mõsõ kalmu lõhna. | I shall wash the smell of grave off your stockings. |

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Peläku-i_ks tarrõ tullõh, | Don't then fear when you come home, |
| kahiku-i_ks tarrõ kalduh! | don't cast an evil eye when you come home! |

(SL III 1832: H, Setu 1903, 173 (83) < Helbi k. – Jak. Hurt < Miku Ode (1903).)

With this example I allude to washing as a manipulation, just as ritual washing (and/or whisking oneself in *sauna*) constitutes part of a liminal rite, not hygiene. The point of this motif in the given lament is the desire to recover the deceased breadwinner and supporter as a participant in the community of the living—not as the unforeseeable and unwanted visitor we spoke about earlier, the figure upon which the archaic fear of the dead is grounded. Thus, the person is called back home here rather in the role of ancestor and protector that we saw in the process of exhumation, although in more recent times, that textual motif may have been understood rather as a lyrical utopia, or a Christian allegory of resurrection (cf. Valk 2000: 258 ff.).

Naturally the death we encounter in the Setu laments, recorded at the end of the nineteenth century, is not a new state in the archaic chain of continuity, but a fatal end one cannot endure and must rather try and bargain with, something that only Mary and sweet Jesus can help against:

| | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Kuul iks tegi kur'astõ, | Death was cruel, |
| katsko väega kalõstõ, | the pest very heartless, |
| kuul iks koolõt' kogonist, | death killed relentlessly, |
| maalõ vei viimätses, | buried in the ground, |
| jäti_ks ime ikma! | left the mother weeping! |

(SL III 1860: H, Setu 1903, 515 (57) < Kolovinna k. – Jak. Hurt < Martini Irõ (1903).)

A motif repeatedly voiced in the Setu laments is yearning for death. No doubt the Setu lament belonged to the genres where the woman could (just as in lyrical songs) express her forbidden feelings and fantasies, among them the yearning for death. In the funeral situation, however, it need not have been just playing on the boundary of the forbidden, but probably (depending, of course, on the details) the yearning was at times realistic. But could we also trace here the archaic feeling of superfluity after the loss of the supporter as the other half of the whole, in all senses? Why should a genre not establish its deep-rooted imperatives for the performer, or putting it differently—what else could the stable preservation of genres rely on, if not on the surprising recognitions and expressions opening up through the text in the relevant situation?

6.

In conclusion the following can be said. The motifs related to the body and the bodily resurrection of the dead bear different meanings in different folklore genres. The dialogues held at the grave, as represented in songs or tales, are based on a one-time practice of communicating with the dead in commemorative situations, the aim of which, however, was not merely lyrical expression, or seeking for psychological support, but also an attempt to control the activities and behaviour of the dead. The invitation expressed in the songs for the deceased to rise from the grave, is based on the waking and invitation formulae used in the laments to mark the beginning of communication. Thereby, the rising of the dead is legitimated, as it were—under such circumstances, the buried one is not a revenant behaving in unwanted and unexpected ways, but a respected kinsman with whom it is possible to share one's concerns and send messages to other deceased ones. The same principle has governed saying farewell to the dead at the end of the lamentation session, negotiating a diplomatic agreement, as it were, according to which he is not to disturb the living unexpectedly.

In the lament, the waking of the dead is accomplished through physical metaphors. Likewise, other lament themes treating the voyage of the dead, or his location, are charged with physicality. The fact that it is not merely a symbolic notion is referred to by the bodily attitudes of the lamenter, physically oriented towards the deceased, as well as by the orientations used in funeral customs and the avoidance of physical contacts with the otherworld, but also by the details of keeping quiet, or clamouring out in uncommon ways (as

lamentation, too, could be described). Although there are no reports of actually seeing the buried one rise from the grave, it has been believed that he could leave the grave in an undesirable manner, possibly disturbing the peace of the living.

The communicative function of lamentations has not consisted in mere channelling of personal affect, but even more in the protection of the communal interests of the living. Throughout the period from death to funeral, laments have controlled and secured the relations with the deceased one and the afterworld—a task they have also fulfilled during communication with the deceased one over the commemoration period. Thus, each lamentation session has also been yet another redrawing of the boundaries between the communities of the living and the dead, another reaffirmation of the location and identity of each side. The lament texts are full of direct and hidden diplomacy and hints; the personal feelings in them have been cast into traditional formulaic language, the message of which, however, is rather of the communal kind.

Among the Balto-Finnic and Slavic peoples, after death communication is characterized by the absence of exhumation. Based on some archaeological data, the existence of this practice at some time in the past cannot be excluded; however, there are no traces of it in later folk practices. Yet among other peoples, exhumation has fulfilled an important social function in the customs observed after death, figuring as a means of reuniting the deceased with the world of the living. Among other things, this has helped avoid the danger of the dead one returning as a revenant, and has brought relief from the grief. The motifs of seeking physical contact with the dead in the lamentation texts of northern Europe may possibly have originated as references to exhumation. If that is the case, it provides an example of how the textual memory of a folklore genre surpasses continuity of customs and preservation of distinct practices.

References

H = Folklore collection of Jakob Hurt in Estonian Folklore Archives.

Adon'eva, S. B.

2004 *Прагматика фольклора*. Санкт-Петербург.

Ajuwon, Badwe

1981 Lament for the Dead as a Universal Folk Tradition. *Fabula* 22: 272–80.

Anttonen, Veikko

- 1996 *Ihmisen ja maan rajat. 'Pyhä' kulttuurisena kategoriana*. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura.
- 2003 Sacred Sites as Markers of Difference: Exploring Cognitive Foundations of Territoriality. In: Lotte Tarkka (ed.), *Dynamics of Tradition: Perspectives on Oral Poetry and Folk Belief*; pp. 291–305. Helsinki: Finnish Literary Society.

Arukask, Madis

- 2009 On the Inter-Genre Transitions of Laments and Kalevala-Metric Songs. *Traditiones* 38: 99–116. <http://www.siefhome.org/images/stories/file/pdfs/traditiones.pdf> (accessed on 20 October 2010).

Arukask, Madis & Alla Lashmanova

- 2009 Määratledes ennast suulises esituses. Äänisvepsa naise itk oma mehe haul. *Mäetagused* 42: 55–76. <http://www.folklore.ee/tagused/nr42/itk.pdf> (accessed on 20 October 2010).

Bajburin, A. K.

- 1979 Проблема пространства в русских и карельских причитаниях. In: *Симпозиум-79 по прибалтийско-финской филологии. Тезисы докладов*; pp. 113–17. Петрозаводск.

Bajburin, A. K. & G. A. Levinton

- 1990 Похороны и свадьба. In: *Исследования в области балто-славянской духовной культуры: Погребальный обряд*; pp. 64–99. Москва: Наука.

Bernshtram, T. A.

- 1979 О “двойной природе” причета. In: *Симпозиум-79 по прибалтийско-финской филологии. Тезисы докладов*; pp. 138–45. Петрозаводск.

Buzin, V. S.

- 2003 Традиционная погребально-поминальная обрядность Тамбовщины. In: *Университетский историк: Альманах*. Вып. 2; pp. 149–72. Санкт-Петербург: Санкт-Петербургский государственный университет.

Chistov, K. V.

- 1994 К вопросу о магической функции похоронных причитаний. In: *Историко-этнографические исследования по фольклору. Сборник статей памяти Сергея Александровича Токарева*; pp. 267–74. Москва.

Chistyakov, V. A.

- 1982 Представления о дороге в загробный мир в русских похоронных причитаниях XIX–XX вв. In: *Обряды и обрядовый фольклор*; pp. 114–27. Москва: Наука.

Danforth, Loring M.

- 2006 Metaphors of Mediation in Greek Funeral Laments. In: Antonius C. G. M. Robben (ed.), *Death, Mourning, and Burial: A Cross-Cultural Reader*; pp. 156–66. London: Blackwell Publishing. (First published in 1982.)

Eco, Umberto

- 1990 Introduction. In: Y. M. Lotman, *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*; pp. vii–xiii. London, New York: I. B.Tauris.

Eliade, Mircea

1959 *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. (First published in 1957.)

Hagu, Paul

2000 Poesia eksam: setu mõrsjaitkudest kõrvutuses läänemeresoomlaste põhjapoolsema itkutraditsiooniga. In: Kristi Salve, Mare Kõiva & Ülo Tedre (eds), *Tagasipöördumatus. Sõnad ja hää!*; pp. 199–227. Tartu: Eesti Kirjandusmuuseumi folkloristika osakond.

Honko, Lauri

1974 Balto-Finnic Lament Poetry. In: *Review of Finnish Linguistics and Ethnology*; pp. 9–61. Helsinki: Finnish Literary Society.

Joalaid, Marje

2000 Itk Vepsa matusekombestikus. In: Kristi Salve, Mare Kõiva & Ülo Tedre (eds), *Tagasipöördumatus. Sõnad ja hää!*; pp. 265–82. Tartu: Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum.

Katona, Imre

1981 Pure and Transitional Forms of Hungarian Lament Poetry: Regularities of Changing Genres. In: Lauri Honko & Vilmos Voigt (eds), *Adaptation, Change, and Decline in Oral Literature*; pp. 79–87. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society.

Kreutzwald, Friedrich Reinhold

1982 *Kalevipoeg. An Ancient Estonian Tale*. Compiled by Fr. R. Kreutzwald. Translated with notes and afterword by Jüri Kurman. Moorestown, NJ: Symposia Press.

Lang, Valter

2007 *The Bronze and Early Iron Ages in Estonia*. Tartu: Tartu University Press.

Lotman, Y. M.

1967 Тезисы к проблеме “Искусство в ряду моделирующих систем”. In: *Труды по знаковым системам*, 3; pp. 130–45. Тарту.

1977 Primary and Secondary Communication Modeling Systems. In: Daniel P. Lucid (ed.), *Soviet Semiotics: An Anthology*; pp. 95–8. Baltimore, London: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Nenola-Kallio, Aili

1982 *Studies in Ingrian Laments*. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica.

Nevskaya, L. G.

1990 Балто-славянские причитания: реконструкция семантической структуры. In: *Исследования в области балто-славянской духовной культуры: Погребальный обряд*; pp. 135–46. Москва: Наука.

1999 Молчание как атрибут сферы смерти. In: *Мир звучащий и молчащий. Семиотика звука и голоса в традиционной культуре славян*; pp. 123–34. Москва: Индрик.

Oinas, Felix J.

1969 Legends of the Chuds and Pans. In: Felix J. Oinas, *Studies in Finnic-Slavic Folklore Relations*; pp. 160–77. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica.

Paulson, Ivar

1997 *Vana eesti rahvausk. Usundiloolisi esseid*. Tartu: Ilmamaa. (First published in 1966.)

Pimenov, V. V.

1965 *Венсы. Очерк этнической истории и генезиса культуры*. Москва, Ленинград: Наука.

Radcliffe-Brown, Alfred Reginald

2006 The Andaman Islanders. In: Antonius C. G. M. Robben (ed.), *Death, Mourning, and Burial: A Cross-Cultural Reader*; pp. 151–5. London: Blackwell Publishing. (First published in 1922.)

Salve, Kristi

2000 Toone tare. Tähelepanekuid setu surnuikude žanridevahelistest ja geograafilistest seostest. In: Kristi Salve, Mare Kõiva & Ülo Tedre (eds), *Tagasi-pöördumatus. Sõnad ja hääled*; pp. 55–72. Tartu: Eesti Kirjandusmuuseumi folkloristika osakond.

Sarv, Vaike

2000 *Setu itkukultuur*. Tartu Eesti Kirjandusmuuseumi etnomusikoloogia osakond.

Sedakova, O. A.

1990 Тема “доли” в погребальном обряде (восточно- и южнославянский материал). In: *Исследования в области балто-славянской духовной культуры: Погребальный обряд*; pp. 54–63. Москва: Наука.

SL

1904 *Setukeste laulud. Pihkva-eestlaste vanad rahvalaulud, ühes Räpinä ja Vastse-liina lauludega, välja annud Dr. Jakob Hurt*. I. Helsingi: Soome Kirjanduze Selts.

1907 *Setukeste laulud. Pihkva-eestlaste vanad rahvalaulud, ühes Räpinä ja Vastse-liina lauludega, välja annud Dr. Jakob Hurt*. III. Helsingi: Soome Kirjanduze Selts.

Stark, Laura

2002 *Peasants, Pilgrims, and Sacred Promises: Ritual and the Supernatural in Orthodox Karelian Folk Religion*. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society.

2006 *The Magical Self. Body and the Supernatural in Early Modern Rural Finland*. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica.

Tolstaya, S. M.

1999 Обрядовое голошение: лексика, семантика, прагматика. In: *Мир звучащий и молчащий. Семиотика звука и голоса в традиционной культуре славян*; pp. 135–48. Москва: Индрик.

Tolstoj, N. I.

1990 Перевоорачивание предметов в славянском погребальном обряде. In: *Исследования в области балто-славянской духовной культуры. Погребальный обряд*; pp. 119–28. Москва: Наука.

Valk, Ülo

2000 Regilaul kui kommunikatsioon teispoolsusega: dialoogist nägemuseni. In: Tiiu Jaago & Ülo Valk (eds), *Kust tulid lood minule... Artikleid regilaulu uurimise alalt 1990. aastatel*; pp. 245–76. Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli kirjastus.

Vinogradov, G. S. & A. N. Lozanova

1941 Плачи и сказы. In: *Фольклор Карело-Финской ССР*; pp. 105–31. Петрозаводск.

Vinokurova, Irina

Some Ideas about the Soul among Vepsians. (Forthcoming article.)

Zhukova, O. Y.

2009 *Языковые особенности вепсских обрядовых причитаний. диссертация на соискание ученой степени кандидата филологических наук*. Manuscript. Петрозаводск.

Abraham's sacrifice in the Qur'an

Beyond the body¹

A recent volume on religion and the body begins by stating that 'Since Abraham's binding of Isaac, minutely described by Søren Kierkegaard as an ethical, religious, spiritual, and physical double bind, the body has overtly or latently been a focal point in the history of the three Abrahamic religions' (Mjaaland, Sigurdson & Thorgeirsdottir 2010: 1). However, Islam's scripture, the Qur'an, does not say that Abraham (Ibrahim in Arabic)² binds his son's body, nor is the body the focal point of the story—nor, indeed, is it of more than passing interest in Muslim history.³ This then leads me to question the tendency to homogenize the narrative of Abraham's sacrifice and, by extension, the religions that claim their descent from him. There is no denying their family resemblance of course, but while the family may be Abraham's, Abraham himself is not identical in the Qur'an and the Bible and neither are his trials. The term 'Abrahamic religions' is not very helpful here since, in spite of its linguistic pluralism, it obscures this crucial distinction between a genealogy that is shared and depictions of a common ancestor that are not. Nonetheless, it *is* more accurate than the standard alternative, 'the Judeo-Christian tradition', a phrase that papers over the fissures in this tradition while also excising Islam from what is surely an 'interreligiously shared' world (Wasserstrom 1995: 209). However, I want to suggest that the only way to include Islam in this world does not have to be through an assimilative embrace that stifles its individuality; one could, instead, find ways to honour *both* the plurality of the Abrahamic tradition as well as the specificity of Islam within

- 1 This is a substantially revised version of the paper I presented at the conference on 'Religion and the Body', in Finland in June 2010. I am grateful to Ulises Mejias and Michelle Lelwica for their questions which allowed me to refine some of my arguments, and to Kelly Rafferty for her help with proofreading and the bibliography.
- 2 I retain the word 'Abraham' since that is how most English translations of the Qur'an refer to him.
- 3 This may be because missing from the Qur'an are what Jeffrey Weeks (1985: 65) calls the tortuous 'Judeo-Christian disquisitions on the sins of the flesh'.

it. This is what I aspire to do by re-citing the Qur'anic story of Abraham, as a way to unbind the lessons of his sacrifice from the body and also to illustrate the inappropriateness of using Isaac's bound body as a universal template for all the Abrahamic religions.

Specifically, I discuss two different renditions of the story: the 'mystical exegesis' (Al-'Arabi 1980: 18) of Ibn al-'Arabi, the Sufi philosopher and theologian, who lived in the lands of 'Western Islam' (Spain), in the twelfth century, and my own reading of it as an anti-patriarchal parable. Both of these fall well outside the Muslim exegetical tradition, but I offer them as a way, firstly, to illustrate the range of lessons that Muslims have drawn from the same scriptural narrative over time. Secondly, I feel that a defence of religious pluralism could begin by exploring the diversity of opinions within Islam itself and this requires one to step beyond the confines of what is regarded as canonical in order to explore what may be marginal or repressed in Muslim thinking. In passing, I will also consider the differing conceptions of faith and sacrifice to which conflicting scriptural narratives have given rise in the Abrahamic tradition, by contrasting the Qur'an and its interpretations with the Biblical account and Kierkegaard's 'exegetical gloss' on it (Askari 2004: 316). I should note, however, that the comparisons are not very rigorous and I offer them simply because I want to put my discussion of Abraham in a cross- and inter-religious perspective.

I will start with the Qur'anic narrative, followed by a synopsis of al-'Arabi's exegesis and a brief contrast of it with Kierkegaard's and I will end with my own take on Abraham's story.

The Qur'an and Abraham

The Qur'an tells of the most extraordinary sacrifice that never was in minimalist and enigmatic terms. The relevant verses do not even name Abraham's son and God calls Abraham by his own name only at the very end:

He said, 'I am going to my Lord; He will guide me. My Lord, give me one of the righteous.' Then We gave him the good tidings of a prudent boy; and when he had reached the age of running⁴ with him, he said, 'My son, I see in a dream that I shall sacrifice thee; consider, what thinkest thou?' He said, 'My father, do as thou art bidden; thou shalt find me, God will-

4 Muhammad Asad (nd: 688) refers to the Arabic word as 'work'.

ing, one of the steadfast.' When they had surrendered, and he flung him upon his brow, We called unto him, 'Abraham, thou has confirmed the vision; even so We recompense the good-doers. This is indeed the manifest trial.' And We ransomed him with a mighty sacrifice, and left for him among the later folk 'Peace be upon Abraham!' (37:99–105, in Arberry 1955: 153–4.)

This is the Qur'anic account in its entirety and it is as remarkable for what it does not say as for what it does. For instance, it does not say that God tells Abraham to sacrifice his son, or how much time elapses between his dream and the proposed sacrifice, where it is to take place, if Abraham ties his son, or if he ends up sacrificing a ram in his place in the end. Thus, missing from it are all the details recounted in Genesis where there is an ongoing call and response between God and Abraham, starting with God's command to him to sacrifice his 'only son', Isaac. Although the Biblical account is also rather terse, it says that the father and son journey for three days to the land of Moriah, that Abraham binds Isaac and lays him on an altar and that, when an angel stops him from slaying Isaac, he sacrifices a ram instead (Gen. 22:1–24).⁵ Conversely, missing from the Biblical saga is the defining motif of the Qur'anic story, that Abraham shares his dream with his son and they only proceed with the sacrifice *after* he agrees to it. In the Bible, by contrast, Abraham does not tell Isaac of his intent to kill him and it is his silence, more than his binding of Isaac, that Kierkegaard explores in his reading. Thus,

ideas of secrecy . . . are . . . essential here, as is Abraham's silence. He doesn't speak, he doesn't tell his secret to his loved ones. He is, like the knight of faith,⁶ a witness and not a teacher. . . . Abraham is a witness of the absolute faith that cannot and must not witness before men. He must keep his secret. (Derrida 1995: 73.)

In effect, it is this burden of secrecy, no less than the tyranny of an inexplicable command, that evokes the fear and trembling of which Kierkegaard speaks,

5 Neither version allows one to determine Isaac's age with any certainty. Some Jewish commentators believe that Isaac may even have been in his 30s, so this depiction of Abraham as an infanticidal father seems overdrawn.

6 The phrase is Kierkegaard's (1983: 21). Edward Mooney points out that this is just 'a narrative construct, a fictional ideal-type', that allows one to tell faith from fanaticism. Even so, it has the effect of reducing a prophet to a knight (1991: 83–4, his emphasis).

for ‘what could be more abominable, what mystery could be more frightful . . . *vis-à-vis* love, humanity, the family, or morality,’ than an ‘infanticide father who hides what he is going to do from his son and from his family without knowing why?’ (Derrida 1995: 67.)⁷

The Qur’anic Abraham may not know God’s intent in testing him either, but he does not face an ethical dilemma as does (allegedly)⁸ his Biblical counterpart because, while the Qur’an links the sacred and sacrifice, it does not link either one to secrecy. In the Qur’an, not only does Abraham tell his son of his dream but the son also has a role in interpreting it.⁹ Thus both father and son witness their absolute faith in front of one another. From a Qur’anic standpoint, had the father set out to kill an unsuspecting son, it would have robbed the son of all moral agency and made him into a victim of his father’s tyranny while also making the father a murderer. This is precisely the reading from which Kierkegaard and Jacques Derrida seek to rescue the Biblical Abraham by arguing that faith transcends ethics. In fact, not only does it lead ‘one to do what ethics would forbid’ (Kierkegaard 1983: 74), but it even ‘*demand*s that one behave in an irresponsible manner (by means of treachery or betrayal)’ (Derrida 1995: 66, my emphasis). In Kierkegaard’s telling, for Abraham to put ‘himself in an absolute relationship to the absolute . . . [there must be] a teleological suspension of the ethical’ (Derrida 1995: 62, 66). In Derrida’s hands this becomes ‘ethics as “irresponsibilization,” as an insoluble and paradoxical contradiction between responsibility in general and absolute responsibility’ (p. 61). In the Qur’an, however, there is no such ethics as irresponsibilization, because Abraham does not plan on killing an unwary son; one does not therefore need to worry about treachery or responsibility. And if, like al-‘Arabi, one believes that the reason God puts Abraham and his son through a test of such magnitude is because of their own statures as prophets, then one also does not need to impute to them the anguish that Kierkegaard ascribes to the Biblical Abraham. As al-‘Arabi would have said, a prophet cannot be tormented at the prospect of doing God’s will; anguish can only be the fate ‘of one who is ignorant of his Fixed Entity’ (Askari 2004: 327). Since these two Abrahams emerge not only from opposing scriptural texts but also from

7 Lippman Bodoff (2005: 40), however, argues that one ‘cannot prove’ Abraham’s intention to kill his son. Bruce Chilton, on the other hand, counters Kierkegaard’s portrayal of Abraham by pointing out that, in the Bible, his character has ‘the staying power of a weathervane’ (2008: 201–2).

8 See Gellman 1994: 8 for why Isaac’s potential murder does not violate Kierkegaard’s view of the ethical.

9 In my reading (below), I explain why this role is not a purely formal one.

the very different epistemological approaches of al-'Arabi and Kierkegaard, this may be the appropriate place to look more closely at al-'Arabi's exegesis.

Ibn al-'Arabi and Abraham

In the only comparative essay on both, Muhammad Hasan Askari argues that, unlike Kierkegaard, al-'Arabi engages a set of questions that are 'entirely meta-physical in character'. For instance, what is Abraham's 'spiritual station' as a prophet and a friend of God (*Khalil*)? 'How does one attain . . . gnosis of God?' What do divine will and command mean? 'What is the relationship between God and man? What is the distinction between . . . lord and . . . vassal?' and so on (Askari 2004: 321). I cannot, of course, summarize al-'Arabi's position on all these issues and perhaps all that is needed to understand the substance of his exegesis are its three main points.

One is that divine commands are congruent with our own natures, since '[e]very lord gives only that command to his vassal which is consistent with that vassal's nature. Therefore, one never receives a command which is against one's Fixed Entity'. It then follows that knowing one's nature is crucial for 'self-knowledge, and it is in fact the "soul at peace"' (Askari 2004: 324). In keeping with this logic, al-'Arabi argues that the reason Abraham was called *Khalil* is because he knew his own nature, which was to make 'God's command his own choice' (p. 325). As a matter of fact, much before he had his dream of sacrificing his son, he had extinguished his Self in his gnosis with God (and, according to al-'Arabi, Abraham's son was also treading on the same path).

Second and, for this reason, al-'Arabi believes that God was testing Abraham not for his faith (*iman*), which was never in doubt, but for his knowledge (*ilm*). Abraham, he points out, 'saw in the dream that he was sacrificing his son. The question now was whether to interpret the dream or act on it literally', and here al-'Arabi is of two minds. On the one hand, he says that Abraham's 'greatness lay in transforming the dream into reality' (Askari 2004: 322); on the other, however, he maintains that Abraham was wrong in having taken his dream literally. He makes this claim on the basis of a two-fold distinction; between the senses and the imagination on the one hand and between reality and its forms, on the other. Sleep, he argues, is 'the plane of the Imagination' and a revelation of Reality on this plane 'requires an additional knowledge by which to apprehend what God intends by a particular form'. This is especially so when Reality appears 'in a form unacceptable to the reason'. (Al-'Arabi 1980: 99, 101.) For instance, what appeared to Abraham in

his dream as his son was ‘with God . . . nothing other than the Great Sacrifice in the form of his son,’ that is, it was the ram Abraham ends up sacrificing in his son’s place (p. 99).¹⁰ According to al-‘Arabi, when God says to Abraham ‘*This is indeed a clear test*, God is testing to see if he knows that the ‘perspective of the Imagination required interpretation.’ However, even though Abraham knew this, he remained ‘heedless . . . and did not deal with the perspective in the proper way. Thus, he believed the vision as he saw it.’ (Al-‘Arabi 1980: 100.) His error, continues al-‘Arabi, is clear from how ‘God says. . . *O Abraham, you believed what you saw*. . . He does not say, “You were *right* concerning what you saw.”’ This is why God saves Abraham’s son from his father’s ‘misapprehension.’ (al-‘Arabi 1980: 99.)¹¹

This reading suggests that Abraham’s dilemma was epistemological, not ethical, since he was faced with the challenge of interpreting God’s will and, inasmuch as he failed to do so correctly, one could say that he also failed the test. If this is so, what lessons can we draw from Abraham’s story? Before I address this question, I want to round out al-‘Arabi’s exegesis by clarifying his stance on prophets and sacrifice. Like all Muslims, he believes that a prophet is called to this spiritual station by God for reasons we cannot know. However, what prophets have in common is that each embodies ‘a particular aspect of God’s wisdom’ (Al-‘Arabi 1980: 16) and each is tasked with making ‘the Creator and Creation manifest at the same time’ (Askari 2004: 328). To be able to do this, a prophet must be willing to descend (from his own state of gnosis) ‘to the plain of humanity’ in order to ‘convey God’s message to the people’ (p. 328, 332). However, a Gnostic ‘experiences such exhilaration in the final stage of the ascent that he feels disinclined to come down. He does not *want* to return to the stage of humanity.’ That is why, for a prophet, it is a sacrifice to end his gnosis with God and it is precisely in this sense that the sacrifice of Abraham and his son was ‘God’s sacrifice’ since it required them ‘to descend and to manifest’ (p. 328) themselves in order to act on Abraham’s dream. To put this in Kierkegaard’s language, a prophet is both a witness and a teacher whose duty is to both God and humanity, not to himself.

This, in a nutshell, is al-‘Arabi’s reading of Abraham’s story and one can discern some obvious problems with it. For instance, how is it that Abraham does not know the real meaning of his dream but that al-‘Arabi does? And, what of the fact that al-‘Arabi ignores the Qur’an’s chronology (by making it

10 This is, of course, not implicit from the Qur’anic text.

11 Incidentally, these arguments occur not in his chapter on Abraham but on Isaac, even though al-‘Arabi’ believes that it was Ismail whom Abraham set out to sacrifice.

seem that God tells Abraham of his trial beforehand), and ascribes a comment to God (that Abraham 'believed' his vision) that the Qur'an does not? Most egregious of all, to a majority of Muslims, is likely to be his claim that Abraham misinterpreted his dream even if it is clear that God does, indeed, save him and his son from their own literalism. Yet, the idea that a prophet could have been mistaken is not un-Qur'anic since the Qur'an itself tells of how, as a youth, Moses misinterpreted the meanings of certain incidents that he witnessed. In the Qur'an, prophets are not perfect since the attribute of perfection belongs to God alone.

In spite of these problems, however, and even if one is not persuaded by al-'Arabi's parsing of Abraham's story, the morals of his exegesis are still worth considering: that literalism is not the essence of faith, that God's will is not transparent but needs to be interpreted, and that no one can claim interpretive infallibility. These are particularly compelling reminders at a time when so many Muslims are bound to textual literalism, when they see reason as an obstacle to faith, and when male hubris has reached such heights that a handful of (mostly Arab) men can claim to know the truth as it resides with God. It is this claim to authority, which also manifests in patriarchal interpretations of the Qur'an, that is the point of departure for my own reading of Abraham's story. However, before I describe that, I want to draw out some contrasts between al-'Arabi and Kierkegaard's portraits of Abraham more explicitly than I have done so far.¹²

Differing Abrahams

Unlike al-'Arabi, Kierkegaard does not seem to be interested in Abraham's nature, which he sees as being no different from his own and which he even explains 'by recourse to his own personality' (Askari 2004: 317). And, while he does distinguish between their relationships to God, he does not conceive of the relationships, or of the difference between them, in ontological terms, as does al-'Arabi. In Kierkegaard's view, what makes Abraham Abraham and Kierkegaard Kierkegaard is not that one is a prophet and the other is not, but, rather, that one elects to do God's bidding, in spite of the anguish it causes him, while the other says that he could not have done as much in the same situation. Second, according to Kierkegaard, it is this willingness to put himself

12 See Askari (2004: 311–35) for a more systematic and nuanced comparison of al-'Arabi and Kierkegaard.

in an absolute relationship to the Absolute that marks Abraham as a knight of faith, whereas al-'Arabi would have said that Abraham was already in such a relationship by virtue of being a prophet. Lastly, Kierkegaard believes that a knight of faith owes a duty of obedience to God and 'a duty of freedom in unfettered individuality' to himself (Gellman 1994: 15). Hence, it is only by becoming such a knight that Abraham is also able to individuate himself.

This emphasis on Abraham's 'free will and independence' (Lowin 2006: 223) and 'atomic sense of individuality' (Gellman 1994: 14), may resonate well with secular notions of radical individualism and the promise of infinite choice, but many Muslims would be troubled by Kierkegaard's own rather secular portrait of a prophet. As al-'Arabi would have objected, a knight of faith is not the same as a prophet, since one cannot become a prophet by one's own efforts or even by obeying God. That is why even if Kierkegaard had done exactly what Abraham did, he might have become a knight but he could not have become a prophet. In fact, God would not have put him to the same test to which God put Abraham precisely because Kierkegaard was not Abraham. Thus, al-'Arabi would have agreed that Abraham's relationship with God was ineluctably personal, but he would have taken this to mean that his sacrifice was commensurate with his own nature and relationship to God and therefore not generalizable, since our natures and relationships with God are likely to be different. As for 'the whole issue of compulsion . . . and . . . free will', he would have considered it 'a colossal deception', because 'compulsion only obtains when one is forced to act against his own will, but God commands man to do only what is innate in man's primordial nature.' (Askari 2004: 323.)

In contrast to Kierkegaard, then, al-'Arabi's exegesis seems to convey 'the more Mosaic idea of Allah's supreme and active control of the universe' (Lowin 2006: 225). This contrast, Shari Lowin argues, is also discernable in early Jewish and Muslim commentaries on the story. Even so, I would hesitate to overdraw the contrast between al-'Arabi and Kierkegaard because, in spite of their differences, they also share the view that obedience to God's will is not the only lesson of Abraham's sacrifice, or even the only element of faith. To Kierkegaard, 'mere *obedience* cannot distinguish faith. *How* Abraham survives is key.' (Mooney 1991: 85.) To al-'Arabi, not all of God's prescriptive commands are meant to be obeyed (see Chittick 1989: 291 ff.). If he makes this argument elsewhere and not in his exegesis of Abraham's story, it is because he believes that prophets stand in a distinctive relationship to God, one that transcends the dilemmas posed by free will. Still, his exegesis of Abraham's story also makes clear that a prophet can be faced with both dilemmas and choices. In fact, it is from Abraham's freely made choice that God rescues his

son. Of course, in al-'Arabi's opinion, the rescue testifies to Abraham's failure to interpret God's will accurately; in mine, however, this rescue signals a resistance on the Qur'an's part to father-right, or, traditional patriarchy.¹³

Abraham's son and patriarchy

My interpretation of Abraham's story also emphasizes the importance of free will, but in a very different way, and to very different ends, than does Kierkegaard's. And, while like al-'Arabi, I am also interested in Abraham's dream, unlike him, I approach it mostly from the perspective of Abraham's son, because I think his role in assuming his own sacrifice puts a constraint on the rights his father exercises over him. Since this is the opposite of what Muslim tradition holds, I should note that the lessons most Muslims draw from the story are 'about obedience to God's will and His reward for those who obey Him unquestioningly' (Leemhuis 2002: 125). A few exegetes even maintain that the son (whom most take to be Ismail and some, Isaac) not only agrees to his own sacrifice, but also tries to ensure 'that he himself will not try to resist his father and thus asks to be bound. He also wants to make sure that his father will . . . not show mercy at the last moment. Therefore he asks that his face be put down so that his father will not look him in the eye.' (Leemhuis 2002: 133.) In brief, the son's role is seen as enacting his obedience to patriarchal authority.

This explanation fits nicely into traditional interpretations of the Qur'an as a patriarchal text, but I do not consider it to be very thoughtful or compelling. For one, where it does not take the verses at face value, it injects a welter of interpretive details into them that cannot be justified textually. As we have seen, the Qur'an does not say that Abraham binds his son's body, nor does it offer any particulars that would indicate the drama and pathos which has been conjured up by exegetes. For another, the Qur'an tells us that Abraham had submitted himself to God's will while he was still a young man and even risked death as a consequence (see below); we do not therefore need the story of the sacrifice to prove this. Besides, for Muslims, it is not much of a lesson to know that prophets were willing to obey God when the very term 'muslim'

13 I clarify my definition of patriarchy and also offer my reading of Abraham's story in a more careful and nuanced way, but also with some different emphases, in Barlas 2002: esp. chs 1 and 4.

means ‘one who submits to God’s will.’¹⁴ Most importantly, ‘Allah at no point demands a literal sacrifice. As the text explicitly says. . . “This was an obvious trial.” . . . The Qur’an elsewhere condemns the sacrifice of children and family (70:11–14), as well as infanticide (17:31), because they are sinful.’¹⁵ For all these reasons, I read the story of Abraham’s sacrifice very differently and I put it into the larger context of both his own life, as well as of some fundamental Qur’anic teachings about God, faith, and the nature of moral personality; specifically, that God is not Father, that there should be ‘no compulsion in religion’ (2:256, in Ali 1998: 103), that each soul is answerable only for ‘herself’ and no one can ‘Bear another’s burden. . . [e]ven though he be nearly Related’ (35:18, in Ali 1998: 1158), and that God tries a soul only to the limits of its own capacity. If Abraham’s story is to cohere with such principles then it is clear that he cannot witness his son’s faith by offering his life to God; rather, the son must do so himself. However, what seems significant is not just that he consents to his sacrifice but also *how* and *why*. I want to consider each of these points in some detail.

At a time when the law of the father sanctioned infanticide, it would not have been very extraordinary for God to have commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son, as in the Hebrew Bible. But, we know that God does not do this in the Qur’an and, instead, Abraham has a dream that he tells his son about. The dominant Muslim view, as I have just noted, is that this disclosure allows for a display of Abraham’s authority as a father, a reading with which some feminists¹⁶ would agree on the grounds that ‘patriarchal society’s emphasis on obedience to authority (including corrupt or even deranged authority), produces modes of socialization that encourage ‘us to make “choices” that reproduce the dominant/patriarchal status quo.’¹⁷ There is no gainsaying the logic of this argument but I read the son’s part in his sacrifice as doing just the opposite, that is, as illustrating the different ways in which the Qur’an challenges the legitimacy of patriarchal norms.

14 Even if Muslims differ on their understanding of submission, the concept itself is integral to their self-definition.

15 That is why, argues Chilton (2008: 161), ‘nothing takes away from the emphasis in the Muslim *Aqedah* that the test Ibrahim faced was “obvious”.’

16 There is only one feminist reference to this story but it makes the patently counterfactual claim that, ‘unlike Isaac in the Biblical narrative, the son in this [Qur’anic] story does not know that God had commanded his father to sacrifice him.’ Hassan 1994: 131.

17 Michelle Lelwica, personal correspondence, 2010.

It does this, for instance, by not upholding paternal authority just because it is paternal authority; in fact, the Qur'an advocates disobeying parents if they 'strive/ To make thee join/ In worship with Me/ Things of which thou hast/ No knowledge' (3:14–15, in Ali 1998: 1083). It is true that Abraham was not pressing his son to worship anyone other than God, but my point is simply that the Qur'an's concept of moral personality is not premised on the notion of blind obedience to parents, particularly, to fathers (I will return to this point below). There is therefore no *a priori* reason to assume a son's investment in consenting to his father's authority, especially since the Qur'an mentions other prophets whose wives and children refused to heed their messages because they refused to acknowledge them as prophets at all.

Second, it is not even the case that Abraham asks for his son's consent or obedience; rather, he asks his son what he makes of his dream. To this open-ended question the son replies that his father should do as he is bidden (by God). This shows both that the son takes the dream literally and that he believes he is obeying *God's* will; that is, he is submitting to the *God* of his father, not to his *father*. Abraham's question also shows that, up to that point in the story, he has not decided on the meaning of his dream. Otherwise he could just as easily have asked his son a very different sort of question, perhaps about how to proceed with the sacrifice. If one is to go by these details in the story, as well as of the Qur'an's teachings I have mentioned above and others that I will consider shortly, there is no reason to treat the son's voice in the cavalier and instrumentalist manner of Muslim tradition. Indeed, it allows the son to profess his faith by assuming his own death. If it is true, as Derrida (1995: 41) says, that death is 'the one thing in the world that no one else can either give or take: therein reside freedom and responsibility', then it is only by assuming his own death that the son can make his sacrifice a morally purposive and self-determining act rather than one of treachery or betrayal on his father's part. This is partly why I believe the Qur'an gives him a voice in his sacrifice; else, it could have made him like Isaac in the Bible, unaware of his fate.

Third, the son's voice is important because it serves to curtail Abraham's rights as a father. By this I mean that not only does Abraham not have the right to commit infanticide, but whatever rights he does have in this instance are made subject to his son's moral choices. But, if Abraham's authority is not absolute in the matter of his son's sacrifice, can we view him as a patriarch and the sacrifice as an act of patriarchal violence, or as upholding the patriarchal status quo? This point can be better made by contrasting the Biblical and Qur'anic Abrahams. In the Bible, too, Abraham's will is not absolute, since

it is subjected to God's will, but this does not detract from his authority as a father. On the contrary, God's command to sacrifice Isaac clearly reaffirms this authority. Even if Abraham is distraught at doing God's will, his right to kill his son is never called into question. Therefore, the authority the two Abrahams exercise over their sons is very different and I want to suggest that this has to do with Christian and Islamic views, not just of fathers, but of God. In fact, the two are contingent. In Christianity, as some feminists have long argued, patriarchy draws for its legitimacy on sacralizations of God as Father.¹⁸ And while Abraham himself does not refer to God as father in the Biblical story, given the possibility of patriarchalizing God, one can read God's rescue of Isaac not as displacing the patriarchal status quo but as demonstrating that divine patriarchy takes precedence over the earthly one.

In the Qur'an, however, God is not father and Muslims are forbidden from referring to God as such and even from using 'similitude' for God (16:74, in Ali 1998: 676). As the Qur'an repeatedly says, God is uncreated (thus beyond sex/gender) and God is also incomparable and unrepresentable. The Qur'an's refusal to patriarchalize God means that Muslim fathers cannot rely on a model of divine fatherhood to legitimize their own authority. Not only that, but the Qur'an also roundly condemns people who ignored God's messages because they wanted to follow 'the ways of their fathers' (2:170, in Ali 1998: 67), a phrase one can take to mean patriarchy proper or, more broadly, patriarchal tradition. This hostility to father's rule also finds a powerful expression in Abraham's story, including and especially that part of it which deals with his relationship with his own father.

As the Qur'an recounts it, after Abraham's search for the one true God eventually leads him to submit himself to God, he gets into a confrontation with his father's people:

Behold! he said
To his father and his people,
'What are these images,
To which ye are
(So assiduously) devoted?'
They said: 'We found
Our fathers worshipping them.'
He said, 'Indeed ye
Have been in manifest

18 One of the earliest advocates of this view was Mary Daly (1973).

Error—ye and your fathers.'
They said, 'Have you
Brought us the Truth,
Or are you one
Of those who jest?'
He said, 'Nay, your [Sustainer]¹⁹
Is the [Sustainer] of the heavens
And the earth, . . . Who
Created [Creation] (from nothing):
And I am a witness
To this (truth).'
(21:5–6, in Ali 1998: 834.)

As this exchange demonstrates, the basis of his father's faith is to cleave to patriarchal traditions and it is this practice that Abraham attacks, with God's approval, as the next verse makes clear:

Behold, he said to his father:
'O my father! why
Worship that which heareth not
And seeth not, and can
Profit thee nothing?'
'O my father! to me
Hath come knowledge which
Hath not reached thee:
So follow me: I will guide
Thee to a Way that
Is even and straight.'
(19:42–3, in Ali 1998: 776.)

To demonstrate that the idols his father worships are ineffectual, Abraham breaks them, except the largest, and dares his father's people to get it to identify the culprit. His father reacts to this challenge by having Abraham thrown into a fire from which God saves him, just as God saves Abraham's son from him years later. Clearly, then, the condition for Abraham's embrace of God is to break with his own father, and this conflict between God's rule (mono-

19 Translation of the Arabic word 'Rabb'.

theism) and father's rule (patriarchy) also finds an exposition in the Qur'an's warning to

Fear (The coming of) a Day
When no father can avail
Aught for his son, nor
A son avail aught
For his father.
(31:33, in Ali 1998: 1089.)

On that day, it says,

One soul shall not avail another;
Nor shall compensation be accepted from her
Nor shall intercession profit her,
Nor shall anyone be helped (from the outside).
(2:123, in Ali 1998: 51-2.)

It is within the context of these teachings that I understand God's rescue of Abraham from his father and of Abraham's son from him, and I consider the two to be very different. For one, the sons and fathers could not be more different themselves. Both sons, for instance, are monotheists but one falls victim to his unbelieving father's depredations while the other submits of his own volition to the God of his fathers. Both face death, then, but for different reasons and at the hands of very different fathers. One father (Abraham's) tries to kill his son for his faith and the son has no choice in the matter. In contrast, the other father (Abraham), while also ready to sacrifice his son as a matter of faith, can only proceed with it at his son's expressed wish. If these differences did not exist, Abraham would have been no different from his own father and the story of his near-sacrifice of his son would have proved little more than the omnipotence of fathers in patriarchies. However, the morals of the two stories are not the same and that is the second way in which they are different. One reveals an outright conflict between obeying God and obeying fathers, especially those who are 'devoid of wisdom and guidance' (2:170, in Ali 1998: 67). The message of the other story is that, in order for God's will to be done, believers must submit to it voluntarily. And, since God is not father, one cannot view God's rule (monotheism) as a divine surrogate for father's rule (patriarchy). To the contrary, and borrowing from Derrida, there is an 'insoluble and paradoxical contradiction' between father's rule and God's rule.

That is why, Abraham's story can be read as 'a moral allegory about the consensual and purposive nature of Faith, its primacy over kinship and blood, the existential dilemmas that can result from submitting to God's Will (specially where it comes into conflict with one's own life), and, not least, the insignificance of the father's will in comparison to God's Will' (Barlas 2002: 116).

A postscript

I ended my reading on this note many years ago but, since then, I have reflected both on al-'Arabi's arguments and also on the ontology of self-surrender to God (the meaning of the term 'Muslim'). Much about Abraham's story remains a mystery to me; why did God choose him as a friend, why did the friendship involve putting him through an 'obvious' trial, why did the trial take the form it did, and what was its real purpose: to illustrate the virtue of taking one's faith, or perception of reality, literally or just the reverse? Even al-'Arabi's elaborate metaphysics cannot unravel these questions; in fact, by suggesting that their answers may lie in Abraham's nature, they just deepen the mystery. However, what I have come to realize is that alleging that he experienced an existential dilemma by submitting to God's will amounts to embracing a rather secular and un-Abrahamic view of prophecy. In fact, on this issue, 'the Abrahamic religions are all quite clear in their original languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic) that faith—from the Semitic root *'amiyn*, one of the early nicknames of Muhammad—is a matter of placing complete confidence in God, not just agreeing to a proposition' (Chilton 2008: 157).

However, even if this is the principal lesson one can draw from the story of Abraham's sacrifice, it seems that each of the Abrahamic religions has chosen, instead, to arm itself with 'the conviction that its innocent victim, Isaac or Christ or Ismail, models God's desire for how his people should sacrifice themselves for him.' Thus, 'both self-sacrifice and the extermination of infidels in the name of God. . . have haunted the West. . . and. . . all but obscured Muhammad's vision, and Ibrahim's, that violence is never God's requirement, but only an obvious trial' (Chilton 2008: 170–1). It seems that in their self-righteousness, at least, Abraham's children are very much alike. Still, it is worth cautioning against the tendency to see only sameness among them since doing so ignores fundamental scriptural differences between the three religions, including over Abraham himself. Thus even that ultimate theorist of difference, Derrida, can speak about Isaac's sacrifice as 'the terrifying secret of the *mysterium tremendum* that is a property of all three so-called religions of

the Book, the religions of the races of Abraham'. This view then leads him to cast the ongoing political strife between these 'races of Abraham' as

the fight to the death that continues to rage on Mount Moriah over the possession of the secret of the sacrifice by an Abraham who never said anything. Do they not fight in order to take possession of the secret as the sign of an alliance with God and to impose its order on the other, who becomes for his part nothing more than a murderer? (Derrida 1995: 64, 87.)

I cannot say why the children of Abraham are so quarrelsome; perhaps they have not yet figured out the terms for mutual exclusion or embrace.²⁰ But about this I am clear: Abraham in the Qur'an did not possess a secret as a sign of his 'alliance' with God, nor is he a murderer, and nor does he try to impose his will on his son. I feel that all these differences *should* matter because they *do* matter. And I feel, too, that, like Abraham and his son, we are free to speak about the unspeakable since there is no burden of secrecy here, just the limitations of our own knowledge.

Bibliography

Al-'Arabi, Ibn

1980 *The Bezels of Wisdom*. Translated by R. W. Austin. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.

Ali, Abdullah Yusuf

1998 *The Qur'an*. Elmhurst: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an Inc.

Arberry, A. J.

1955 *The Koran Interpreted*. New York: Allen and Unwin Ltd.

Asad, Muhammad

nd *The Message of the Qur'an*. Pakistan.

Askari, M. H.

2004 Ibn-e 'Arabi and Kierkegaard: A Study in Method and Reasoning. Translated by M.U. Memon. *The Annual of Urdu Studies* 19.

Barlas, Asma

2002 "Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Bodoff, Lippman

2005 *The Binding of Isaac, Religious Murders, and Kabbalah*. New York: Devora Publishing.

20 I borrow this phrase from Miroslav Volf (1996).

Chilton, Bruce

2008 *Abraham's Curse*. New York: Doubleday Religion.

Chittick, William

1989 *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*. Albany: SUNY Press.

Daly, Mary

1973 *God the Father*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Derrida, Jacques

1995 *The Gift of Death*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Gellman, Jerome I.

1994 *The Fear, the Trembling, and the Fire*. Lanham: University Press of America.

Hassan, Riffat

1994 Eid al-Adha (Feast of Sacrifice) in Islam: Abraham, Hagar and Ismael. In: Andre LaCocq (ed.), *Commitment and Commemoration, Jews, Christians, Muslims in Dialogue*; pp. 131–50. Chicago: Exploration Press of the Chicago Theological Seminary.

Jacques, Derrida

1995 *The Gift of Death*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Kierkegaard, Søren

1983 *Fear and Trembling, Repetition*. Translated by Howard and Edna Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Leemhuis, Fred

2002 Abraham's sacrifice of his son in the early post-Koranic Tradition. In: Ed Noort & Eibert Tigchelaar (eds), *The Sacrifice of Isaac*; pp. 125–39. Leiden: Brill Publishing.

Lowin, Shari L.

2006 *The Making of a Forefather: Abraham in Islamic and Jewish Exegetical Narratives*. Leiden: Brill Publishing.

Mjaaland, Marius Timmann, Ola Sigurdson & Sigridur Thorgeirsdottir

2010 Introduction. In: Marius Timmann Mjaaland, Ola Sigurdson & Sigridur Thorgeirsdottir (eds), *The Body Unbound: Philosophical Perspectives on Politics, Embodiment and Religion*; pp. 1–16. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Mooney, Edward F.

1991 *Knights of Faith and Resignation*. Albany: SUNY Press.

Volf, Miroslav

1996 *Exclusion and Embrace*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press.

Wasserstrom, Steven

1995 *Between Muslim and Jew: the Problem of Symbiosis under Early Islam*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Weeks, Jeffrey

1985 *Sexuality and Its Discontents: Meanings, Myths and Modern Sexualities*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd.

Defiled and deified

Profane and sacred bodies in Caitanya Vaiṣṇava theology

It is well known that there is no dearth of stereotypes when it comes to religion and the body. Christianity is a body-negative religion, Judaism is body-positive, ascetic practices automatically lead to a negative view of the body, and Eastern religions are more positive towards the body than Christianity. Such truisms are of little value. Still, they are voiced often enough to warrant occasional replies. In this little article, I will highlight one instance, from within the Hindu tradition, that offers an interesting take on how the conception of the body may vary greatly within one and the same religious tradition.

Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism, also known as Bengali or Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, is the devotional movement of Kṛṣṇa-bhakti begun by Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya (1486–1533) in Bengal, India. Śrī Caitanya left next to no written legacy himself, but the so-called Six Gosvāmins, primarily Bengali ascetics who had migrated to Vrindavan in North India on the order of their master, made up for this by creating a voluminous corpus of erudite Sanskrit texts, which eventually came to form the unifying canon of literature for all of Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism. Their student was Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja, and it is on his work that I will focus here (for some general introductions to Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism, see, e.g. Chakrabarty 1985, De 1981 or Eidlitz 1968).

Kṛṣṇadāsa (ca 1528–1617) was a Bengali *vaidya* by birth, stemming from Jhamatpur near Naihati in Burdwan, West Bengal (for a comprehensive account of his life, see Dimock 1999: 26–37). He moved to Vrindavan as a young man, where he eventually received the title of ‘Kavirāja’ or ‘king of poets’ for his extensive and ‘aesthetically sophisticated’ (Stewart 2010) *Govinda-līlāmṛta*, a poetic description of a day in the eternal life of the dual deity of Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Towards the end of his life, he was commissioned to write a work on Caitanya’s biography that would focus on the latter part of his life, to remedy this lack of the earlier (ca 1540) and immensely popular *Caitanya-bhāgavat* of Vṛndāvana Dāsa (for a short study of this work, see Śāstrī 1992).

Kṛṣṇadāsa fulfilled this task by writing the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*. Unlike the texts of the Gosvāmins and his own earlier books, this one is in Bengali. It was probably finished around 1615. Only slightly smaller than the *Caitanya-bhāgavat*, the text consists of almost 24 000 lines; mostly simple *payar* couplets, but also numerous passages in *tripadi*-verse. In addition, the book contains over a thousand Sanskrit verses, quoted from an impressive range of religious, philosophical and aesthetic sources. The literary merits of the work are disputed (cf. De 1981: 52–3 and Sen 1992: 91–2), but its theological merits are clear. Through the life of Caitanya, Kṛṣṇadāsa popularised the teachings of the Gosvāmins in Bengali, presenting inclusive doctrines that made it possible to unite all the earlier, contending theological ideas of Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism.

Standing as it does at the centre of Caitanya Vaiṣṇava orthodoxy, while at the same time being influenced by popular Bengali notions, it is natural to use Kṛṣṇadāsa's work as an entrance into the theology of Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism. What, then, does Kṛṣṇadāsa have to say about the body?

It has often been argued (e.g. Doniger 1999: 170) that the basic Brahmanic ethos of the body is an obsessive preoccupation with regulating matter entering and leaving it. 'This terribly dirty body leaks both day and night from nine holes,' states Dakṣa's law (2.7). All bodily fluids must thus be vigilantly controlled, and bodily orifices carefully kept clean. Such statements can also be found in Caitanya Vaiṣṇava texts on ritual and *sadācāra*, correct behaviour (Bhaṭṭa 1986: *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* 3).

Some parts of the body are considered inherently unclean, as for example the feet. Kṛṣṇadāsa offers an example of this in his *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*. A devotee is admiringly said to have discarded a whole batch of valuable, special coconuts because his servant touched them with the same hand that he had just previously touched the ceiling above a door with. 'People are always coming and going through that door, and the dust from their feet blows up and touches the ceiling. You touched the ceiling, and then the coconuts, so now they are contaminated and unfit to be offered to Kṛṣṇa.' (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta* 2.15.69–82.) What has happened here, then, is that the servant's impure body has come in the way of service to Kṛṣṇa.

Still, in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Kṛṣṇadāsa focuses on another kind of body, as illustrated in the following story.

Sanātana Gosvāmin decides to visit Śrī Caitanya in Puri, Orissa. On the way from Vṛndāvana, he drinks bad water and contracts a disease, which gives him itching, weeping sores. He decides to end his sufferings by means of a ritual suicide, throwing himself under Jagannātha's chariot; the 'juggernaut'

that so captured the British colonial imagination. When Caitanya first meets Sanātana in Puri, he wants to give him a hug, but Sanātana declines, both because of considering himself fallen from his Brahmin status and because of his oozing sores. Caitanya then forcefully embraces him. Later, Caitanya confronts Sanātana with his desire to commit suicide, and forbids him to do so, both because it will not help him to attain love of Kṛṣṇa—the ultimate goal of Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism—but also because, and I quote,

You have surrendered unto me, so your body is my personal property. Why should you want to destroy another’s belongings? Have you no regard for right and wrong? Your body is my principal instrument—through this body I shall carry out many tasks. (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta* 3.4.76–8.)

During later encounters, Caitanya keeps embracing Sanātana despite his oozing sores, and this gives Sanātana no peace of mind. The next time the two meet, Caitanya again forcefully embraces Sanātana, who now speaks up.

I came here for my benefit, but what I am getting is the opposite. I am not capable of service, but rather commit offences day after day. By nature I am low-born, wicked and a reservoir of sin. If you touch me, that will be an offence on my part. Further, blood and pus oozes from my body, but still you touch me by force, so that all of this smears your body. You have not the slightest aversion to touching me, but this my offence will ruin everything. Because of this, nothing good can come from my staying here. (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta* 3.4.151–5.)

Caitanya replies:

You consider your body disgusting, but to me your body appears just like nectar. Your body is spiritual, never material, but you think of it from a material viewpoint. And even if it were material, you should not neglect it, for matter should never be considered good or bad. . . . The body of a Vaiṣṇava is never material. The devotee’s body is made of *cid-ānanda*, wisdom and bliss. At initiation, the devotee surrenders his self, and at that time, Kṛṣṇa makes him the same as himself. In this spiritual body of *cidānanda*, he then worships Kṛṣṇa’s feet. (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta* 3.4.172–4, 191–3.)

Caitanya then again embraces Sanātana, whose body is immediately healed of its sores, and shines like gold.

In other words, everyone has an ordinary material body, which is neither good nor bad from the perspective of Kṛṣṇa-bhakti, but when someone becomes an initiated devotee of Kṛṣṇa, his or her body is mysteriously transformed into a spiritual body, even though ignorant people may not see the difference. It is with this practitioner's body (*sādhaka-deha*), then, that the practitioner worships Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. This corresponds with the well-known Hindu adage 'only Śiva can worship Śiva'—in order to be able to interact with the divine, the devotee first has to become divine him or herself (see e.g. Flood 2006: 108–16).

However, for Kṛṣṇadāsa, there is a third body still. While serving Kṛṣṇa with the body by means of the standard rituals of bhakti, such as hearing and chanting, the devotee internally, within his or her mind, worships Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in their eternal, heavenly Vṛndāvana. This mental, visualized body is called the divine body (*divya-deha*), or the body of the perfected one (*siddha-deha*) and is attained when the practitioner takes up the mood (*bhāva*) of one of Rādhā's and Kṛṣṇa's eternal servitors in divine Vṛndāvana (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta* 2.8.222, 2.24.134).

Now, this divine Vṛndāvana is described in Caitanya Vaiṣṇava works in great detail. What will strike the reader first is how earthly everything seems. Rustic while at the same time extremely luxurious and opulent, it is something like the idealized romantic garden of Marie Antoinette, but at least on the surface, there is nothing otherworldly about this divine abode. So it is with the players in this drama: Rādhā, Kṛṣṇa and their friends, relatives and attendants are described in painstaking detail. Kṛṣṇadāsa's *Govinda-līlāmṛta* (11) contains a description of Rādhā's beauty, running up to almost 150 verses, and that describes her body literally from top to toe. The bodies of the divine couple's attendants—and thus the mentally visualized bodies of their earthly devotees—are similarly described. The feet of such bodies are not only clean, they are fit to be worshipped.

Where, then, lies the perfection of these bodies? In contrast to classic Hindu descriptions of the bodies of the gods, the bodies of the residents of divine Vṛndāvana do touch the ground and perspire, they even bathe, sleep and eat—Kṛṣṇadāsa includes long, mouth-watering descriptions of feasts in both of his major works (e.g. *Govinda-līlāmṛta* 4.23–63; *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* 2.15.199–243). It is not that these bodies are perfect; they are the bodies of the perfected ones. The perfection of these people lies in their being perfectly attuned to the service of the divine couple, ready to offer them their bodies and

their very lives. The spiritual ideal of the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava practitioner is a pre-pubescent serving maid of the divine couple, ready to fulfill their smallest needs (for more on this, see Haberman 2001).

What is the body, then, for Kṛṣṇadāsa? It may be anything, from an obstacle to divine service, to its instrument, both in this life and the next. It is also an object of worship—in fact, by far most of the instances of words in Sanskrit or Bengali indicating body in the texts of Kṛṣṇadāsa refer to the forms of Caitanya and Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, that are described with loving, painstaking detail. The differences between these types of bodies may or may not be apparent to an outsider, and indeed, the body need not be physical at all.

Such a conception of the body must surely indicate an aversion to ascetic practices, must it not? No. While Kṛṣṇadāsa does regale his readers with descriptions of Caitanya and his companions feasting, he also offers examples of extreme asceticism among Caitanya's devotees. Raghunātha Dāsa Gosvāmin slept less than two hours a day and ate only half-rotten rice, rebuking himself for such sensuous indulgence (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta* 3.6). Rūpa and Sanātana Gosvāmins slept just as little under a tree here or there, but at least they ate a few chickpeas and some dried bread (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta* 2.127–30). While these three are a small minority among the personages of the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, they become more striking when it is kept in mind that Kṛṣṇadāsa presents these three as his gurus, and as exemplary devotees, whose behaviour everyone should follow.

Now, these ascetic, strictly celibate, male practitioners inwardly worship Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa as young girls, eager to vicariously participate in the divine couple's amorous play. One is perhaps not too surprised by this contrast having drawn keen suspicion from British scholars of the Victorian age. Quoting a Dr Wise, H. H. Risley, an Indian civil servant writing on the castes and tribes of Bengal in 1892 writes that the mendicant Vaiṣṇavas are

Of evil repute, their ranks being recruited by those who have no relatives, by widows, by individuals too idle or depraved to lead a steady working life, and by prostitutes. . . . A few undoubtedly join from sincere and worthy motives, but their numbers are too small to produce any appreciable effects on the behaviour of their comrades. (Risley 1998: 344.)

Other authors were more specific in singling out the 'sensuous meditations' of these ascetics as being the reason for their depravity—a depravity marked in particular by lax bodily, sexual morals (see Kennedy 1993). While orthodox Caitanya Vaiṣṇava theologians drew a sharp line between acts and be-

haviour in the mentally conceived body of a perfected one and in the outer, practitioner's body, this line was blurred in the numerous heterodox Caitanya Vaiṣṇava sects that sprung up in the centuries following Kṛṣṇadāsa (see e.g., Dimock 1989). While frowned upon by theologians, there is little evidence that common people viewed them with the disdain of the colonial scholars above until 'learning', if you will, the correct way of seeing them from their masters. Whether or not this led to any positive change in the case of the widows and prostitute above is highly doubtful; more probably the result was opposite. But that is another article altogether.

To conclude: by this little example from the Hindu tradition, I have wished to highlight some of the complexities inherent in terms such as 'the body', or 'body-negative spirituality'.

Bibliography

Bhaṭṭa, Gopāla

1986 *Śrī Haribhaktivilāsaḥ*. Vols I–II. Ed. by Haridāsa Śāstri. Vṛndāvana: Śrī Gadādhara-Gaurahari Press.

Chakrabarty, Ramakanta

1985 *Vaiṣṇavism in Bengal 1486–1900*. Calcutta: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar.

De, Sushil Kumar

1981 *Early History of the Vaishnava Faith and Movement in Bengal*. 2nd edn. Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay.

Dimock, Edward C.

1989 *The Place of the Hidden Moon: Erotic Mysticism in the Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā Cult of Bengal*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

1999 *Caitanya caritāmṛta of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja*. A translation and commentary. Ed. Tony K. Stewart. Harvard Oriental Series 56. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University.

Doniger, Wendy

1999 Medical and Mythological Constructions of the Body in Hindu Texts. In: Sarah Coakley (ed.), *Religion and the Body*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Eidlitz, Walther

1968 *Kṛṣṇa-Caitanya. Sein Leben und Seine Lehre*. Stockholm Studies in Comparative Religion 7. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell.

Flood, Gavin

2006 *The Tantric Body: The Secret Tradition of Hindu Religion*. London: I.B. Tauris & Co.

Haberman, David L.

2001 *Acting as a Way of Salvation: A Study of Rāgānuḡā Bhakti Sādhana*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Kennedy, Melville

1993 *The Chaitanya Movement: A Study of Vaishnavism in Bengal*. Delhi: South Asia Books. (First published in 1925).

Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja

1957 *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*. Ed. Bhaktikevala Auḡulomi Mahārāja. 5th edn. Calcutta: Gauḡīya Maḡha.

1981 *Govinda-līlāmṛta*. Ed. Haridāsa Śāstri. Vṛndāvana: Gadādhara-Gaurahari Press.

Risley, H. H.

1998 *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal*. Vols. I–II. Delhi: Firma KLM. (First published in 1892).

Śāstri, Asoke Chatterjee

1992 *Caitanyabhāgavata. A Study*. Delhi: Nag Publishers.

Sen, Sukumar

1992 *History of Bengali Literature*. 3rd edn. Calcutta: Sahitya Akademi.

Stewart, Tony K.

2010 Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja. Banglapedia. <http://www.boi-mela.com/Banglapedia/ViewArticle.asp?TopicRef=3094> (accessed on 28 October 2010).

'Religion' and 'body'

Reclaiming the missing links of Western education

In this paper I intend to depict Western education as being led by a scientific ethos of objectivity. Such an ethos lends itself clearly to a disengagement from 'religion' as representing the realm of so-called 'unscientific knowledge' and speculation on the one hand, and to a disengagement from the 'body' as the locus of sentiment and idiosyncrasy on the other. Thus Western education promotes a secular mind-oriented ideology, weeding out the spiritual realm on the one hand, and the emotional-physical realm on the other.

I will claim that an education based on this reductive perception of man cannot possibly be worthy of its name. It may be a form of information propagation, but not Education in its fullest sense. Conversely I will claim that education can only take place once it becomes an exploratory path which poses the question 'who am I?' at its core. The exploration of such a question will forever be a depleted one as long as it is deprived of 'religion' and the 'body' as possible research paths. This paper is thus an orientation call for the field of curriculum development serving as a foundation for the 'holistic education' discourse developed in recent years by figures such as John Miller (2005, 2007), Linda Lantieri (2001), Ramon Gallegos-Nava (1999), Ron Miller (1997), David Marshak (1997), and others.

The paper will include three sections, an introduction and a short epilogue. In the introduction I will claim 'well-being' to be the goal of education. Following this in the first section I will show why this goal cannot be achieved given Western education's rational ('body-less') – secular ('religion-less') epistemology. In the second section I will attempt to reconceptualize education by means of reclaiming the 'body' and 'religion' as Western education's missing links, reintegrating them into its proper epistemological/ontological basis. In the final section I will deal with our inherent dualistic conceptualization of reality (education included) as it constitutes an obstacle to the reconceptualization of education which I offer in section two. As a concluding statement I will offer a way to overcome this obstacle.

Introduction: the goals of education

I would like to begin with a short story:

A seven-year-old is on his way to school, in the car with his father. The boy begins crying, saying: 'I'm afraid to go to school.' 'Why?' the father asks. 'Because I'm afraid something will happen to me when there's no adult around.' The father asks: 'Did something happen yesterday, or the day before?' 'No, I'm just afraid, my heart is beating fast, I don't feel well, I'm afraid.' The father: 'Listen, we have to go, I have to go to work. We'll tell the teacher to help you out if you have any problem.' The boy: 'I'm afraid, something can happen to me and what if there is no adult around?' The father: 'But nothing really has to happen.' The boy keeps crying: 'You don't understand, I can't, I can't explain this, I just feel afraid, like something bad is going to happen.' The father contemplates this for a few moments. He knows his son's tendency to think too much; to get caught in his own world, losing contact with reality. Then this father suddenly remembers himself as a young boy feeling such feelings. Some sense of a threat hovering above. Some heaviness on the chest, or was it hollowness in the stomach? When he was a boy, he kept it to himself. They spoke less in those times. He turns his car and drives back home. *The boy stays home that day.*

I will conclude this short story by stating that this boy happens to be my son.

In recent years the notion of education's goal as 'well-being' or 'happiness' has been brought to the foreground. Nel Noddings (2003) dedicates a full book to exemplify and support her claim that: 'Happiness should be an aim of education, and a good education should contribute significantly to personal and collective happiness (Noddings 2003: 1)'. Anthony Seldon has developed a '10 point program for developing well-being', implementing it at the Wellington College where he serves as headteacher¹ and ardently promoting it over the media.² However the notion of 'teaching happiness' or setting 'well-being' as a goal of education has been raising much criticism. Richard Smith (2008) denies the possibility of defining 'happiness', resulting in the impossibility of teaching it. Judith Suissa (2008) criticises the methodology of reducing 'hap-

1 Wellington College, <http://www.wellingtoncollege.org.uk/page.aspx?id=31>.

2 'Can We Teach People to be Happy?' *The Guardian* 19.2.2008.

piness' to a 'market-list' which fails to encompass the full meaning of this concept, while Alistair Miller (2008) adds a thorough unraveling of the circular argumentation lying at the basis of 'teaching happiness' and its 'positive psychology' foundations. I here wish to reclaim 'well-being' as education's goal, and modify Noddings's claim that 'well-being' should be merely *an* aim of education to a more drastic claim: 'well-being' should be *the* aim of education, contrary to the above mentioned critiques. Although I appreciate the academic level of the critique mentioned above, and analytical philosophy's being a powerful tool when applied to ambiguous concepts, I believe in this case it is rather tedious, counter-intuitive and unnecessary. Defining 'happiness/well-being' does indeed raise questions, but it will suffice to state that this term can be taken to mean a sense of livelihood, a wish to thrive, to explore, a sense of loving and being loved, a sense of meaning and more.³

It is indeed quite useless to extend the list of constituents of 'happiness' given the above-mentioned critique farther, since this is by no means an exhaustive philosophical analysis of the term. It rather draws the boundaries of 'the ballpark', and for the purposes of this paper there is no need for more. The fact that any man wishes to feel the above-mentioned features of 'well-being' is hard to dispute, and it is quite natural that we hope that our education would promote such 'well-being'.

I proceed by saying that if 'livelihood, a wish to thrive, to explore, a sense of loving and being loved and a sense of meaning' are all constituents of my sense of 'well-being', then I must make an investigation into the ways by which they can be enhanced. I wish to claim now that all these constituents require some form of 'knowledge'. My ability to experience 'well-being' must be enhanced as I know more about my surroundings and about myself, since such knowledge broadens the scope of my possibility of experience.⁴ This means that my possibility for creating meaning is extended. It suggests that I am exposed to more potential objects to love and so on. Education thus is a form of 'knowledge' acquisition.

Western education indeed ardently adheres to this last statement. But, it is its definition of the term 'knowledge' which reduces education from its broad understanding as promoted here, to what may hardly be perceived as worthy of the term 'education'. In the following section I will elaborate this claim as I

3 Noddings (2003: 5) lists the following as some sources of happiness: 'making a home, love of place and nature, parenting. . . the development of personal and interpersonal capacities'. This list can easily be extended further.

4 This is of course clearly a Deweyan notion, which sees education's goal as growth through the unfolding of perpetual experience (Dewey 1929).

undermine Western education's mind-oriented epistemology, which deprives us of the 'body' and of 'religion'. Such deprivation means that Western education imposes boundaries which restrict us from exploring 'who we are', which in effect is the most essential question education must attend to. We cannot enjoy 'well-being' if we do not know who we are. The question 'who we are' cannot by any means ignore our 'bodily existence' and a great majority of humanity's spiritual inclination towards transcendence rooted in a 'religious quest'. Exploring ourselves as a mind-body-soul complex should thus be the focus of education, turning it in actuality into a scientific spiritual quest.

Western education's reduced epistemology

Minding the loss of the 'body'

The Western curriculum is rooted in the two intertwined agendas of rationalism and secularization, characterizing our inheritance from modernity. These inclinations can be traced to ancient Greece, but have gained their 'final twist' with Europe's enlightenment, represented strongly by the rationalists' and empiricists' search for objectivity along with the famous Kantian call: 'dare to think'.

Both rationalism and empiricism were guided by the old quest for certainty. Descartes' path led him to a distrust of the senses, and to the anchoring of his quest for certainty in the bedrock of a disengaged mind.⁵ The empiricists, by contrast, saw the senses as the anchor for the same quest, but their demand for 'objectivity' as the cornerstone of scientific validity, had led them to 'weed out the self' (Kincheloe & Steinberg 1993: 312). The greater the 'objectivity', the more grounded the truth revealed. Together the empiricists and the rationalists have established an ethos of separation between 'knowledge' and 'self'. The farther 'knowledge' is driven from 'self' the more valid it becomes. 'Knowledge' is accepted more fully as it is disentangled from the residues of idiosyncrasy.

This ethos is no other than the (notorious) mind-body dualism. Whether it is Descartes' disengaged mind denying the body as a source of knowledge, or the empiricists' selective mind which accepts only that portion of the 'body' which is remote from our subjectivity (assuming that is actually possible), eventually the ethos of modernity has left us with a 'crippled body'; a 'body'

5 The affinity with Augustine and earlier with Plato should be taken into consideration here. See Hatfield (2003: 21) among others.

which is used/abused as a mere means of knowing the external world, while rejecting its own story as our own subjective existence.

Postmodernity's attack on the myths of 'objectivity'⁶ and 'scientific success'⁷ has taught us much about critical thinking, but according to my view, it has not created a significant shift in our perception of 'knowledge'. In fact, Western science is perceived as a successful model (and rightly so),⁸ which should be applied to all fields, education included. It is not science's success which I am criticizing in this paper, but rather science-as-ideology rather than a method of inquiry; in fact a *mere* method of inquiry which bears tremendous advantages, but grave dangers as it becomes an agenda.

The fact remains that contemporary Western education is still run by the mind-body dualism established three hundred years ago. An anti-Cartesian, postmodern critique remains a theoretical discourse as Michelle Lelwica (2009: 123) points out. Descartes is still very much with us as we continue to cherish the severing of 'knowledge' from what we depict as the portrait of man. Thus we allocate nearly all school time to 'facts', leaving the realm of idiosyncrasy and subjective feeling to the 'mercy', or rather 'cruelty', of life outside school.⁹ This brings us back directly to my son's story this preference becomes clarified. My son does not wish to go to school, since he has an unexplained fear felt excruciatingly clearly in his body. School wishes to set him behind a table and impart arithmetic, historical dates, chemistry and physics to him, treating learning as what occurs 'from the neck up' (Lelwica 2009: 125). Will all these 'facts' lead my son to 'well-being'? They may apply to what the West has conceived as an ethos of success quite mistakenly equated with 'well-being'.

6 I refer to Polanyi (1958: 3): 'Any attempt rigorously to eliminate our human perspective from our picture of the world must lead to absurdity.'

7 I refer to Laudan (1997) as he critiques postmodern attempts to discredit Western science's success.

8 Laudan (1993: 156–7): 'The methods of science are not necessarily the best possible methods of inquiry. . . nor are the theories they pick out likely to be completely reliable. But we lose nothing by considering that the methods of science are imperfect and that the theories of science are probably false. Even in this less-than-perfect state, we have an instrument of inquiry which is arguably a better device for picking out reliable theories than any other instrument we have yet devised for that purpose.'

9 Noddings constantly challenges the Western approach to the curriculum (2003: 11): 'It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the view placing intellectual activity over all other forms of activity is still alive today. We see it active in the elevation of mathematics and physics over politics and natural history. We see it in the insistence that all students study algebra and geometry, but not parenting, even though most of us become parents and relatively few use algebra.'

The relation between success and ‘well-being’ must of course be explored. We already know that the two are not necessarily inseparable. The West tends to measure success by social status, bank accounts, and glamorous positions. Education thus follows this agenda. Western education falsely equates financial success with well-being, as it becomes almost an economic endeavour, as Mike Rose (2009) demonstrates. I do not wish to object to arithmetic’s and history’s significance, but rather claim that all these become painfully marginal when juxtaposed against my son’s agony. In fact, as long as he feels his agony he will not be able to absorb any of these issues. Being embodied, his agony is more present than any fact we can bear in mind that school may propagate. School knowledge is *disembodied*. It constitutes ‘food’ for the mind, bypassing ‘body’ and ‘soul’. Our Western school is concerned about what the student *thinks* with his brain much more than about how he *feels* in his body. That is quite far from a concern with ‘well-being’. I suggest that learning to cope with his fear may be the most important lesson my son can learn. Following the ‘holistic education’ discourse I ask, must school take *reason* to be its only course of study? Are there not practices which school can adopt in order to address the student’s full being? Must we be resigned to such a narrow epistemological basis?

Recruiting Merleau-Ponty

The emergence of the ‘body’ into our ‘mind’ oriented ethos is among others, the product of Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962). Without privileging either ‘mind’ or ‘body’, Merleau-Ponty depicts man as an ‘embodied subject’ as he describes the process of perception as encompassing both a perception of an object, *and* a perception of the lived body’s situatedness against the object.¹⁰ Perception is never a mere absorption of ‘things out there’, but rather a process of being and acting in the world as the perception of the situated body presents a field of meaningful possibilities which the object bears for the perceiver. The body thus becomes ‘the instrument of my “comprehension”’ (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 235). As Thomas Csordas (1994: 9) interprets Merleau-Ponty: ‘If we begin with the lived world of perceptual phenomena, our bodies are not objects to us. Quite the contrary, they are an integral part of the perceiving subject.’ Consequently: ‘. . . on the level of perception it is thus not legitimate to distinguish mind and body.’ (Csordas 1994: 9.)

10 ‘Every external perception is immediately synonymous with a certain perception of my body’ (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 206).

This very short description lends itself to a very different understanding of what education must become, as it steps away from a dualistic view of either 'body' or 'mind'. Disembodied knowledge in the form that the Western curriculum imparts fails to address the student as a holistic being. It is a form of segregation of the 'self' from the 'world', it is in fact a form of 'deadening' as it betrays Merleau-Ponty's perceiving/being 'embodied subject'.

The query I am raising should not be reduced to a mere 'how does the date 1492 apply to the student's life?'¹¹ My call is not a call for instrumentalism. It is more complex, and requires more elaboration, but for the time being it is a call for us to awaken from a depleted way of viewing education as tending to the 'mind' which neglects our being as a 'body-mind' complex.

As we extend Merleau-Ponty's perception as a pragmatic process of perceiving-being, we may delve into a more psychologically oriented context. My son's perception of school raises a very different field of possibilities from my own perception, or his classmates' perceptions. His perception/being process in this case, brings forth a sensation which I do not perceive. For some reason my son's perception/being is manifested by a fear which I do not experience. If we shift Merleau-Ponty's descriptive philosophy to a more normative field of education we may begin contemplating education as a process of probing into the perception/being process for the enhancement of 'well-being'. What is it in my son's perception/being process that brings forth that fear which I myself do not experience? Why is his perception coloured by fear? I suggest that these are not mere psychological issues, but rather educational issues of *healing*. Once we accept such an approach, we are pressed to locate a pedagogy which will enable us to transform education into a non-dual process, overcoming the ontology-epistemology, perceiving-being, self-world dualisms inherent in our system and critiqued by Merleau-Ponty's philosophy.

Before tending to pedagogy, the careful reader may raise an eyebrow in the face of the combination of education and healing above. Am I not getting this all wrong? Am I allocating education an inappropriate turf? Should education be concerned with *how we feel*? Shouldn't such questions be dealt with by therapists/healers and so on outside the school doors? Let us revisit this issue later on, but for the time being I will state that the standpoint which I am promoting sees education in its broadest, most integrative sense. It fits well within the discourse of 'holistic education'. As a holistic endeavour, education can never be settled the way Western society has been conducting it, since it encompasses every aspect of being human, treating man as an: 'intellec-

11 Although I do not underestimate the need of educators to address such a question.

tual, emotional, physical, social, aesthetic, and spiritual being' (Miller 2005: 2). School thus must meet this challenge. If teaching my son to 'know' and face his fear may be the most important skill school can teach *and* we rethink education as a preparation for adulthood (a commonly accepted claim), then our pedagogy must change. Let us merely contemplate how much our adult lives are riddled with fears we are unable to handle; fears standing in our way to 'well-being'. The famous Deweyan observation of the dualism of school and life is still here to haunt us, pressing us to overcome our reduced dichotomous pedagogy. Western education's epistemological basis is thus painfully narrow. Its understanding of 'knowledge' as disembodied creates a rift between school and the child's life.¹²

The Western curriculum, guided by a 'scientific' agenda 'weeds out the self' (Kincheloe & Steinberg 1993: 312) from the educational endeavour; weeding out the self means depleting education of meaning; education deprived of meaning is education bereft of its final goal of 'well-being'.

We are to develop a new model of education which broadens our view of 'knowledge' to that same realm which science has deprived us of—we are to heal the 'crippled body' through the resurrection of education's epistemological basis and transform education into a practice of healing.

The loss of 'religion'—minding the realm of 'soul'

The deprivation of idiosyncrasy, of subjectivity, of the 'lived body', as a contrast to the realm of objectivity, reason and science, does not quite sum up the problem of education's reduced epistemological basis. The consequence of rationalization and science is a 'disenchanted world' according to Max Weber's meta-narrative. A growing belief in man's power to decipher nature through the language of mathematics has led quite naturally to a dwindling of the need for any realm which is beyond man. The more grounded education becomes in an ethos of objectivity and facts, the less it will lend itself towards realms of mere belief, metaphysics, spirituality, *religion*. Education bereft of these becomes a *secular* endeavour.

And yet, when attempting to assess whether Weber's prophecy has actually materialized, reality proves otherwise. As Ruth Illman notes:

12 John Dewey (1956) identified this rift as mentioned, nearly a hundred years before and attempted to heal it through his pragmatic approach to education. I do not object to his philosophy, but I do believe his solutions to be partial, as his treatment of the individual did not delve deep enough into the psycho-physical workings of man, as I will elaborate later on.

For many researchers looking into the global religious landscape of today, it seems obvious that the scholarly predictions introduced some decades ago concerning the slow decline, or even death of religion through the processes of secularization, have not been fulfilled. . . the vivid interest in and practice of religion in new, innovative ways seem to give the phenomenon a character of expansion rather than erosion (Illman 2010: 230).

Philip Wexler (2005) on his part, claims that Weber's infamous 'iron cage' is rather porous, and humanity refuses to resign itself to the shackles of reason alone. The movement towards science and desacralization creates friction in the form of what Wexler (2000) defines as the 'mystical society', which according to my own interpretation is no other than New Age, cleansed of charlatanism. It is a more academic treatment of human efforts towards liberation, whether socially organized in the form of new religions, or through individual spiritual tendencies, which may be located within Michel Foucault's (1988) 'technologies of the self' in the way Robert Hattam (2004) has suggested.¹³ According to Wexler (2000), Weber underestimated the power of such movements, while Wexler sees them as a source of societal rejuvenation; an antidote to our alienated contemporary society and a movement towards 're-enchantment'. Given this background Western education becomes an anachronism. It is still well set within Weber's narrative while society is beginning to speak a different language. It results in a situation in which our contemporary education promotes a 'disenchantment of the world' while a good portion of the world outside school is pushing us towards 're-enchantment'.

Reclaiming the 'body' and 'religion' through the broadening of 'knowledge'

I suggest, quite unoriginally, that the problem lies in our narrow definition of the 'empirical'; in our misguided identification of 'knowledge' with scientific-empirical 'knowledge'. It was William James who noted this in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1974), claiming that reality encompasses much more than what we can perceive through the realm of our senses. Our confinement to this sort of ethos of knowledge leaves no room for a credible 'unscientific'

13 'I propose that Buddhism, and especially its meditation practices, be read as 'technologies of the self' (Foucault 1988), that deconstruct a reified self, and enable the development of an altruistic mind as a basis for living an ethico-political life in an unjust world' (Hattam 2004: 110).

experience of the world promoted by religion. Here lies the relation between our tendency to the rational and the inevitable secularized view stemming from it; here lies the relation between the 'body' and 'religion'. If our senses are mere sources of data in the process of knowing the world, than the framework we confine reality to is one which will never yield more than sense-data information.¹⁴ Following Thomas Kuhn's (1970) logic, the whole scientific endeavour is a paradigm which is subject to the framework of the senses undergirding it every step of the way. Science guided by the 'body' will leave no room for religion, thus the 'body' and 'religion' become antagonists in the same way that 'science' and 'religion' continue to fight their epic and non-sensical battle. I will not engage in this battle, but rather adhere to Wilber's acute analysis of it¹⁵—'religion' and 'science' as forms of 'knowledge' must part ways, not in the sense of antagonism, but rather in the form of a respectful reconciliation; as a reciprocal recognition of the power of each to render valid and different aspects of reality.

Following Ken Wilber, I am claiming that *there exists* knowledge which we must reclaim and reinsert into the picture of contemporary man. The realm dismissed by the scientific ethos of 'objectivity' as metaphysics/spirituality/religion must be resurrected. We must abandon Immanuel Kant's banishment of metaphysics from our discourse. In fact this is the knowledge which bears the most potential for 'well-being'. By banishing this knowledge from the curriculum we are depriving the student of the possibility of asking questions which lie at the core of actual meaning; the meaning of being in this world and making sense of existence. As noted before a sense of meaning is one of the main sources of our experience of 'well-being'.

But what *is* this 'knowledge' exactly? It is the 'liberating' knowledge depicted by Eastern traditions, which will possibly enable my son to observe his agony's true nature, as he realizes the Buddhist teaching of the ephemeral character of all phenomena, including the most overwhelming of fears; it is the knowledge of the *Tao* as one tunes into the perpetual flow of *yin/yang*, transcending dualism through finding stability as one flows with the flow. Buddhism and Daoism are brought here simply as an example. It might have

14 I refer to the debate between Paul Geisert (2002) and Warren A. Nord as they interpret Arthur Eddington's fisherman parable, which conveys the message that one can discover only those findings which do not slip between the holes in the net. In the same way, Western science throws a specific kind of net over reality, while some of reality slips between these holes.

15 Ken Wilber analyses the history of this battle in several of his writings. Among these *Eye to Eye* (2001) and *The Marriage of Sense and Soul* (1999).

been Patanjali's rendition of classical yoga or Zen Buddhism as each of these traditions points to its form of liberation and yet they all breathe a mutual ethos pointing towards knowing 'who we are'; knowing the 'self' in whichever interpretation each of these traditions promotes.¹⁶

The Upanishadic tales,¹⁷ as the tap-root of all the above mentioned traditions, call our mundane factual 'knowledge' which includes our Western science—lower knowledge (Mundaka Up. 1.1.3.), 'mere names' (Chandogya Up. 7.1), or even 'unworthy' (Svetasvatara Up. 1.12). It is only the knowledge of *atman* (the self) which bears the potential of transcending man's inherent and inevitable sorrow. It is clear that these paths are based on very different premises. They promote a completely different viewpoint, driving us from the outwardly oriented gaze characterizing our Western science, to an inward gaze rejecting the phenomenal temporal world of appearances. It is very reasonable to raise the critical issue: Can we as Westerners even begin to relate to such esoteric and alien notions? I will revisit this issue at the end of this paper.

Moving on to practicality—yoga as pedagogy

The soteriological 'knowledge' pointed towards here, brings us to the realm of 'religion' and integrates the 'body' into the discourse. It is no more a 'crippled-body' but rather a 'full body'; a Merleau-Pontian 'embodied subject'—but even farther than that. It becomes rather an interaction in which thoughts, emotions, sensations, insights, intuitions and moods are formed, resonating as a more Buddhist-like perception of a human being as the five *skandhas*;¹⁸ an *aware* human being. It is closely related to Csordas's (1994: 5) negative definition: 'Self is neither substance nor entity, but an indeterminate capacity to engage or become oriented in the world, characterized by effort and reflexivity.' And yet I do not wish to block the possibility of 'self' as some form of entity, as it remains an enigma to be unraveled through practice. It becomes a consciousness expressing itself in its attempt at self-understanding. It is man asking 'who am I?' and in the normative orientation brought here, it is a *courageous* man welcoming any practice which allows for this question's life-long exploration. His courage lies in his willingness to see any dogma (Western or Eastern) for its 'emptiness' (*Shunyata*) as he practices Buddhism's

16 Of course these interpretations contradict each other to the point where Buddhism will deny the existence of 'self' as such.

17 I refer to Patrick Olivelle's (1998) translation.

18 I refer to David-Neel (1977: 127) and Gethin (1998: 139) for more on the five skandhas.

‘non-attachment’ towards his own set of ideals and beliefs. This kind of conceptualization suggests Eastern body–mind practices, namely yoga in its broadest forms and manifestations, as defined by Georg Feuerstein (2001), W. Y. Evans-Wentz (1970) and others.¹⁹ This arena extends Merleau-Ponty’s ‘embodied subject’ even further. As a pragmatic hypothesis it nourishes this discourse with the lore of the East, bringing in notions of an enlightened state although in the same breath I claim to be less concerned with final goals than with enhancing the potential of ‘well-being’ in less lofty terms.²⁰ The paths I am pointing towards stress the activity of ‘striding’ rather than reaching the goal. The stride itself *is* the goal.²¹ Allowing myself to apply Merleau-Ponty’s terminology, enlightenment exists in the background without me focusing my gaze upon it. It is a blurred object in my perceiving/being process, which becomes meaningful only through the practice of yoga. Broadening education’s epistemological basis must include such possibilities, which blur the mere distinction of epistemology and ontology.

After broadening the ‘crippled body’ to a ‘full body’, I am now tending to a broadened view of ‘religion’. It is not the sectarian institutionalized form of ‘religion’ which I am after. Such an understanding of ‘religion’ would be reductive as well. It is the ‘religious’ sentiment which interests me, following James’s path, while it is also a form of ‘knowledge’ which science-turned-into-ideology will deny. It is here where I find the possibility of reuniting the ‘body’ and ‘religion. If the ‘crippled body’ will be broadened towards a ‘full body’, which allows us our five senses and any ‘knowledge’ beyond them gained by

19 Feuerstein (2001: 3) treats yoga as: ‘all the Indian practices oriented towards the transcendence of self or liberation from the ego’, while Evans-Wentz (1970: 35) sees yoga as the: ‘... tap-root of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Taoism.’

20 I am well aware that the Western rendition of ‘well-being’ problematized at the beginning is by no means parallel to ‘well-being’ in Eastern terms. This issue will be addressed in future publications.

21 As Zen guru Suzuki Shunryu states in his *Zen Mind, Beginners Mind* (1994), assuming the meditation posture correctly is enlightenment itself. We are not to look for anything outside it. Suzuki’s rendition of the Zen tradition stresses this demystified, quotidian approach. I believe such an approach is necessary, especially for the Westerner’s inquisitive and skeptical mind. Enlightenment may seem to the scientifically oriented Westerner as mythology. We do not need to fight such a battle. We may leave the results of mind–body practices to speak for themselves. We may ask: Does one have to become a virtuoso violinist in order to enjoy playing music? Or from a different angle, we may resign to Baker Roshi’s famous aphorism: ‘Enlightenment is an accident—practice makes you more prone.’ I am here promoting education in its broadest sense, embracing all alleys which may enhance our sense of meaning leading to ‘well-being’ as education should.

the application of body–mind practices *then* 'religion' in the sense I am referring to it, may emerge. Again, not as a form of human organization in the Durkheimian sense, but rather as a 'spiritual' awe, characterizing individuals' paths in a Wexlerian 'mystical society'. Such an endeavour extends our view of 'knowledge' towards a broadened 'science'—a 'science of life'. It opens us towards life as a scientific path, life as an educational path, education as a path for life.

Why do I turn specifically eastwards, rather than remain in our own confinement of Western religion? I will not engage in a long discussion of this worthy issue, but rather claim that these Eastern paths integrate the 'body' within the story of liberation in a sense which Western religions do not convey. Classical yoga, as condensed by Patanjali offers a rare combination of an embodied philosophy as it is constituted of a psycho-physical practice which is necessary for the realization of truth. As such it is a unique example of 'body–mind' and what a Westerner mistakenly would perceive as 'religion' while a more loyal description would define it as a 'path'.²² Buddhism's *vipassana* meditation cultivates awareness to our body–mind complex. Yiquan practice directs our awareness to feeling our entire body as it moves through its surroundings. These are but a few examples of these practices. Western religions have not developed in this direction. They *do* offer various practices related to the body, but the overall ethos of these religions calls for a *rejection* of the body in order to achieve the higher qualities of soul (Denton 2005: 755).

Given the potency of soteriological knowledge compared to our 'lower' scientific knowledge we must ask why should we not abandon our Western science all together, if it is so impotent indeed, in our search for 'well-being'? Because that would mean depriving us of 'reason' or 'mind' as we perceive it as the counterpart of 'body'. It would mean that we would fall into yet another trap of reductionism. I am not here to condemn reason, but rather to point to its limitations, to its deadening grip on our curriculum and from there on our being; to its partial role in our story; the story of man. We are *not* to abandon either 'reason' or 'body' or 'soul'.²³

22 I am even refraining here from the term 'spiritual path' as I prefer not to fall within a dualistic trap which confines me to one specific tradition. The debate regarding the Western attempt to define Eastern paths is a very old one. I refer to Gethin (1998: 63–5).

23 I am aware of the possible confusion which the terms 'soul'/'self'/'man'/'subject' and so on may bring forth. I will not solve this confusion here, as my motivation is merely to shed light on areas we are neglecting in our perception of man. The terminology

I am thus pointing eastwards since this is our way of including the realm of the 'body' *and* the realm of 'religion'; our way of tracing Western education's missing links, without abandoning the 'mind', which is still a great part of our being and of our culture. I am here to broaden education, and broadening means keeping what is there and at the same time allowing for more. This is the way towards a fuller life of 'well-being'.²⁴

Cartesian thought as an obstacle

There are quite some hurdles we must leap over before such an approach can be adopted. Here I will deal with an essential theoretical hurdle rather than deal with hurdles concerned with pedagogy which are definitely troubling as well. It is the hurdle of our Cartesian perception of reality, which tends to draw sharp borders constricting our view to education as an enclave unto itself. Education in this sense is separated from religion, from adulthood, from training, from healing and continuing this line it is in actuality severed from life. John Dewey (1929) has long before critiqued this course of thought, attempting to overcome this rift in his philosophy of education and its practice. But eventually contemporary Western education is not as affected by Dewey as may be expected. We tend to cling to lofty aphorisms stating that 'education is a life-process' and so forth, but do we really see this aphorism translating itself into the actual schoolday?

Overcoming this dichotomized view begins with a reconceptualization of education. Education should be perceived as the platform over which mind, body and soul interact through any form of discipline. This means that religion and healing are fused with education, as Philip Wexler has pointed out clearly:

in this case is less concerning, but rather the assumption that there may definitely be a realm which is beyond the body-mind complex, a realm which may be referred to as 'soul' or 'spirit' (although these last terms are not necessarily interchangeable).

24 It is clear that we must elaborate more on the process of gaining such liberating knowledge which I am promoting. How does a yogic posture, or breath exercise contribute to such knowledge? How does it eventually infiltrate our lives; into the life of my son as he is confronted with school. This issue will be addressed in future publications.

American mass-media now routinely report the healthful effects of prayer and the relation between health and religion. By this series of truly post-modern social transformations, the end point of this fusion (a point that is not yet evident) is that education will become 'healing', the core New Age transformative practice. (Wexler 2008: 190.)

A common observation differentiating education from healing states that the student is not 'sick' and is not in need of 'healing', therefore education must not be understood as a form of therapy or healing. The consideration of such a claim, of course, depends on what philosophy of man is applied. If we adopt a more Easternized pattern of thought we may very well begin to view the human condition as a state of 'dis-ease'.²⁵ In fact the Buddha's four noble truths are related to as a therapeutic doctrine in which the first noble truth characterizes man as being in a state of 'dis-ease' (*dukkha*), the second points to the reason for the 'dis-ease' (*trsna*), the third points to the possibility of a healthy state (*nirvana*), and the fourth points to the way to achieve this state (the eightfold path of *pana, sila & Samadhi*). The Buddha thus is no other than a doctor of humanity, a fact which the scriptures constantly repeat (Gethin 1998: 63). Of course, it does not clearly follow that education is thus a form of healing. But if man is viewed through a Buddhist prism (which can easily be paralleled to classical yoga as bearing very similar premises, although deferring in the healing strategy), man *is* a 'sick' being and is indeed in need of healing. It will suffice to prove this view experientially if we ask an average person to sit for five minutes and observe his breath. Very quickly he will find his 'monkey-like' mind (to use a famous Tibetan metaphor) jumping from one thought to the other, rejecting the mere notion of remaining in this moment, in *this very breath*. Of course now we must ask if the task of healing is to be deposited in the hands of education, or rather is this a task for the psychotherapist, or for the Buddhist guru? Recapping the beginning of this article we will quickly conclude that education as characterized here bears the characteristics of a Buddhist path, once it is stripped of all the residues added to Buddhism in its later stages.²⁶ If we remain at a very basic level of interpreting these four noble truths which constitute the core of Buddhism, we are presented with a standpoint which sees man as bereft of 'well-being' because of an inherent perpetuating uncontrolled thirst for more.

25 Of course Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* (1965) would bring a Western relativist view of the notion of health and disease.

26 I refer to Conze (2000) for more about developments in Buddhism as a tradition throughout history.

'Well-being' cannot be achieved if one experiences a constant state of lack. Unaware of this mechanism man acts out of ignorance (*avidya*), perpetuating his state through the false attempts to fill his bottomless pit of cravings. It is an uncontrolled mode of action, resulting from an uncontrolled pattern of thought. The only way to overcome this fruitless form of living lies in experiencing this mechanism, which governs human action, through the cultivation of awareness. Wisdom (*pana*) is developed through *Vipassana*²⁷—a penetrating vision into the true nature of existence. This is that 'knowledge' which I referred to earlier as the antipode of our Western scientific ethos. In a way these two types of knowledge pull us in opposite directions. The West pulls us outside, to observe the objects around us, and through science to cushion our lives with commodities and the technology borne by science.²⁸ It brings us to the 'body' as a source of sensual momentary enjoyment. The East pulls us inwards, to observe our 'body' but to extract a very different understanding from it in the form of realizing these sense pleasures' futility; to observe our craving's grip on our being, and the misery they impart on us as we cling to them. This same 'body' is both our way to *samsara* and to *nirvana*. As we engage in sense pleasure we are doomed to continue our *karmatic* existence, while as we engage in contemplating the *process* of pleasure, we gradually pull ourselves from the realms of *avidya* to the realm of *pana* and 'well-being'.

But we are Westerners. We cannot simply wrap ourselves in monks' robes and enter a Buddhist monastery. We *do* enjoy food, comfort, sex etc. Should we turn our backs on all of these? This is life as we know it. It does have some disadvantages, but overall some of us do not feel such an urge to change our lives. Walking in Eastern mythological paths seems quite detached from life. These paths bear quite an unfathomable promise which some of us may see as a dispassionate life, which denies life itself. We do prefer the known over this unknown esoteric goal. Where does our path lie, then?

As we enter into the world of Eastern paths, one of the most prominent ideas which strike us is the notion known as 'a-dvaita'—'non-dual' understanding of existence. The Upanishads' enigmatic *atman = Brahman* parsimonious formula brings this notion to its most radical expression. Once we explore our modernity-inherited mythical dichotomies through the prism of such a formula our dualisms crumble one after the other. All dualisms are but

27 One of the Buddha's most well-known forms of meditation.

28 Habermas (1971: Ch. 4) had shown that in everyday life we conceive of science more as a technology of control, rather than as a growing reservoir of knowledge about the world.

various manifestations of each other. *Atman = Brahman* means that the self/world dichotomy is a fictitious one. If the boundaries between self and world dissolve, then the body as some form of link between self and world must also be merged into this bigger merger. The Western dualism of religion and science is no other than a separation between the spiritual and the material, the heavenly and the mundane. We can quickly see how an '*advaitic*' realization will require that we heal these splits as well.

But my approach suggests that eventually we are to step away even from this 'monism–dualism dualism', represented by the dualism of East²⁹ and West. Reality manifests itself to the human mind as dualistic, while the mystical experience, or enlightenment, may be conceived as monistic. Encompassing these two poles, reality is both monistic and dualistic, and should not be confined to an either/or interpretation.³⁰ Pushing the envelope means that we incorporate a monistic aspiration into our dualistic curriculum. We accept the possibility of a mystical experience as a scientific supposition in need of constant individual confirmation.

We are not to abandon the West in favour of the East, losing our Western postmodern critical mode; losing our identity in the lore of India, as Alan Wilson Watts warns us.³¹ Neither are we to shy away from indulging in this ancient wisdom. We are to 'thrive on the differences', as J. J. Clarke (2000: 11–12) suggests, between these two very different approaches, through incorporating the East into our Western life. But this incorporation should eventually become an unaware integrated act dissolving the borderline between the yoga class which I attend on Wednesdays and the cubicle I inhabit at work; the meditation cushion I sit on in the morning and the people I encounter on the line to the bus. East–West, life–practice, world rejection–world affirmation . . . our lives are riddled with these dualisms and we must find a way to integrate them into a field in which we can walk freely. This walk is education, since it is a walk towards 'well-being' in an open-ended field, which allows me to thrive on all the possible routes towards 'well-being'. As I walk the walk the 'body' is my vehicle teaching me about sense pleasure, and of sense pleasure's ephemeral nature, through scientific 'knowledge' of the temporal, and soteriological ('religious' as I interpreted it earlier) 'knowledge' of the atemporal.

29 That is, if we think of *advaita* as a representative school of thought. Of course there are dualistic traditions such as classical yoga.

30 *Neti neti* tells us the Buddha.

31 'It is of the utmost importance that [we] keep [our] scientific wits about us . . . otherwise there is the morass of esoteric romanticism which awaits the unwary' (Watts 1971: 29).

In such a field education regains its core as a quest of body–mind and soul.

As the Buddha's path is called *the middle path*, wishing to avoid extremes, we should make an attempt at holding the rope from both ends, through a pragmatic approach both to our Western science, and to the traditions of the East. The view promoted here is that these are not rival ways of knowing, but rather complementary ones. The framework for such a path is a 'non-dual' curriculum, as the notion of 'non-dualism' is interpreted here. We must not abandon western science in order to accept the mystical, and vice versa. On the contrary, we must raise our eyes from the confinement of the laboratory microscope, into the heavens and into ourselves and then bring them down back to that microscope in a perpetual motion. Only thus can we fully be engaged in a true exploration of *what there is*, and *who we are*.

Epilogue

What if that father in the beginning would know that leaving his son at school that day, would mean that the boy would begin his day with a practice of mindfulness, cultivating the ability to observe any agony, any fear, any pain equanimously. What if such a practice could bring him to a realization of some liberating truth. What if after this class they would learn about triangles, studying geometry while assuming a trikonassana posture (triangle pose). What if then they would move on to study gravity through experiencing its power when practicing qigong or zanzuang (standing poses), study physics as they learn to integrate their body force by practicing a taiqi form. . .

References

Clarke, J. J.

2000 *The Tao of the West*. New York: Routledge.

Conze, Edward

2000 *Buddhism: a Short History*. Oxford: Oneworld.

Csordas, Thomas J.

1994 *The Sacred Self*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

David-Neel, Alexandra

1977 *Buddhism: Its Doctrines and Its Methods*. London: Unwin Paperbacks.

Denton, Diane

2005 'Toward a Sacred Discourse: Reconceptualizing the Heart Through Metaphor.' *Qualitative Inquiries* 11: 752–70.

Dewey, John

- 1929 *Democracy and Education*. New York: Macmillan.
1956 *The Child and the Curriculum*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Evans-Wentz, W. Y.

- 1970 *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Feuerstein, Georg

- 2001 *The Yoga Tradition*. Prescott: Hohm Press.

Foucault, Michel

- 1965 *Madness and Civilization: a History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. Toronto: Random House.
1988 Technologies of the Self. In: Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman & Patrick H. Hutton (eds), *Technologies of the Self*; pp. 16–49. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press.

Gallegos-Nava, Ramon

- 1999 *Educación Holista*. Cruz Atoyac: Editorial Pax México.

Geisert, Paul

- 2002 Nord's Net: "Ways of Knowing" for the Science Classroom and Nord Warren A.'s Response. *The Journal of Religion and Education* 29 (1): 77–89.

Gethin, Rupert

- 1998 *The Foundations of Buddhism*. London: Oxford University Press.

Habermas, Jurgen

- 1971 *Towards a Rational Society*. Translated by J. J. Shapiro. London: Heineman.

Hatfield, Gary

- 2003 *Descartes and the Meditations*. London: Routledge Philosophy Guidebooks.

Hattam, Robert

- 2004 *Awakening-Struggle*. Flaxton: Post Pressed.

Illman, Ruth

- 2010 Embracing Complexity. The post-secular pilgrimage of Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt. In: Tore Ahlbäck (ed.), *Pilgrimages Today*; pp. 228–43. Åbo: The Donner Institute for Religious and Cultural History.

James, William

- 1974 *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Collier Books.

Kincheloe, Joe & Shirley R. Steinberg

- 1993 A Tentative Description of Post-Formal Thinking: the Critical Confrontation with Cognitive Theory. *Harvard Educational Review* 63 (3): 296–320.

Kuhn, Thomas

- 1970 *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. New York: New American Library.

Lantieri, Linda

- 2001 *Schools with Spirit*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Laudan, Larry

- 1997 Explaining the Success of Science: Beyond Epistemic Realism and Relativism. In: Alfred I. Tauber (ed.), *Science and the Quest for Reality*; pp. 138–57. London: Macmillan.

Lelwica, Michelle

2009 *Embodying Learning: Post-Cartesian Pedagogy and the Academic Study of Religion. Teaching Theology and Religion* 12 (2): 123–36.

Marshak, David

1997 *The Common Vision: Parenting and Educating for Wholeness*. Peter Lang: New York.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice

1962 *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated from French by Colin Smith. London: Routledge and Keagan Paul.

Miller, Alistair

2008 A Critique of Positive Psychology—or ‘The New Science of Happiness’. *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 42 (3–4): 591–608.

Miller, John

2005 Introduction. In: J. Miller *et al.* (eds), *Holistic Learning and Spirituality in Education*; pp. 1–16. Albany: State University of New York Press.

2007 *The Holistic Education Curriculum Review*. 2nd edn. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Miller, Ron

1997 *What are Schools for?* Brandon: Holistic Education Press.

Noddings, Nel

2003 *Happiness and Education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Olivelle, Patrick

1998 *Upanishads*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Polanyi, Michael

1958 *Personal Knowledge*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Rose, Mike

2009 *Why Schools? Reclaiming Education for All of Us*. New York: The New Press.

Shunryu, Suzuki

1994 *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*. Boston & London: Shambhala.

Smith, Richard

2008 The Long Slide to Happiness. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*. 42 (3–4): 559–73.

Smith, V. A.

1919 *The Oxford History of India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Suissa, Judith

2008 Lessons from a New Science? On Teaching Happiness in Schools. *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 42 (3–4): 575–90.

Watts, Alan Wilson

1971 *Psychotherapy East and West*. New York: Ballantine Books.

Wexler, Philip

2000 *The Mystical Society*. Boulder: Westview Press.

2005 *Beyond the Iron Cage of Education: Toward a Weberian Sociology of Edu-*

cation. In: M'hammed Sabour & Leena Koski (eds), *Searching for the Meaning of Education and Culture*; pp. 29–39. Joensuu: University of Joensuu.

2008 *Symbolic Movement*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Wilber, Ken

1999 *The Marriage of Sense and Soul*. New York: Broadway.

2001 *Eye To Eye*. Boston: Shambhala. (First published in 1983.)

The female body in early Buddhist literature

In the following I intend to present Theravāda Buddhist perceptions of the female body and their impact on sexuality, gender equality and salvation. In doing so I am drawing on a selection of texts from the Buddhist canonical literature, which are relevant to the Theravāda tradition. Buddhist scriptures were first canonized in the first century CE, that is, more than 300 years after the appearance of the historical Buddha. Without doubt the scriptures thus contain mixed materials that have been influenced by a variety of opinions over time and not solely the original utterances of the Buddha himself. Consequently, the canonical literature shows inconsistencies regarding several issues, one of which is the status of women and the feminine (Sponberg 1992: 3, 7–8). Considering the distinction between codified norms as given in the normative texts and actual practice, these accounts only provide us with stereotypical attitudes. Furthermore, it is important to point out the androcentric bias of these scriptures: they have been written by senior monks for other monks, hence we do not find distinctly female opinions on the subject. The only exception is the *Therīgāthā*, which supposedly encompasses songs and poems written by nuns. Consequences will be explained below. First I will highlight some of the major Buddhist tenets and principles, of which there needs to be a prior understanding in order to guarantee a realistic appraisal of the perception of the woman and the female body.

The Buddhist concept of the self and the body

According to the Buddha, everything in life is pervaded by suffering (Pāli *dukkha*). In his Four Noble Truths he teaches about (1) the nature of this suffering, stating that birth, ageing, and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair, association with the unbeloved, as well as separation from the loved, and not getting what is wanted is suffering. He further (2) identifies the origin of suffering in the three poisons, or defilements (Pāli *kilesa*), which are: ignorance, craving, and clinging and (3) declares enlightenment, or Nirvana, as the end of suffering, which follows the relinquishment of and freedom

from the three *kilesas*. Eventually, (4) he provides a way, leading to the end of suffering, in the Noble Eightfold Path. (Schumann 1974: 37–41.)

In a way, the three poisons are the fuel that keeps the Wheel of Life turning. Unless they are abandoned, a human being will remain caught up in the cycle of rebirth (*Samsāra*) and thus suffering will never stop (Herrmann-Pfandt 1998: 123).

The given context suggests focusing on the human defilement of craving (*taṇhā*) or greed, meaning the craving for sensual pleasures, existence and extermination. Within the Buddhist concept of *Samsāra* it has a significant impact, causing human beings to constantly crave for this or that, thereby clinging to the world and failing to break the cycle of suffering and attaining Nirvana (Gómez 2004: 213–14).

Associated with craving are the illusions about the nature of the self and the substance of the material world. What human beings mistake as a unique and constant ‘self’ is actually not existent—it is what Buddhists call not-self, or selflessness (Pāli *anattā*). What makes us believe in a constant self is the sum of experiences obtained by the interaction of the five clinging-aggregates, the *khandhas* (Pāli) that form the human being. These are; (1) form or matter (Pāli *rūpa*), externally identified as the physical world. Internally *rūpa* includes the material body and the physical sense organs; (2) sensation, or feeling (Pāli *vedanā*) meaning the ability to sense an object as pleasant, unpleasant or neutral; (3) perception (Pāli *saññā*) including conception, cognition, and discrimination and so on, which registers whether an object is recognized or not (e.g. sounds, shapes, smells); (4) mental formations (Pāli *saṅkhāra*) comprising all types of mental habits—thoughts, ideas, opinions, prejudices, compulsions, and decisions, triggered by an object, and (5) consciousness (Pāli *viññāṇa*), which is formed by the other four *skandhas*. There is a certain reciprocity, as *viññāṇa* is the aggregate or function that (mis)interprets the other *khandhas* as constant and thus forming a self, but they are in reality ever-changing. (Schumann 1974: 42–50.)

Apart from the interaction between all the *khandhas* persists a significant dualism between the body (*rūpa*) and the consciousness (*viññāṇa*), as the former provides the basis for all the other aggregates, which again generate consciousness. Without a physical body there is no sensation, without sensation there is no perception, and so on. At the same time the body becomes manifested by consciousness. In death the body ceases to exist, it decays and dissolves at the same time as the consciousness splits into the clinging-aggregates that will reassemble in a new constellation in a subsequent rebirth, or dissolve in Nirvana. (Collins 1997: 188.)

Summing up, the soteriological aim of Buddhism, the end of all suffering, can only be reached by overcoming the illusion of the self and the illusion of the material world. Within this framework, the attitude towards the human body is ambivalent. As an integral part of the aspects combining to form the misleading consciousness, it is considered a hindrance that binds us to the world and to suffering. Thus it is depicted as a 'bag of dung' that should be avoided like excrement; its urges and drives have to be controlled:

You little hut made of a chain of bones, sewn together with flesh and sinew. Fie upon the evil-smelling body. You cherish those who have another's limbs.

You bag of dung, tied up with skin, you demoness with lumps on your breast. There are nine streams in your body which flow all the time.

Your body with its nine streams makes an evil smell and is obstructed by dung. A *bhikkhu* desiring purity avoids it as one avoids excrement.

If any person knew you as I know you, he would avoid you, keeping far away, as one avoids a cess-pit in the rainy season. (*Theragāthā* 1146–1208, in Norman 1969: 106–10.)

This resentment towards the body is also related to the cosmogonic myths that were inherited from the older Indian culture. The *Agañña-Sutta*¹ depicts the divine realm, where the formerly incorporeal and self-luminous beings fed only on joy, until they began to dissolve. Then the Earth formed some sort of sludge or scum on the surface of the waters that was eaten by the beings, who then acquired corporeal bodies and lost their luminosity. Soon sexual differences appeared on their bodies and they developed lust for one another and sexual intercourse. The overall aim is to regain the incorporeal, luminous status. (Lang 1982: 96.)

These perceptions imply that only ascetic practice and especially the abstention from sexual pleasures will weaken the ties to the lower material world (Lang 1982: 97). If cultivated in the right way, the body thus becomes a vehicle on the path to salvation: in the end the body is the basis for all ascetic practices and meditation.

1 *Dīgha-Nikāya* III.80–98, in Rhys Davids & Rhys Davids 1977, III: 77–94.

Tied to the world: the female body

The aforementioned principle of *anattā* and the illusory nature of the material world are basic Buddhist tenets; thus one might conclude that the body and sexuality, or sex and gender, respectively, do not really matter as they are illusory themselves. This argument is often quoted to emphasize the equality of women and men in and the general tolerance of Buddhism.

In fact, early Buddhist literature provides us with some accounts that represent this attitude. For example, a nun called Somā ponders the claim that women would not be fit to attain enlightenment, concluding, that there is no hindrance if one—male or female—has come to insight in the doctrine:

That place, hard to gain, which is to be attained by the seers, cannot be attained by a woman with two-finger-intelligence (i.e. very little intelligence).

What (harm) could the woman's state do to us, when the mind is well concentrated, when knowledge exists for someone rightly having insight into the doctrine?

Everywhere enjoyment of pleasure is defeated; the mass of darkness (of ignorance) is torn asunder; thus know, evil one, you are defeated, death. (*Therīgāthā* 60–2, in Norman 1971: 9.)

The same attitude is reflected by the tale of Sumedhā (*Therīgāthā* 448–522, in Norman 1971: 45–51), who strongly objects to marriage and wants to go forth instead, given the vanity and defilement of the world. There does not seem to be any doubt in these women, that they are able to follow the spiritual path. Furthermore, we find statements ascribed to the Buddha himself confirming the equal ability of men and women, despite their gender differences, to attain the status of an *arahant* and even enlightenment. Notwithstanding their androcentric bias, the canonical sources introduce us to several female followers of the Buddha who gained respect within the early community as donors, practitioners and teachers of the *Dhamma*. (Sponberg 1992: 5–7.)

Alan Sponberg argues that this soteriological inclusiveness, granting women the same possibilities on the spiritual path as men, can be considered 'the most basic and also the most distinctively Buddhist attitude regarding the status of women in the vast literature of the 2500-year-old tradition' (Sponberg 1992: 8).

Nevertheless, examining the quotes on women in the scriptures, especially when focusing on the female body, one finds a majority of statements that are

clearly misogynistic, revealing that it does make a meaningful difference, if you are (re)born within a female or a male body. Inconsistencies like these derive from the aforementioned mix of opinions and attitudes that emerged in the early centuries of the history of Buddhism. The early community has to be seen as being under the considerable influence of its historical, social and cultural surroundings in Northern India. The pervasive ideology of Brahmanism strongly restricted women and linked womanhood to suffering in the world. The woman was depicted as vile, false and sexually insatiable; specific characteristics that prevented her from attaining spiritual fulfillment (Skr. *mokṣa*). Gautama Buddha grew up in these strongly patriarchal surroundings, where the woman was understood to be a menace to society and therefore had to be controlled by her male kin: her father and brother, her husband, her son. Opposing the image of a 'good' woman, who was a devoted mother and an obedient wife, was that of a 'bad' or 'dangerous' woman, sexually insatiable and so on, as explained above. (Kawanami 2001: 138–9; My Hanh 1995: 99–100.)

The Buddha was mainly interested in promoting a way of life leading to the liberation from suffering—his focus lay on soteriological issues and not on a new social order. He spread the idea of equal abilities in attaining liberation, no matter what social background (caste) or sex one came from, but he did not question the social reality of the dualism of sex and gender (My Hanh 1995: 12). He was not a social reformer; born as the Prince Siddharta, he had actually made a point of turning away from politics. In fact he promoted a way of life for those who strive for spiritual fulfillment that entailed an abandonment of worldly issues such as social status, family ties and all forms of relationships. Thus, it is not surprising that in early Buddhist literature, attitudes emerged that resemble an image of womanhood similar to the traditional Indian perception. In the following I will illustrate this in a selection of text passages and give explanations regarding their relation to Buddhist doctrine.

Consistent with the traditional Indian image, a fair amount of passages in the canonical literature of early Buddhism portray the woman as vile, deprived and vicious. She is much more strongly subject to drives, urges, and emotions than a man and therefore has to be controlled by men. Female sexuality renders her weak-minded and keeps her from spiritual growth. The female body is imperfect and impure, especially because of the biological processes of menstruation, pregnancy and birth. (Kawanami 2001: 138–41; My Hanh 1995: 126.)

The legitimation of this attitude towards the female is rooted in the Buddhist understanding of the composition of the world and human life as illustrated above.

The main source of suffering is the formation of a new constitution of the five *khandhas*, which translates to the physical conception and birth. Birth gets the whole chain of existences going and the association of birth with the female body has severe consequences for Buddhist women. Buddhism is basically an ascetic religion—sexuality and sexual craving, or lust (Pāli *taṇhā*, *rāga*), in general are considered a hindrance on the path to enlightenment—the woman as both the object of the male's lust and as an allegedly cunning temptress personifies the aspects of life and the world that the ascetic has to renounce. She is rendered responsible for the forbidden, for human sexuality and all illicit behaviour. (Hermann-Pfandt 1998: 123; Lang 1982: 99.) This also relates to the aforementioned cosmological myths. As Karen C. Lang points out, the word *pathavi*, used to denote the earth, is feminine in gender. The fertility of the earth and women, respectively, are associated with each other: tasting the feminine leads to the downfall of humanity. (Lang 1982: 96.)

In the *Bhavacakra* a pregnant woman thus symbolizes the 'becoming', which is worldly existence and being trapped in the cycle of life. Buddhist literature, on the other hand, portrays the womb as a hell of torment and ordeal, or as a place of impurity (Lang 1982: 95; My Hanh 1995: 124). Buddhist monks focus mainly on liberation from the bondage of desire; in their written work they often use the woman's body as a metaphor for the worldly objects of desire and sensual pleasure. Misogynist statements are prior warnings to the seekers after enlightenment to refrain from fleshly desire, not to be corrupted by the pleasures of the senses, but to concentrate on spiritual growth. Sexual contact with a woman's body defiles a man and sexual intercourse can result in the birth of a child, further strengthening one's ties to the world. Sexuality and birth are impediments for both men and women, but women are more strongly affected by it. (Lang 1982: 99.) Thus in the *Aṅguttara-Nikāya* the female body is depicted as the snare of Māra, the demonic Lord of Death and manifestation of evil:

Monks, a woman, even when going along will stop to ensnare the heart of a man; whether standing, sitting or lying down, laughing, talking or singing, weeping, stricken or dying, a woman will stop to ensnare the heart of a man. Monks, if ever one would rightly say: It is wholly a snare of

Māra,—verily, speaking rightly, one may say of womanhood: It is wholly a snare of Māra. (*Āṅuttara-Nikāya* V.55, in Hare 1973: 56.)

A dancing girl is described in similar words by a monk in the *Theragāthā*, when he compares her to a ‘snare of death spread out’ (*Theragāthā* 267–70, in Norman 1967: 32); the same comparison is applied by another monk to his wife and child when he is approached by them (*Theragāthā* 299–302, in Norman 1969: 34) and by yet another who encounters a courtesan (*Theragāthā* 459–46, in Norman 1969: 48). Characteristic also is the account of Raṭṭhapāla, who metaphorically refers to the possibility of escaping this snare by the knowledge of the teaching (the fodder):

See the painted puppet, a heap of sores, a compounded body, diseased,
with many (bad) intentions, for which there is no permanent stability.

See the painted form, with jewels and earrings; covered with skin and
bones, it is resplendent with clothes.

The feet are reddened with lac, the face is smeared with powder,
enough to delude a fool, but not for one who seeks the far shore.

Hair braided eight-fold, eyes smeared with collyrium, enough to de-
lude a fool, but not for one who seeks the far shore.

The hunter laid his net; the deer did not come near the snare; having
eaten the fodder, let us go while the deer-trapper laments.

The hunter’s net is broken; the deer did not come near the snare; hav-
ing eaten the fodder, let us go while the deer-trapper grieves. (*Theragāthā*
769–93, in Norman 1969: 74–6.)

This attitude is not confined to monks; in the *Therīgāthā* the nun Vimalā who formerly has been a courtesan describes her doings with the same resentment and reluctance:

Intoxicated by my (good) complexion, my figure, my beauty, my fame,
haughty because of my youth, I despised other women. Having decorated
this body, very variegated, deceiving fools, I stood at the brothel door, like
a hunter having spread out a snare, showing my ornamentation. Many a
secret (place) was revealed. I did various sorts of conjuring, laughing
(= mocking?) of people. (*Therīgāthā* 72–4, in Norman 1971: 11.)

Also various *Jātakas* illustrate the depravity of the female sex that leads man into torment and suffering. They are portrayed as manipulative, vicious and seductive.

A sex composed of wickedness and guile,
Unknowable, uncertain as the path
Of fishes in the water,—womankind
Hold truth for falsehood, falsehood for the truth!
As greedily as cows seek pastures new,
Women, unsated, yearn for mate on mate.
As sand unstable, cruel as the snake,
Women know all things; naught from them is hid!²

Wrathful are women, slanderers, ingrates
The sowers of dissension and fell strife!
Then, Brother, tread the path of holiness,
And bliss therein thou shalt not fail to find.³

Though soft of speech, like rivers hard to fill,
Insatiate, nought can satisfy their will:
Down, down they sink: a man should flee afar
From women, when he knows what kind they are.
Whomso they serve for gold or for desire,
They burn him up like fuel in the fire.⁴

Even if the aim of a *Jātaka* is not an admonition directed towards men to be careful when dealing with women, female characters often take the role of ignorant or murderous villains, or symbolize the profane in general. In the rare case that a woman is presented in a positive way, this alludes to the loyal wife

2 Andabhūta-Jātaka 62 (Cowell 1973, I: 151–5), cf. Durājāna-Jātaka 64 (ibid. 158–60), Rādha-Jātaka 145 (ibid. 309–10), Culla-Paduma-Jātaka 193 (Cowell 1973, II: 81–5), Gahapati-Jātaka 199 (ibid. 94–5), Culladhanuggaha-Jātaka 374 (Cowell 1973, III: 144–8), Samugga-Jātaka 436 (Cowell 1973, III: 313–16).

3 Takka-Jātaka 63 (Cowell 1973, I: 155–8), cf. Culla-Paduma-Jātaka 193 (Cowell 1973, II: 81–5), Kukkuṭa-Jātaka 383 (Cowell 1973, III: 168–9).

4 Mudu-Pāni-Jātaka 262 (Cowell 1973, II: 224–6), cf. Sattubhastha-Jātaka 402 (Cowell 1973, III: 210–15).

and devoted mother, who is humble and giving, or even sacrifices herself for the well being of her loved ones.⁵

This conforms to a common ambiguity in the perception of woman: one part is demonized and debased, the other part transcended, or even deified. Especially in relation to her body, in her ability to give birth, the woman is split: as a mother of sons and important male characters she is praised and honoured, but her female genitals, her bodily functions, are considered to be filthy and vicious. The original creative power of the female body and sexuality is either directly linked to suffering, or fully negated, as is the case with Māyā, the Buddha's mother. (My Hanh 1995: 53; Herrmann-Pfandt 1998: 123.)

In the legend of the Buddha's mother, his conception and birth, an extensive negation of the female body is expressed: Māyā is pictured as a very chaste and pure woman, a virgin and an ascetic. She conceived the Buddha-to-be in a dream, by means of a white elephant entering her side. After ten months she gave birth to Siddharta from her right side, while standing in the garden of Lumbini. Thus she actually gave birth without any genitals or sexual action being involved and is depicted as an ideal woman. It is needless to say that this supports a very distanced relationship to the female body and sexuality. Furthermore, in the legend, Māyā had to die seven days after giving birth, in order to guarantee that she would not become polluted and lose her sacred status. In the end her image is ambivalent—on the one hand she symbolizes the patriarchal ideal of womanhood, on the other hand she is associated with allurements and ignorance. In contrast to the old Brahmanic perception of the status of a mother as the highest ideal for a woman, in Buddhism motherhood has a bitter taste. It is of secular character, strengthening the ties to the world. (Kawanami 2001: 140; My Hanh 1995: 52, 131.)

Altogether the woman's physical, biological and mental features are a major hindrance on the path to Nirvana—not only to herself, but also to men. Due to her tempting qualities and her natural ability to give birth she is, in a way, responsible for all suffering. Consequently, in Theravada Buddhism, women are not granted Nirvana. In fact, only a pious monk is capable of attaining enlightenment. Nuns and lay people, whether they are women or men, are excluded. It is noteworthy, however, that lay men can decide to become monks and hence have a chance of Nirvana; women, even nuns, on the

5 Cf. Sambula-Jātaka 519 (Cowell 1973, V: 48–53), Succaja-Jātaka 320 (Cowell 1973, III: 44–7), Godha-Jātaka 333 (ibid. 71–2), Culladhammapāla-Jātaka 358 (ibid. 117–20), Māti-Posaka-Jātaka 455 (Cowell 1973, IV: 58–61).

contrary, have to be reborn into a male body first. What is granted to pious nuns is the possibility of acquiring the status of an *arahant*, but a Buddha is never a woman. The female is considered imperfect and impure and thus incapable of the proper conduct leading to enlightenment. Nirvana as the highest perfection can only be gained in a male form; also only the man possesses the mental stability required. (My Hanh 1995: 123–6.)

The fate of being a woman is understood as a karmic consequence. Therefore the suffering of women, for example, the physical suffering in labour, but also the subordination to the man, is not related to a socio-historical structure, or to socialization, but it is an unchangeable fate the woman has brought upon herself by sinful deeds in her previous life (My Hanh 1995: 23). Being born into a female body is a comeuppance. The Buddhist teachings of *karma* and *Samsāra* thus give way to the subjection of women in society. By practising the *Dhamma*—especially in financially ‘supporting the *Sangha*’—and leading a pious life, women can improve their *karma* in the hope of a rebirth in a male body. Practising the *Dhamma* for women actually means subordination and obedience—for lay women, as well as for the nuns.

The female body and the *Sangha*

However disadvantaged women are because of their bodies, the Buddha did establish a female *Sangha*, implying the overall possibility for women to follow the spiritual path to the liberation of suffering. As the story about the invention of a nun’s order in early Buddhism demonstrates, the Buddha himself at first had no intention of including women in his *Sangha*. He did so very reluctantly and not without accentuating that the endurance of his teachings in the world would thereby be impaired from 1000 to 500 years. (My Hanh 1995: 124.) As Alan Sponberg (1992: 13–18) points out, this story has to be understood rather metaphorically, as an account not of the negotiation between Mahāprajāpatī, Ānanda, and the Buddha, but between groups in society with different interests. Thus it is a document exposing the social dynamics of that time.

Following the account in the *Bhiksunikarmavacana*⁶ (Paul 1985: 82–94) Buddha’s aunt, Mahāprajāpatī makes a request to the Buddha that women should be allowed into the order. He declines her request, thereupon his fa-

6 This fragment of the Sanskrit Vināya gives a concise account of the story, the Pāli version is much more extensive, cf. Cullavagga X, in Horner 1975: 352–92.

vourite disciple Ānanda speaks in her favour and is told by the Buddha why he actually does not want to allow women into the order:

To go forth from home under the rule of the Dharma as announced by me is not suitable for women. There should be no ordination or nunhood. And why? If women go forth from the household life, then the rule of the Dharma will not be maintained over a long period. It is just as if, O Ānanda, there were a family with many women and few men. It is subject to easy attack and spoliation. It is subject to easy attack specifically of thieves and bands of robbers. Just thus, O Ānanda, if women go forth under the rule of the Dharma, this rule of the Dharma will not be long enduring. It is as if, O Ānanda, in a big field belonging to a householder, a quantity of thunderbolts with great flashes of lightning fell, to the extent that the field was destroyed, ruined, and brought to nought. Just thus, O Ānanda, the rule of the Dharma—if women go forth from a home life—will not continue for long. Suppose, Ānanda, there was a sugar cane field belonging to a householder. Upon it fell a blight by the name of Crimson disease until the sugar cane was destroyed, ruined, and brought to nought. Just in this way, when women go forth, the rule of the Dharma is not long maintained. (Paul 1985: 84.)

While his first objection refers to the threat of an easy attack and spoliation of a female *Sangha*—which yet could be interpreted as a justified fear for the lives of the women—he then emphasizes that the real hazard to the *Dhamma* are women themselves, comparing them to a quantity of thunderbolts with great flashes of lightning and a blight by the name of Crimson disease that destroys, ruins and eventually erases everything.

Eventually he gives in and allows women to form a nun's order, 'but only within a carefully regulated institutional structure that preserves and reinforces the conventionally accepted standards of male authority and female subordination' (Sponberg 1992: 13).

This was reduced to a praxis by providing them with eight important rules that clearly establish the monks' control over the female *Sangha*:

1. In the presence of monks, O Ānanda, women are expected to request ordination to go forth as nuns. I announce this as the first important rule for women to overcome the obstructions so that instruction can be maintained throughout life.

2. In the presence of monks, O Ānanda, a nun must seek the teachings and instructions every half month. I announce this as the second important rule for women. . .

3. No nun may spend a rainy season, O Ānanda, in a place where no monks are resident. This, O Ānanda, is the third important rule for women. . .

4. After the rainy season a nun must have both orders [monks and nuns] perform the 'end of the rainy season' ceremony for her with reference to the seeing, hearing, or suspicion [of faults committed by her]. This is the fourth important rule for women. . .

5. It is forbidden, that a nun, Ānanda, accuse or warn a monk about transgression in morality, heretical views, conduct or livelihood. This is the fifth important rule I announce for women. . .

6. A nun, Ānanda, should not scold or be angry with or admonish a monk. I announce this as the sixth important rule for women. . .

7. When a nun violates important rules, O Ānanda, penance must be performed every half month. This I declare as the seventh important rule for women. . .

8. A nun of one hundred years of age shall perform the correct duties to a monk. She shall, with her hands folded in prayerful attitude, rise to greet him and then bow down to him. This will be done with appropriate words of salutation. I declare this as the eighth important rule. . . (Paul 1985: 85–6.)

Preceding the entering of the order a nun has to agree to these eight rules. As already noted above, Buddhism originated in a patriarchal society. By subordinating the nuns to the monks, the Buddha probably intended to protect the spiritual and social welfare he saw endangered by making too many concessions to women (My Hanh 1995: 108; Sponberg 1992: 17–18).

Living within the monastery, the nuns have to follow a code of conduct (*Bhikkhuni-Vibhanga*, 311 rules) quite similar to, but much more comprehensive than the monks' code (*Sutta-Vibhanga*, 227 rules). The nuns have to observe 84 additional rules; given a closer look, however, a lot of them

are actually established to protect them from harm and there is no apparent stronger condemnation of the nun's sexuality. But it is very important to bear in mind that this is not an acknowledgement of female sexuality as such. As sexuality in general is understood to be a major hindrance on the spiritual path, it is strongly prohibited by the first rule of the code for male and female members of the *Sangha*. Entering the order ideally means giving up one's sexuality, which is associated with the female. In fact all 'female thought processes' have to be eliminated in order to gain the required mental stability attributive to the male. The nun actually has to overcome her femininity, and transform into a man, because the woman's ties to the world, her urges and aforementioned physical and mental handicaps deprive her of spiritual growth. (Kawanami 2001: 137; Lang 1982: 99–101.)

This is illustrated by the example of Gopikā in the *Sakka-Pañha Suttanta*:

She, having abandoned a woman's thoughts and cultivated the thoughts of a man, was, at the dissolution of the body after her death, reborn to a pleasant life, into the communion of the Thirty-and-Three gods, into sonship with us (*Dīgha-Nikāya* II.271, in Rhys Davids & Rhys Davids 1977, II: 306).

Karen C. Lang (1982: 100) argues that this figurative transformation from preoccupation with sexuality to concern with spirituality seems to be rooted in the fear and disgust of women's bodily functions. Ascetic practices, such as fasting, will prevent menstrual flow and sexual abstinence will prevent her from bearing children. Furthermore, 'shaving off the woman's hair and enjoining her to wear shapeless garments, identical to those worn by monks, also contribute to the impression that women were expected to transform their female nature, physically as well as mentally' (Lang 1982: 101).

Given these facts, strictly speaking, there is no female *Sangha*. Femininity is not fit for spiritual growth and has to be dropped.

Conclusion

Early Buddhist literature reflects an understanding of the female body as being more closely connected to the material world and the cycle of reincarnation, due to its biological qualities. This has a severe impact on the woman's status and her chances of attaining enlightenment. Considering the early teaching of individuals possessing equal capacities to attain liberation, no

matter what sex or social background, Buddhism as it developed over time failed to translate the equality of the sexes into a social reality. In fact, the perception of a distinct female 'nature' which was deemed a hindrance could not easily be erased from the collective consciousness. (Sponberg 1992: 11–12.) It is, however, important to note that Buddhist countries are subject to diverse influences that affect attitudes towards the female body, sexuality and the status of women—thus one has to be very careful with generalizations regarding norms and practices. Over time the negative attitudes and restrictions have been questioned; social changes have given way to new interpretations and perspectives. Pondering religious and cultural implications of the Buddhist attitude towards the body and its sex while also considering, for example, modern Mahayana Buddhist interpretations—especially by Western Buddhists and Buddhist Feminists—can lead to an acknowledgement of its potential of interpreting *anattā*, selflessness and an equality of capacity to practice *Dhamma* in favour of a general sex and gender equality.

References

Texts and translations

Cowell, E. B. (trans.)

1973 *The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*. Vols I–VI. Ed. Pali Text Society. London & Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.

Hare, E. M. (trans.)

1973 *The Book of the Gradual Sayings: Aṅguttara-Nikāya*. Vol. III. Ed. Pali Text Society. London & Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.

Horner, I. B. (trans.)

1975 *The Book of the Discipline (Vināya-Piṭaka)*. Vol. V: *Cullavagga*. Ed. Pali Text Society. London & Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.

Norman, Kenneth R. (trans.)

1969 *The Elders' Verses*. Vol. I: *Theragāthā*. Ed. Pali Text Society. London: Luzac and Company Ltd.

1971 *The Elders' Verses*. Vol. II: *Therīgāthā*. Ed. Pali Text Society. London: Luzac and Company Ltd.

Rhys Davids, T. W. & C. A. F Rhys Davids (trans.)

1977 *Dialogues of the Buddha*. Vols II & III. Translated from the Pali of the Dīgha Nikāya. Ed. Pali Text Society. London & Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.

Bibliography

Collins, Steven

1997 The body in Theravāda Buddhist monasticism. In: Sarah Coakley (ed.), *Religion and the Body*; pp. 185–204. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gómez, Luis O.

2004 Desire. In: Robert E. Buswell, Jr (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*. Vol. I; pp. 213–14. New York: Macmillan.

Herrmann-Pfandt, Adelheid

1998 Askese, Versuchung und Inspiration. Frauen und ihre Sexualität im Buddhismus. In: Sung-Hee Lee-Linke (ed.), *Das Hohelied der Liebe. Weibliche Sexualität in den Weltreligionen*; pp. 123–46. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag.

Kawanami, Hiroko

2001 Can Women be Celibate? Sexuality and Abstinence in Theravada Buddhism. In: Elisa J. Sobo & Sandra Bell (eds), *Celibacy, Culture, and Society: The Anthropology of Sexual Abstinence*; pp. 137–56. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Lang, Karen Christina

1982 Images of Women in Early Buddhism and Christian Gnosticism. *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 2: 95–105.

My Hanh, Isabelle

1995 *Kinder, Küche, Karma. Die Frau im Buddhismus und Konfuzianismus. Zwischen Matriarchat und patriarchaler Ideologie*. Bern: edition amalia.

Paul, Diana Y.

1985 *Women in Buddhism: Images of the Feminine in the Mahāyāna Tradition*. Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press.

Schumann, Hans Wolfgang

1974 *Buddhism: An Outline of Its Teachings and Schools*. Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House.

Sponberg, Alan

1992 Attitudes toward Women and the Feminine in Early Buddhism. In: José Ignacio Cabezón (ed.), *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*; pp. 3–35. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Spiritual and religious aspects of torture and scalping among the Indian cultures in Eastern North America, from ancient to colonial times

Only a few decades ago a common perception prevailed that the historical Native Americans were very prone to violence and warfare. Scalping and torture were seen as a specific custom attached into their ideology and sociocultural ethos (Hans 1907). However in the 1960s a completely reversed picture started to emerge, following the course of other worldwide movements, such as ethnic rights, pan-Indianism, ecological conscience, revisionist historiography and so on. Immediately the Native American people came to be seen as the victims of the European colonialism and the Whites were the bad guys who massacred innocent women and children, either at Sand Creek or in Vietnam. Books were written in which the historians pointed out that the practice of scalping was actually not present in the Americas before the whites came. This theory drew sustenance from some early colonial accounts, especially from the Dutch and New England colonies, where it was documented that a special bounty was offered for Indian scalps. According to this idea, the practice of scalping among the Indians escalated only after this. On the other hand, the blame fell on the Iroquois tribesmen, whose cruel fighting spread terror throughout the seventeenth century, when they expanded an empire in the north-eastern wilderness. This accords with those theorists who wanted to maintain a more balanced view of the diffusion of scalping and torture, agreeing that these traits were indeed present in Pre-Columbian America, but limited only to the Iroquoians of the east (Axtell & Sturtevant 1986). But where does the truth lie? Somewhere in between, maybe? Usually a middle-ground approach into a historical dilemma proves to be best, but not always. Here, for instance, we may have a case in which the traditional first perception may be the right one, no matter how inconvenient it would be in its implications about the socio-political arena.

Colonial American history has been rewritten every now and then. Each age and time perceives it a little differently, depending on political propaganda and economic or racial issues etc. The poor historians try to do their



A genuine scalp (National Museum of Denmark). The photograph is computer enhanced by the author from Birket-Smith 1972.

best however. And now, this historical panorama is changing once again. Starting this time in the 1980s, and in the field of archaeology especially, a completely new set of insights have arisen. Anthropologists are also reading their documents anew by using Ockham's razor instead. And what is the consequence of this?

There has been a secondary burial of the myth of Noble Savage and a return of the old Wild Indian idea, but this time stripped of its cartoon stereotypical attachments. This is of course a very simplified view. As a matter of fact, several characteristics from either side of the picture are present in the

contemporary image of the American Indian. We may say, at any rate, that this is the most realistic conception presented thus far. In a word, the Indians are now seen as being like any other human beings, with their usual mixture of vices and virtues. Understanding this, one may approach such a topic as scalping and torture without more bias than when reading of any practice of atrocities in human history (Keeley 1996, LeBlanc 1999, Osborn 2000).

Human violent behaviour exists in a cause and effect relationship. Violence in warfare is a norm. Sociocultural habits, taboos and laws are guiding its expressions. Spiritual and religious aspects determine markedly how, why and when the customary or institutionalized violence may occur. From the anthropological perspective, the practice of scalping and torture by Native Americans should be viewed more through its religious-spiritual aspects than in relation to its colonial historical implications, which are familiar and being popularized in the frontier warfare. Contextually it is actually much closer to the Mesoamerican cult of human sacrifice than with the Nazi Holocaust. Each of these are outstandingly brutal cases among the records of mankind of course, but they become understandable when all the historical, anthropological and religious-spiritual aspects are carefully studied and set into their proper places in our past (Mannix 1986, Scott 2006).

Prehistoric violence and warfare

Scalping and torture were closely involved with warfare. That is why it is important how we perceive the nature of tribal warfare. Cumulating evidence is unveiling plainly that we have been far too optimistic, even utopian in our previous interpretations. All around the world archaeology has revealed locations of brutal prehistoric violence, sites of massacres and so on. Tribes which have been characterized as peaceful, are now seen as more warlike than their neighbours. In proportion to their populations, these tribal societies suffered far more casualties than ancient states and modern communities. Anthropology has also revealed that matrilineal societies were actually more prone to warfare than the patrilineal ones, a fact which sits uncomfortably with feminist theories (Arkush & Allen 2006, Eller 2000, Guilaine & Zammit 2005, Keeley 1996, LeBlanc 2003). This is particularly apparent in the Eastern Woodlands area of the North American continent. Here were the Iroquois, whose reputation extends worldwide across numerous cultural and socio-historical arenas. These people provided a model for women's rights as well as the United States constitution, but still today there is a belief that they were the original scalpers and torturers in this primitive world. A new view is clearing this image of Iroquois brutality however, but only in its focus, since it extends the similar behaviour among their neighbours as well (Richter 1986).

Hardly any serious scholar today dares to doubt the idea that scalping was present in pre-Columbian America. Though the direct facts are few, a mountain of circumstantial evidence is accumulating from archaeological research. The most dramatic data comes from osteological examinations of burial grounds and massacre sites. One site in particular is a prime example. It is the Crow Creek archaeological ground in the Middle Missouri region, where the historical Mandan and Hidatsa tribes lived. It has been dated to around 1300 AD. What is astonishing here is a mass grave of about 500 men, women, and children, which almost all have been mutilated, tortured and scalped (Arkush & Allen 2006, Case 2010, Dye 2009: 131–2, Keeley 1996, LeBlanc 1999, Smith 1991). This prehistoric killing field stands as a horrible Pol Potian kind of landmark in Native American history.

Skeletal data can give us only a partial idea of what has happened, and can testify primarily by means of the injuries which have left markings on the bone. In reading the marks of prehistoric scalping for instance, one has to study skulls. There are a number of collections of comparative historical osteological data in museums, where confirmed cases of victims who have suffered scalping are present. Markings of scalping are very distinctive and



The Crow Creek site, beside Missouri in South Dakota, where remains of *ca* 500 bodies were found. Almost all were mutilated, tortured and scalped. This prehistoric massacre occurred *ca* 1325 AD. The copy of photograph is computer enhanced by the author from Keeley 1996.

one could not really find any other reasonable explanation for them. This has much to do with the act itself, which is most brutal and may even cause fatal bleeding. Even stone knives could carve deep furrows on skull bone. This kind of evidence has been excavated from most of the area of North America, indicating very dramatically that Native Americans practised scalping from times immemorial and on a wider scale than has been thought (Case 2010, LeBlanc 1999, Smith 1991). It is historically known that the ancient Scythians did this too, as well as some Germanic nations and tribes from Siberia; and, according to current data, certain folk in Central Asia and Scandinavia also (Denison 2000, Murphy *et al.* 2002, 'Scalping' in *Wikipedia*), but the North American Indians were unique indeed. We must therefore admit that these people fit into their popular stereotype on this particular point at least. Interestingly, the only other scalping Indians outside this vast area can be found thousands of miles away and are from the South American steppes of Chaco (Hodge 1910: 482).

And now, once we have put the Indians in their place amongst the other peoples of mankind, a question of the nature of scalping and torture must be presented. Anthropology uses labels such as 'religious' or 'spiritual' quite

commonly and too lightly, whenever there is a need to interpret some newly excavated case which indicates evidence of prehistoric violence. A typical course of study proceeds in this way: in the first instance the excavating archaeologist usually comes to the right conclusions instantly by looking at the traumatic data in front of his eyes. Much later another scholar, maybe an anthropologist this time, reads the same data, but comes to a completely different reading by using the labels itemised above. Finally, a present-day archaeologist appears on the scene, reads the data once again, only to find that his previous colleague had it right at the beginning (LeBlanc 1999). A lesson may be drawn from this: Ockham's razor is a useful tool to have alongside the archaeologist's spade.

The nature of Native American scalping and torture

The question of the nature of scalping and torture among the North American Indian tribal societies is a complicated one. Universal answers are not available and the interpretations should be considered case by case. From the cross-cultural perspective certain aspects may be evident however, especially considering warfare in general and its consequences, where practice of atrocities is universal. Emic and ethic encounter each other here, and nowadays one may confidently interpret a violent behaviour plainly by itself, without any complicated explanation, except in pointing out motivations of sheer hate and the simple evilness of warfare. This is a part of the picture, and that is why we have to read much of the data from North America so carefully.

No doubt there also existed religious and spiritual aspects to the practice of scalping and torture among the Indians. Descriptive accounts can be read from early colonial sources, such as the *Jesuit Relations* for instance, which is an accurate document with certain interests in the Native American religion (as can be expected of the authors, who were clerics) (Thwaites 1896–1901). These documents synchronize with similar data gathered from primitive societies around the world and throughout history. Scalps and heads were primarily taken as war trophies, which were thought to bestow a supernatural, stimulating strength, stolen from an enemy. A returning war party which returned with a number of scalps was received with wild enthusiasm at home, and more so if there were enemy captives as well. A common fate for male captives was an immediate running of the gauntlet and thereafter a tortured death at the pole. Sometimes, if the captive exhibited outstanding heroism under torture he might be allowed to survive as an accepted, adopted member of the tribe.

In the eastern areas of North America it was quite common, especially among the matrilineal tribes, that the active torturers were women and children. This is a logical element in humiliating a male victim, whose masculinity is attacked by every possible means (Friedrici 1993, Knowles 1993, Nadeau 1993). In fact, these tribes sometimes also practised brutal sexual raping of the male captives, in an effeminating act where they were 'made women'. On the other hand the American Indians only seldom raped women in war, which contrasts with the rest of the world (Trexler 1995). The reason for this may be in their general respect of women and their potential to raise children, who



Distribution of headhunting and scalping in Pre-Columbian North America, yellow (Algonquians), light blue (Siouans), rose (Iroquoians), grey (Muskogheans). Designed by the author, 2010.

were also highly valued. The Eastern Woodlands tribal world is very characteristic in this matter. Women and children were the prime targets as captives, not to be killed or tortured, but to be adopted into the tribe. Actually this adoption became institutionalized in the course of bloody tribal warfare, where numbers of casualties were sought to be compensated in this way. At least during colonial times when the tribal



An artistic view of running the gauntlet, a test almost every male captive was forced to pass in the Eastern Woodlands. Original painting is computer enhanced by the author from Löfgren 1959.

societies were reduced in numbers even more, it seldom occurred that very many captives were chosen to be tortured. Usually one, two, or a few more were selected, and on these occasions the ritualistic aspects were markedly present, when all the attention could be focused and enough time given over to a spectacle which could even last for days (Dye 2009, Friedrici 1993, Knowles 1993, Nadeau 1993, Osborn 2000).

The victims were treated with certain respect, which may seem strange. This is manifested especially in the way in which the torturers spoke with them. According to this etiquette, the victims were metaphorically seen as beloved relatives, whose fate was to be a sacrificed offer (Knowles 1993). This respectful treatment of captives reflects that of the ancient Mesoamerican human sacrifice, a custom which may have spread early on to the north in this disguised form. Among the Aztecs, those to be sacrificed were usually captives of war, who by their suffering and death provided spiritual welfare to the empire state. Quite similarly the chosen victims among the Eastern Woodlands tribal societies were seen as sources of might and strength for each person present on the field of torture action. The braver an enemy the more power his torturers could gain. Here can be understood also the practical logic as to why women and children were usually not been killed this way. Their evident weakness to endure for any sustained period, made them 'bad medicine' to provide extra strength for male warriors on these occasions (Knowles 1993).



A sketch by David de Vries from the seventeenth century, in which an Iroquois village torture scene is illustrated. Picture is computer enhanced by the author from Wilbur 1995.

Woodlands warriors were actually mentally and physically trained from their childhood into a situation when one could be a captive himself and have to face a horrible death at the stake. In this training spiritual powers were sought in every possible way. These Woodlands warriors were indeed ready to die at any time, like Japanese *samurais*, or Muslim fanatics. An essential part of their training was physical endurance, which made them fearless and skilful fighters (Smith 1812, McNab 2010, Yager 1912). Their death at the stake in an enemy village should be seen as a battle in itself, and it had to be fought as bravely as possible. This was necessary, because only in this way could they maintain their societal tribal respect in the eyes of their enemies. Every one

should learn his own death song, which must be chanted until the very end. It was the source of personal courage, like prayer for Christian martyrs (Knowles 1993). In this manner, ideally, the *status quo* of the Eastern Woodlands tribal spiritual worldview was maintained—like its Mesoamerican, more sophisticated prototype—by heroic deaths providing welfare to either sides of the arena—to the victims and to the tormentors. Interestingly, the Jesuits and other Christian missionaries found numbers of people among the Indians who were ready to listen to the teachings of the Gospels in which the story of a God who has been tormented to death at the stake for the welfare of mankind sounded familiar to their own belief system.

In fact, as an execution device, the Native American stake or torture pole has some parallels with the old world practice of impaling and crucifixion. In all these a victim is fixed into a pole. Impaling differs from the others in its fatal rapidity, while the Indian stake and the crucifixion-cross were closer

each other as devices of torture instead of plain execution. Both are related in the ways in which the sufferings of victims were extended as long as possible and in the most humiliating manner (Hiltunen 2009: 101). But the Indian torture pole was set at the centre of the village for an audience similar to that of the gladiatorial arena of the Romans, while the crucifixion sites were outside town and usually without any specific spectators. This Indian pole does not have actual parallels, and this may be a reason why it became such a marked symbol of Native American cruelty, frequently presented in Western drama, movies and comics.



A fragment of Mississippian period shell gorget, in which an ancient warrior is figured. His head was shaved in historically well-known scalp lock style. Picture is computer enhanced by the author from Fundaburk & Foreman 1985.

Headhunting and scalping were related in an anthropological sense. The former seems to have been much older and more widespread custom, while scalping is restricted to certain culture areas. In North America their distribution overlaps in some areas, but both extended over a vast territory in this large continent. South American Indian tribes were frequently headhunters as opposed to their North American racial relatives who were mostly scalpers (Friedrici 1993). As has been stated, the evidence from archaeology is plentiful in indicating the presence of this practice for a very long time in this part of the world. Actually the first clearer cases have been found from the late archaic period, which means that scalping was invented here maybe as early as 2500 BC (Smith 1991). In the Eastern Woodlands a mound building civilization had its beginnings around this time and developed until its heyday, which happened a couple of centuries before the whites came into this area. At that time such cities as Cahokia, close to present day St Louis had a population of 40 000 and all this country was much more crowded than at the beginning of the colonial era. The major cause of depopulation was the epidemics brought from Europe, especially smallpox.



South American Jivaro-Indians are famous of their shrunken heads. Headhunting was common in South America, while scalping was practically unknown. The photograph is computer enhanced by the author from Birket-Smith 1972.

Archaeology has revealed that the intensity of intertribal warfare in the Eastern Woodlands was more escalated during the Mississippian period (ca 900–1500) than almost any time during the colonial era (the only exception being the Iroquois expansion of seventeenth century). The aforementioned Crow Creek massacre site belongs to this timeline. These archaeological and ethnographical data indicate, however, that Native Americans did not possess any mental obstacles against using both torture and scalping on women too. It could really have been so, but again a focus of study must be directed in its proper time and area. These people experienced a profound change in their whole system of existence after the arrival of whites and their diseases, which almost annihilated the Indians. The survivors were only remnants of those major nations, which were remembered only through oral traditions and the haunting remains of their mysterious forest-growing, mound built cities all around the area. I presume therefore, that the scale of killing and captive sacrifice were markedly different during the colonial era than it was in Pre-Columbian times. Even the most horrible cases described in the early documents possibly could not have been compared with massacres such as that at Crow Creek, which is reminiscent of a distinctive total warfare belonging to complex societies. The historically known practise of torture and scalping by the Indians of this area may only have been a diminished reflection of the institutionalized violence which prevailed centuries ago, based on models which may have spread from Mesoamerica. This development could be seen as analogous with the medieval Europe of knights and tournaments, where

fighting and violence were controlled by certain rules based on individual bravery and honour. When we read the colonial history of the Indian wars with this view in mind, a lot more sense can be found in the stories and one could really see this forest for its trees (Dye 2009, Fogelson 2004, Osborn 2000, Wilbur 1995, Washburn 1988, Ubelaker 2006).

Native Americans were very fond of their hair. Many tribes considered human hair as a specific locus of personal spiritual power, even the nest of the soul. The capture of one's soul by scalping had thus a certain amount of ideological truth to it. Other cases have been reported in which the fresh scalp has been offered as a sacrifice to supernatural beings. In the Eastern Woodlands especially, many tribes favoured the famous 'Mohawk' or 'Mohican' haircut, which leaves a lock of hair or roach on an otherwise shaven head. It seems to be very ancient in this area, because a lot of artwork from the early Adena and Hopewell mound building cultures include figures with this particular hairstyle. One of its functions may simply be practical, corresponding to the short haircuts soldiers are used to having everywhere. Another may lie in its provocative aspect for the enemy, by sending a visual message of one's courage. There may have been a certain self-protection as well, because in giving such a minimal space for scalping, multiple scalplings may be prevented and extra injuries to the head likewise. On the other hand, there are some descriptions of how fellow tribesmen treated the survivors of scalping. According to these, some were kept as outcasts or even ghosts, and to whom a return to tribal community was prohibited. Others instead were treated with great respect, as these individuals were seen as touched by the spirits (Friedrici 1993, Nadeau 1993, Welch 1994). Anyhow, there existed a great variety of custom, attitude and ideology depending the culture area, tribe or even individuals. After all, this custom of taking scalps has been so deeply rooted in the cultural-historical ethos of the North American Indians, that it is even to be found in modern warfare. In fact, Native American soldiers and Mariners still took scalps during the both World Wars. This occurred also in the Korean, Vietnam and Gulf wars, and perhaps today in Iraq and Afghanistan as well (Welch 1994).

Bibliography

Arkush, Elizabeth N. & Mark W. Allen (eds)

2006 *The Archaeology of Warfare: Prehistories of Raiding and Conquest*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

Axtell, James & William C. Sturtevant

1986 The Unkindest Cut, or Who Invented Scalping? In: Roger L. Nichols (ed.),

The American Indian Past and Present; pp. 47–60. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Birket-Smith, Kaj

1972 *Kulttuurin tiet* 3. Helsinki: WSOY.

Case, Troy

2010 An Analysis of Scalping Cases and Treatment of the Victims Corpses in Pre-historic North America. <http://www.dickshovel.com/scalp.html> (accessed on 12 June 2010).

Denison, Simon (ed.)

2000 Origins of War: Mesolithic Conflict in Europe. *British Archaeology* 52, April Features. <http://www.britarch.ac.uk/ba/ba52/ba52feat.html> (accessed on 27 October 2010).

Dye, David H.

2009 *War Paths, Peace Paths: An Archaeology of Cooperation and Conflict in Native Eastern North America*. New York: Altamira Press.

Eller, Cynthia

2000 *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Fogelson, Raymond D. (vol. ed.)

2004 *Handbook of North American Indians*. Vol. 14: *Southeast*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution.

Friedrici, Georg

1993 *Scalping in America*. Reprint by Irocrafts Ltd. Indian Publications: Scalping and Torture. Ohsweken, Ontario. (First published in 1906.)

Fundaburk, E. L. & M. D. Foreman (eds)

1985 *Sun Circles and Human Hands*. Fairhope, Alabama: Southern Publications.

Guilaine, Jean & Jean Zammit

2005 *The Origins of War: Violence in Prehistory*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing.

Hans, Fred M.

1907 *The Great Sioux Nation: The Indians as Nature Made Them*. Chicago: M.A. Donohue and Company Publishers.

Hiltunen, Juha

2009 *Valokuva Jeesusesta? Torinon käärinliina tieteen, historian ja Uuden testamentin valossa*. Helsinki: Kirjapaja.

Hodge, Frederick Webb

1910 *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico*. 2 vols. BAE, Bulletin 30. Washington: Smithsonian Institution.

Keeley, Lawrence H.

1996 *War Before Civilization: The Myth of the Peaceful Savage*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Knowles, Nathaniel

1993 *The Torture of Captives by the Indians of Eastern North America*. Reprint by Irocrafts Ltd. Indian Publications: Scalping and Torture. Ohsweken, Ontario. (First published in 1940.)

LeBlanc, Steven A.

1999 *Prehistoric Warfare in the American Southwest*. Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press.

2003 *Constant Battles: The Myth of the Peaceful, Noble Savage*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Löfgren, Åke

1959 *Maailman suurin seikkailu*. Helsinki: Tammi.

Mannix, Daniel P.

1986 *The History of Torture*. New York: Dorset Press.

McNab, Chris

2010 *The Native American Warrior 1500–1890 CE*. Warriors of the World. New York: Amber Books Ltd.

Murphy, Eileen, Ilia Gokhman & Ludmila Barkova

2002 Prehistoric Old World Scalping: New Cases from the Cemetery of Aymyriyg, South Siberia. In: *American Journal of Archaeology* 106 (1): 1–11.

Osborn, William M.

2000 *The Wild Frontier*. New York: Random House.

Nadeau, Gabriel

1993 *Indian Scalping*. Reprint by Irocrafts Ltd. Indian Publications: Scalping and Torture. Ohsweken, Ontario. (First published in 1941.)

Richter, Daniel K.

1986 War and Culture: The Iroquois Experience. In: Roger L. Nichols (ed.), *The American Indian Past and Present*; pp. 105–26. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Scalping

nd Scalping. In: *Wikipedia*. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scalping> (accessed on 12 June 2010).

Scott, George Ryley

2006 *History of Torture Throughout the Ages*. London: Torchstream Books.

Smith, James

1812 *A Treatise of the Mode and Manner of Indian War*. Paris, KY: Lyle.

Smith, Maria O.

1991 The Earliest Scalping Victim in America. *Research Notes* 9 (1991). McClung Museum. <http://mcclungmuseum.utk.edu/research/renotes/rn-09txt.htm> (accessed on 12 June 2010).

Thwaites, Reuben Gold

1896–1901 *Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Exploration of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610–1791*. 73 vols. Trans. from French. Cleveland: The Burrows Brother Company. Computerized transcript by Thom Mentrak. <http://www.puffin.Creighton.edu/Jesuit/Relations> (accessed on 27 October 2010).

Trexler, Richard C.

1995 *Sex and Conquest*. Oxford: Polity Press.

Turney-High, Harry H.

1949 *Primitive War*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.

Ubelaker, Douglas H. (vol. ed.)

2006 *Handbook of North American Indians*. Vol. 3: *Environment, Origins, and Population*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution.

Washburn, Wilcomb E. (vol. ed.)

1988 *Handbook of North American Indians*. Vol. 4: *History of Indian-White Relations*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution.

Welch, James

1994 *Killing Custer*. Reprinted on the internet: 'Scalping, Torture, and Mutilation by Indians' (pp. 140-3). <http://www.bluecorncomics.com/scalping.htm> (accessed on 12 June 2010).

Wilbur, Keith C.

1995 *The Woodland Indians*. Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press.

Yager, Willard E.

1912 *The Onéota: The Red Man as Soldier*. New York.

Praising as bodily practice

The neocharismatic culture of celebration

When people describe their experiences, even the spiritual ones, there are often physiological components to their descriptions. The stronger the emotional effect of an event has been, the more likely it is that a person's narration of it will include a comment about having had goose bumps, or of shivering, sweating, not being able to stand still, jumping, lifting up one's arms, falling down, being swept off one's feet, and so forth. It appears that, as embodied selves, we must have bodily *feelings* to be able to claim to have *experienced* something. Material bodies also allow us to experience spiritual things (e.g. Fuller 2008). Physiological processes, such as arousal, may be involved in some aspects of religious experience, and they may be actively sought, too. However, as the psychologists of religion have indicated, within religious experience the whole story is not simply the arousal as such, but the arousal as it is *contextualised* and *interpreted*. Emotional experience, be it religious or not, requires both a physiological arousal and a cognitive framework for identifying the meanings of the feelings. Learned traditions provide the relevant cognitions, roles or models for experiencing 'the right things'. Traditions do not provide merely the context in which arousal is interpreted to be religious, but are also the source and facilitators of such an experience. (Hood *et al.* 1996: 193.)

Physiological arousal as a religious experience has been studied, for instance, in the context of healing and ecstasy in many different religious traditions. Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity in particular has provided a research field for the study of speaking in tongues as an act in which a human body is interpreted as a channel for the supernatural power (e.g. Poloma & Hoelter 1998). The question of how the body is understood, how it is experienced, and how its spiritual functions are made explicit in words, is integral to all religious experience. As Thomas Csordas has outlined it, from a phenomenological perspective, *embodiment* is the existential condition in which culture and the self are grounded and, to bring the question closer to the

grass roots of anthropology, the body can be seen as a locus of social practice (Csordas 2002: 241–2).

Meredith McGuire's study includes Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and claims that *lived religion* is based more on practices than on religious ideas or beliefs (2008: 15). Spirituality fully involves people's material bodies, not just their minds or spirits. Bodies come to be linked with spirituality through social senses and through ritual acts which restructure experiences of space and time (McGuire 2008: 118). Thus, the human material body matters very much spiritually. Embodied practices can produce both individual and communal spiritual experiences. As an example, McGuire discusses an embodied spiritual practice as intersubjectivity within a ritual of singing together. It is a practice that produces a religious experience and a sense of community, 'an apprehension of subjective experience that is mediated by conscious thought'. (McGuire 2008: 112–13.)

Rhythmic body movements and dancing, as well as singing, have also been used as a means and inspiration for both individual and communal spiritual experience throughout the history of religions. In this presentation, I will tentatively look at the contemporary neocharismatic culture of *celebration* as a means of aiming at religious experience through collective bodily practice; namely *praising*, which is generally understood to take the form of singing but is, in fact, expressed also in bodily movements such as dancing. In the neocharismatic context, a celebration means a certain type of a meeting with a special focus on contemplative worship and prayer, accompanied with lively music of praise. A celebration can also be a part of a bigger event; a conference, attended by visiting evangelists. It is often arranged with the help of a performing praise group.

First, I will very shortly outline the historical background of the neocharismatic branch. Secondly, as the main topic of this paper, I will describe the tradition of praise itself within this context. I will look what are the insider definitions and what kinds of forms praise in the culture of celebration actually includes, especially in Finland. The description is basically based on internet material and my previous field experiences in the Word of Life congregational meetings and other charismatic Christian events. In conclusion, I discuss acts of praise as a source of religious experience.

The background of the tradition

The neocharismatic movement has its roots especially in the Pentecostal healing revival, which occurred between 1947 and 1958 in the United States (e.g. Harrell 1975). Today, Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity in its numerous versions is the most expansive form of Christian religion in the world (Anderson 2004). The focus of its teaching is the doctrine of *charismata*, which are the gifts of the Holy Spirit; for example, speaking in tongues, prophesy or healing. The most characteristic features of the movement are certainly the animated meetings, where the special music of praise plays an important role among long sermons and prayers in tongues.

The most recent significant boom in charismatic Christianity which has emerged in the 1980s from the Canadian Vineyard revival is commonly called the neo-Pentecostal, or neocharismatic trend. I prefer to call it neocharismatic to differentiate it from so called classical Pentecostalism that, in the form of traditional congregations in Finland, tends to avoid the latest fashions in charismatic worship. As a matter of fact, neocharismatic Christianity is not a consistent movement, but rather includes numerous branches of culturally, socially and even individually accommodated versions. In addition to the organised local congregations, there are evangelizing organisations, as well as increasing supplies of nondenominational charismatic networks, which do not preconceive congregational membership of participants, but work in less official formations, such as home cell groups, for instance. One of the latest examples in Finland is the Vineyard Home Cell Network that also announces monthly celebrations on its website (the website of the Finnish Vineyard Home Cell Network).

Despite variations in their practices, neocharismatic communities simultaneously represent a biblical fundamentalism which is understood as a religious system of meaning that relies exclusively upon a sacred text (cf. Hood *et al.* 2005: 6, 9). The theme that all variants of the movement share is the importance of personal experience in encountering the Holy Spirit. In principle, religious virtue as a means of communicating directly with the supreme power without the mediation of a specialist is equally available to every believer, and believers are supposed to seek a personal mystical encounter with the Holy Spirit, above all by acts of praise.

Classical Pentecostalism has been represented in Finland since the early decades of the twentieth century, and today it has pretty much established its status as a church, with organized guidelines for functions. From the 1990s onwards the neocharismatic trend in Finland, with its independent local con-

gregations and evangelizing organizations has introduced its popular devotional practices also to the wider Christian field. In some cases these influences have even reached the mainstream church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, which traditionally represents an institutionalised, 'religious stiffness' to those who seek more experiential ways of 'living their religion'. For most Finns the saying 'like sitting in a church' means strict self-control: not moving in a pew, not making noise, only answering the liturgy and singing the hymns accompanied by the organist. In many traditional Evangelical Lutheran parishes, lively celebration has been regarded as disturbing, and in some cases, the problems caused by it have been solved by organizing special occasions for different interest groups; those who want to praise may have their own charismatic evenings and home cells. (Palmberg 2003.)

Strong emphasis on an individual's personal experience and openness to practical innovations links neocharismatic Christianity with the larger processes in the post-secular religious landscape. There is a certain shift away from institutionalized religion, or religion constituted mostly by its public role. Simultaneously, a growing trend is taking the form of a more or less privatized spirituality corresponding to personal needs. (Gilliat-Ray 2005: 358.) From this perspective, the rise of the charismatic movement in its various forms can be regarded as a response to the search for a more holistic spirituality within Christianity. However, another strong theme of the movement is a sense of community, its intersubjectivity between the believers who, more or less, claim to have the same personal spiritual experience.

Spirituality has various meanings, depending on the context in which it is used. Historically and etymologically, the word 'spirituality' is linked to the history of Christian theology and praxis. However, today the concept is used generically to refer to a transcendence of the assumptions of specific religious traditions, and spirituality has come to be seen as being rooted in a search, in experimentation, in questioning and exploring. (King 1998.) In her recent article, Ulrike Popp-Baier discusses different approaches to the religion–spirituality debate, and ends up criticising the definitions which link spirituality with the 'inner life', thus maintaining the mind–body dualism. Instead of drawing the line between spirituality and religion, she suggests that the psychologists of religion should look for a way of understanding spirituality as it is used by people in different contexts. (Popp-Baier 2010.) This point of view, which actually is an ethnographic approach to the phenomenon, is a useful perspective in the study of post-secular culture in general, with its starting point in ambiguity, and in particular, in the study of neocharismatic experience that contests the mind–body dualism quite explicitly.

The culture of celebration

In neocharismatic communities, worship and praise are an integral part of the meetings. Thirty minutes of praise at the beginning of a meeting is meant to create the right atmosphere for praying and receiving the biblical teaching. Rhythmic, emotionally charged and electronically amplified celebratory music is usually accompanied by collective dance and traditional praising gestures, typically the raising of hands. Music, together with dance and other forms of body language, serve as learned techniques for a believer's endeavour to achieve the experience of the Holy Spirit.

The term *celebration* in neocharismatic movements refers to a certain type of meeting that is focused particularly on collective praise and worship, which are partly the same and partly different acts. The difference between praise and worship is that joyful and upbeat songs of praise, often accompanied by dance or jumping, should lead the person towards more contemplative worship, into experiencing God's presence more deeply, so that everything else loses its meaning. For this reason, when singing the slower and more repetitive songs of worship, many participants in the meetings even keep their eyes closed in order to exclude the physical environment from their consciousness for a moment. Consequently, praising is supposed to function as a method that moves a believer to a particular state of mind: 'to hear God's talk'. In these circumstances God is also said to be able 'to heal' a person and make him or her 'whole'. The experience of getting healed or receiving power in one way or another is often described in narratives concerning acts of praise.

In some Finnish neocharismatic communities, this intensive worship is described as 'soaking in the Spirit', being completely surrounded or drowned by the Holy Spirit, as if the Holy Spirit was some kind of fluid or liquid into which one could dive.¹ Obviously, in more traditional charismatic discourse, the experience is known as 'resting in the Spirit'.

According to Mr Pekka Hautakangas, the praise leader at the Nokia Missio Church, 'worship is a way to experience and receive love between a believer and God'. It is supposed to be a private relationship, and that is why everyone may worship in his or her own personal way. As a matter of fact, private worship in everyday life is said to be the most important form of praise. Even

1 In fact, no proper Finnish word for the verb 'to soak' is used, but it is twisted into a more Finnish form as 'soukata'. It is not unique in this respect in the Finnish neo-charismatic rhetoric. For instance, the 'celebration' itself is called 'celebraatio', following or imitating the original language of the movement.

though music is an inseparable part of the collective service, it is only one way to worship. Hautakangas explains that one can worship God just as well without music, even without words. Thus, praising is said to be a way of life, not just a ritual. As another praise singer, Ms Tytti Taipale also from the Nokia Missio Church, emphasises that what counts is the right attitude; praise and worship must be ‘wholehearted’. However, typically in congregational life one worships together with other believers. In collective worship, likewise, there is said to be an enormous power in praying together. (See the praise website of Nokia Missio Church.)

As was already implied above by the praise singers of Nokia Missio, there are no strict rules for praising styles. It depends on a believer’s mood. One can sing, play an instrument, dance, laugh or cry. Some pray silently, whereas some shout for joy. Bowing or kneeling can be expressions of worship, as well as standing, jumping or raising arms and clapping hands to the rhythm. It is possible, or even preferable, that a believer’s spiritual body language does not always stay the same. Changes and variations in the movements of acts of praise belong to the idea that God liberates the worshipper from inhibitions and constricted assumptions; these being social aversions and other negative limitations in life. This is supposed to be apparent in the worshipper’s manners and appearance; in the *believer’s habitus*, his or her internalized way of being affected by biblical teaching in the community of believers. Applying a concept of the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, Simon Coleman has correspondingly described the *evangelical habitus* that the Word of Life people gradually adopt by following the example of the leaders and advanced members of the congregation in the meetings (cf. Coleman 2000: 134).

Thus, the believer’s habitus can be seen as a result of social learning process. The social psychologist Albert Bandura’s theory of social cognition is very much based on the idea of observational learning—in other words modelling—rather than learning from direct experience, through trial and error. Verbal modelling is an important source of instructive and inspirational exemplars, of course, and it is the mode of symbolic modelling, by which values, lifestyles etc. are personalized. Speaking of spiritual modelling, Bandura reminds us also of the importance of linking beliefs to practices. (Bandura 2003: 169–70.) The neocharismatic culture of celebration is a practice that typically is a result of modelling. The art of celebration is learned by means of participation, imitation and rehearsal with other believers.

Converts and other newcomers to neocharismatic communities often find it difficult at first to participate in the action-packed and fast-paced collective acts of praise. As I indicated earlier, the routine of active participation and

noisy interaction in church is not typical in Finland. In neocharismatic circles, praise as a way of life and as a ritual in a service is a prerequisite for teaching and training to become proficient in leading a believer to the expected experience. Referring to such spiritual training, the anthropologist Simon Coleman uses the bodybuilding metaphor in the context of the Word of Life community in Sweden. He says that the body actually becomes 'an index of the spiritual state of the believer'. The Christian engaged in a process of 'spiritual bodybuilding' learns not only to glean the truth from biblical and other spiritually inspired writings, but also to read the body as a text that can give an inductive proof of the power of the ingested Word, the biblical message. Coleman refers here also to the idea of the 'positive confession' in the Word of Life teaching, which means avoiding a negative attitude because it is self-actualizing. The positive confession can thus be extended beyond the realm of spoken language into embodied forms of self-presentation that demonstrate the empowerment of physical and spiritual well-being in dancing and raising hands in a collective praising situation. Acting out of a joyful state produces the desired effect. (Coleman 2006: 171.) The desired effect is, of course, well-being; a happy and healthy believer.

Today in Finland, the Nokia Missio Church may be the most outstanding representative of the neocharismatic celebration culture, with its organized performance groups, musicians, singers and dancers, in events that draw large crowds. The pioneering work of the Nokia Missio Church in that area also includes systematic praise dance teaching, with an informative praise dance website on the internet (e.g. <http://www.nokiamissio.fi/jyvaskyla/index.php/worship-dance.html>). Dance performed by specialists—praise dancers—has gained a significant role alongside sung and played worship music. The spiritual body language of a performing praise dance group is not merely individual jumping or quaking, as it often is among participants in a pew, but rather more sophisticated and rehearsed choreographies. The function of praise dancers in a meeting is to strengthen the auspicious atmosphere for meeting the Holy Spirit. I would like to refer to these performers as 'spiritual cheerleaders'. The special costumes they wear, their choreographies and brandishing of colourful flags easily give an impression of a cheerleader's role. The reason for using flags in praise is explained in the Nokia Missio Church by use of an analogy between dancers and armies in war; 'the enemy recognises the power that the flag represents'.

While performing a dance of praise, it is not insignificant what a dancer wears. The dancer's costume is also meant to support the messages she (or he) is sending in the language of movements. I have found several online shops

for dancewear in the United States, offering both praise dance garments and accessories, such as shawls and veils. The items of praise wear are named thematically as ‘angel sleeve dress’, ‘glory dress’, ‘revelation dress’, ‘rejoice dress’, ‘adoration dress’ etc., with biblical connotations.² According to the American praise dance teacher Ann Stevenson, when planning a dance performance for a meeting, choreographers should not think too much of the artistic impression. Stevenson advises:

A truly God-appointed choreographer will not create a dance out of his or her own knowledge or skill, but will prayerfully wait upon the Lord for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit for just the right music and movement (Stevenson 1998: 73).

The idea works much in the same way as pastors who are inspired to craft their sermons—waiting for the right words from God. It implies the idea that a dancer’s body and language of movements serve as an intermediary of the Word, as if it was spoken.

In addition to the performative and collectively intermediating function of praise dance, personal spiritual development can likewise be understood through the idea of bodily praising. The Finnish praise dancer, Ms Saara Taina, explains praise dance in her own terms as one of the channels by which God’s healing power can be transmitted into the lives of believers. She adds that it is a gift from God to be able to express oneself holistically, so that an individual’s spirit, soul and body are one. This comment describes well Meredith McGuire’s theorizing of religious ritual being as a chain of embodied practices presenting the human mind and body as a unity (cf. McGuire 2008: 100).

Role models for performing praise dance can be found in the United States. Just to mention one example of the flourishing praise dance scene, the *Dancing for Him Ministries* in Florida were founded in 1996 by Lynn Hayden. This is claimed to be ‘a Spirit filled, biblically based organization whose primary purpose is to minister to the body of Christ, the heart of God through creative expressions of worship, prophesy and dance’ (see the website of *Dancing for Him Ministries*). In Finland, the performance of praise dance has not, so far, become an important issue in neocharismatic meetings, except for at the Nokia Missio Church and some experimental occasions elsewhere. It

2 More praise wear fashion is easy to find in numerous praise dance videos on YouTube.

will be extremely interesting to see if performing praise dance becomes more popular in the future, as using the flags in the meetings has already. Generally speaking, dancing as a hobby in Finland is a very much a gendered practice; dance courses and studios are populated by women. Men in Finland traditionally have not expressed themselves by dancing individually; it is regarded as too feminine an activity. So, it is more or less a norm that performing praise dance is also done by women at Finnish charismatic events.

Concluding remarks

When I interviewed both male and female members of the local Word of Life congregation at the end of the 1990s I did not ask deliberately about acts of praise because I did not realise its multidimensional meanings to the believers, but understood it in rather narrow way, just as singing lively songs instead of traditional Lutheran hymns in the meetings of a community. Nevertheless, the theme that emerged in the interviews, even without asking about it was the effect of praising. The effects that were mentioned were having more courage to perform in public, being able to manipulate one's own mood and get over troublesome situations. However, after my short introductory excursion to the realm of praising now, I can see that it has several other aspects as well that are worthy of deeper analysis in the future.

To sum up the description of neocharismatic culture of celebration, praising as a bodily practice can be placed into three categories. First, there is praise and worship at an individual level of action. Private worship in everyday life can actualize without music, even without words. In this context, praising is said to be a way of life, not just a ritual. It can be integrated into daily routine activities as a silent prayer or meditation, concentrating on the divine. Secondly, praise as a collective ritual is the most characteristic form of praise in neocharismatic circles. The spiritual body language for this purpose is typically dancing in one way or another in a pew, with arms raised and, often, eyes closed. This moment of praise is led by the praise group, musicians and singers at the altar. Thirdly, I took up a relatively new form of praising in Finland, namely, the performance of praise dance, which I interpret as 'spiritual cheerleading' in a meeting. It is meant to express the power of the Holy Spirit through the bodies of the dancers. For some dancers themselves, praise dance also serves as a means of personal healing; it has therapeutic effects as a holistic practice, unifying the mind and the body.

Praise in its different forms seems to be the facilitator of a holistic spiritual experience that is dependent on how a believer understands herself as an embodied self. The Norwegian psychologist of religion, Dagfinn Ulland has analysed Toronto Blessing meetings as *bodily spirituality*. The expression of combining the body and the spirit sounds paradoxical, especially in the Christian and Western context, where there is a long history of separating these two realms from each other. Ulland explains the function of collective praise in a meeting—or the ‘warming-up sequence’, as he describes it—as being to engage people in a *somatic mode of attention*, borrowing the concept from Thomas Csordas. (Ulland 2007: 221). Consequently, acts of praise provide for a believer the capacity or preparedness to feel the expected supernatural contact. By means of intensive praising, the body becomes an instrument and an icon in the spiritual practice. However, this interpretation could not be possible without adequate knowledge of the tradition; the socially learned cognitive map of charismatic religious experience. (Ulland 2007: 222.) This process can be seen as observational learning, modelling, by practical rehearsal and following the other believers during the celebratory act.

Another point of view on these acts of praise is that of *watching* a praise dance performance, which is certainly a completely different experience from dancing by oneself. For instance, in *RistinVoitto*, a Finnish Pentecostalist magazine, there was a discussion about praise dance in May 2010. Some people who participated in the discussion in the editorial column of the magazine, reported ‘meeting God’ during the dance performance, while others, in contrast to this, felt quite uncomfortable. One of the contributors discreetly pointed out the unwanted impact of the performance situation where the dancer (female) moving her body in front of others (male) gets too much attention even though she did not want to do so. As the writer articulates it:

For some people this is quite okay but for the others it is not. For instance a man who has his own ‘Miss Universe’ by his side sees a moving body of a female dancer in a different way than a man in an opposite life situation. A congregation consists of different people who are living through different life situations. That is why body movements in front of their eyes do not improve their concentration on divine matters but rather confuses them. (Okkonen 2010.)

Thus, the writer recommends pondering on whether it is wiser to dance at home or in a congregation, during the meetings or some other time, and in front of the audience or behind the pews. An opportunity for an erotically

or sensually experienced impact of observed praise dance is undoubtedly a paradox in a conservative or fundamentalist Christian context.

I was not aware of many of the psychological and anthropological dimensions of acts of praise. After a very superficial review of this tradition, I have found out that this fascinating theme needs further investigation and much ethnographic data, both from the field itself and from the internet which today is an indispensable resource, as regards the study of neocharismatic scene. Praise as a bodily spiritual practice is also both a collectively produced and an individual experience that presupposes a learned tradition, and that is used for personally desired effects. The culture of celebration is not just the collective animated singing in the pew, but a complex set of practices, experiences, styles and embodied meanings.

References

Literature

Anderson, Alan

2004 *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bandura, Albert

2003 On the Psychosocial Impact and Mechanisms of Spiritual Modeling. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 13 (3): 167–73.

Coleman, Simon

2000 *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

2006 Materializing the Self: Words and Gifts in the Construction of Charismatic Protestant Identity. In: Fenella Canell (ed.), *The Anthropology of Christianity*; pp. 163–84. Durham: Duke University Press.

Csordas, Thomas J.

2002 *Body/Meaning/Healing*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Fuller, Robert C.

2008 *Spirituality in the Flesh: Bodily Sources of Religious Experience*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Gilliat-Ray, Sophie

2005 'Sacralizing' Sacred Space in Public Institutions: A Case Study of the Prayer Space at the Millennium Dome. *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 20 (3): 357–72.

Harrell, David Edwin, Jr

1975 *All Things Are Possible: The Healing & Charismatic Revivals in Modern America*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Hood, Ralph, Bernard Spilka, Bruce Hunsberger & Richard Gorsuch

1996 *Psychology of Religion: an Empirical Approach*. New York: Guilford.

Hood, Ralph W. Jr, Peter C. Hill & Paul Williamson

2005 *The Psychology of Religious Fundamentalism*. New York: The Guilford Press.

King, Ursula

1998 Spirituality in a Postmodern Age: Faith and Praxis in New Context. In: Ursula King (ed.), *Faith and Praxis in a Postmodern Age*; pp. 94–112. London: Cassell.

McGuire, Meredith B.

2008 *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Palmberg, Christa

2003 ”Mikä ihmeen ylistys?” *Hengellisen ylistysmusiikin olemus ja ilmeneminen Suomessa*. Unpublished master’s thesis in musicology. University of Helsinki.

Poloma, Margaret M., & Lynette F. Hoelter

1998 The ‘Toronto Blessing’: a Holistic Model of Healing. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37 (2): 257–71.

Popp-Baier, Ursula

2010 From Religion to Spirituality—Megatrend in Contemporary Society of Methodological Artefact? A Contribution to the Secularization Debate from Psychology of Religion. *Journal of Religion in Europe* 3: 34–67.

Stevenson, Ann

1998 *Restoring the Dance: Seeking God’s Order*. Shippensburg: Destiny Image Publishers.

Ulland, Dagfinn

2007 *Guds karneval. En religionspsykologisk studie av Toronto vekkelsens ekstatiska spiritualitet*. Lund: [Centrum för teologi och religionsvetenskap], Lunds universitet.

Electronic sources

Okkonen, Elias

2010 A letter to editor of *Ristin Voitto* 5.5.2010, published also in the blog *Pelastuksen polku*: <http://pelastuksenpolku.blogspot.com/2010/05/ylistystanssille-sopiva-aika-ja-paikka.html> (accessed on 14 December 2010).

The praise website of Nokia Missio Church

<http://www.nokiamissio.fi/jyvaskyla/index.php/worship-dance.html> (accessed on 22 November 2010).

<http://www.nokiamissio.fi/jyvaskyla/index.php/worship.html> (accessed on 23 November 2010)

The website of the Finnish Vineyard Home Cell Network

<http://www.viinitarha.net/> (accessed on 23 November 2010).

The website of Dancing for Him Ministries

<http://www.dancingforhim.com/> (accessed on 23 November 2010).

Finger of a saint, thumb of a priest

Medieval relics in the Diocese of Turku, and the archaeology of lived bodies

The finger of St Eric as part of Turku Cathedral's collection of relics

The collection of medieval relics and reliquaries at the sacristy of Turku Cathedral, Southwest Finland, includes a small, rectangular wrapping of light-green textile (Fig. 1). Its size is about 3 cm by 2 cm by 1 cm. The package has a 6 cm long slip of parchment attached to its side. The slip is a so-called *authentica*, which identifies the contents of the reliquary. The phrase on the parchment states, in Latin, *de digito b[ea]ti erici*, or 'From the finger of St Eric', attributing the contents to Eric IX, the King of Sweden (Rinne 1932: 369). According to a hagiography (Heikkilä 2005), Eric IX led the First Swedish Crusade and sailed to Finland in the 1150s. The king was accompanied by an English Bishop, Henry of Uppsala, who baptised the natives, and subsequently became the province's first bishop. Parts belonging to the martyred and canonized Henry are also present among Turku Cathedral's relics. In fact, the whole building was consecrated in 1300 as the Cathedral Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St Henry.

The relics of Turku Cathedral are remains belonging to the bodies of holy persons, different from ours, even today, although the cathedral is the see for the archbishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, and relics are not on public display. Among the relics of the cathedral, there is a fragment of a radius, which according to its *authentica*, belongs to St Henry. Presently the relic is deposited as an object of veneration in the Catholic Cathedral of St Henry in Helsinki. It continues the tradition established and developed during the Early Church and the Middle Ages.

In medieval studies, since the 1980s, the cult of relics has come to be seen as one of the most characteristic aspects of western Christianity (Bynum & Gerson 1997: 3–4). The veneration of relics is a vantage point from which, among others, the social construction of holiness, various responses to religious images, and the religious significance of sacred bodies have been ana-

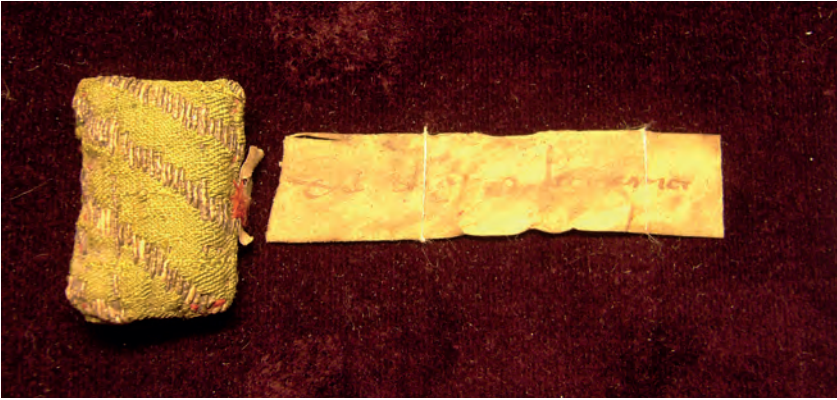


Fig. 1. A relic of Turku Cathedral is wrapped inside a textile. The size of the package is about 3 cm by 2 cm by 1 cm. A name-label of parchment associated with the relic states in Latin *de digito b[e]a[ti] erici*, or 'From the finger of St Eric', attributing the contents to Eric IX, the King of Sweden. Photo by Aki Arponen.

lysed. Relics and reliquaries were in the core of medieval piety, and the cult of saints had infused throughout the society (Montgomery 2010: 59). Due to their central position in culture, relics offer glimpses at a range of material, social and cultural phenomena related to medieval embodiment.

The archaeologist and antiquarian Juhani Rinne (1932: 398), who published the relic collection of Turku Cathedral in 1932, estimates that there are approximately thirty saints represented. He attributes some of them, besides Saints Henry and Eric, to Margaret, Benedicta, and Pancras, and the Holy Innocents, while small fragments of a stone from Gethsemane are related to Christ (Fig. 2). The assemblage also includes a relic with fragments of skull identified as belonging to St Bridget of Sweden, but the attribution remains debated, or even unlikely (Lahti 2003). However, as most of the relics and their fragments remain unidentified, it is difficult to calculate their precise number.

The material includes not only relics wrapped in textiles, but also fragments of bone, wood, textiles, paper, a bag for relics, pieces of wax seal, a medieval coin and so forth. The number of individual items in the collection reaches around 90. Yet no reliquaries of metal survive, mainly due to the confiscations of ecclesiastical property related to the transition from the Catholic to the Reformed Church during the sixteenth century. It is known from written records, though, for instance, that around the 1420s Bishop Magnus II Tavast (1357–1452) acquired precious containers for relics placed at the altar of Corpus Christi, and silver reliquaries in the shape of a head and arms for St Henry's remains from Italy (Paulus Juusten: 60).

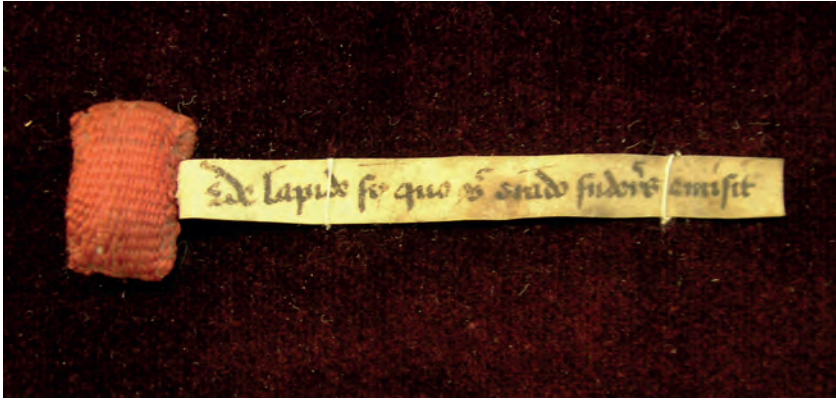


Fig. 2. The relic containing a stone from Gethsemane at Turku Cathedral. Photo by Aki Arponen.

The Department of Archaeology at the University of Turku began to study the finger relic of St Eric and other items in the assemblage of Turku Cathedral in 2007 (Taavitsainen 2009). Relics and reliquaries are being opened and documented and organic as well as inorganic samples are being taken for a range of scientific analyses. So far the project has concentrated on building a chronological chart of individual artefacts. The oldest dating, calAD 255–408 (1706±30 BP, 95.4%, Ua-40201), has been obtained from a piece of fur discovered inside the alleged reliquary of St Gertrud. Such an advanced age is exceptional, since the majority of the relics date to the fourteenth century, although much more recent datings have also been obtained. The challenge of the project is not to stop here, when a better understanding of materials, their origins and age has been accomplished, but to use the results as a stepping-stone into a study of the practices of medieval relic veneration. Medieval bodies and those material processes which authenticate relics, or distinguish saints' bodies from other human remains, are thus at the heart of the following discussion of embodiment.

Archaeologies of embodiment

The human body has been in the focus of archaeological interest since its foundation in the nineteenth century, mainly in the form of human remains, and the ornamentation and decoration of individuals. Only relatively recently, however, has the body 'as metaphor for society, as instrument of lived

experience, and as surface of inscription', as Rosemary A. Joyce (2005: 140) argues, come explicitly to occupy theoretical discussion. In its interest in embodiment, archaeology follows other disciplines studying human cultures, but according to Joyce, archaeology has three possible contributions to offer for the study of embodiment across the humanities. Firstly, by grounding its approach on the materiality of human experience, archaeology consistently emphasises physicality in its inquiry. Secondly, the particular sensitivity of the discipline on cultural repetitions and continuities over long stretches of time produces a highly unique view on the production, reproduction and transformation of bodies and embodiments. Thirdly, archaeologists, in trying to cope with the otherness created by the temporal distance, are highly aware of the gap separating the material vestiges of the bygone era from their views, and thus the discipline is potentially more aware of the violence inherent in interpreting the past.

Despite the three commonalities which archaeology as a discipline provides in outlining past bodies, archaeological approaches to embodiment are highly diverse. Joyce, nonetheless, brings out two main lines, semiotic and phenomenological, in recent approaches to the body. The former bears some proximity to descriptive and typological traditions of archaeology, since it sees the body as a scene of display and assumes a direct equivalence between specific bodily appearances—that is, age, race, gender—and previous social categories. The semiotic line distinguishes typologies of identities according to the variety of bodies appearing in archaeological material. The social is imprinted on the bodies as signs and representations, and consequently such bodies offer themselves to the readings of the contemporaries in the past as well as present-day archaeologists.

Two differing theoretical positions can be distinguished in the semiotic line (Meskell 2000). The first considers the body as a scene of display, where the discursive aspects of bodies—meaning their postures, gestures, ornamentations and representations—are in the forefront, while the second approaches the body as an artefact. Bodies as artefacts form series, or normative typologies, which function in the network of social forces, although, at the same time, they have the potential to produce and transform the same forces.

The description of the semiotic line is necessarily a simplification of the subtlety of archaeological discussions, and more recent work following its principles approaches bodies as sites of construction, not merely a reflection of material culture and the social sphere. Nevertheless, Joyce's characterisation reveals the core of the semiotic line: the focus on chains of signs inscribed on bodies and individuals, and on the movement of these signs on the surfaces

of social and discursive structures. These movements of signs and structures form individuals and set up the landscape for their actions.

The problem of such an approach, pointed out by both Joyce (2005) and Lynn Meskell (2000) (see also White 2009), is the lack of concern with the body as a site of lived experience, where corporeal practices, and idealized representations are combined and negotiated into gestures, affects, personhood, and consumption practices. Without lived and positioned bodies, the notions of agency and the body as a site of subjectivity have no point of reference, and the analysis of embodiment remains truncated.

The concept of the lived body belongs to the philosophical tradition of phenomenology. In archaeology, the phenomenological way of approaching the world and its phenomena has gathered rather notorious connotations during the recent decades. This is mainly due to the interpretative strategies practiced under its guise and particularly how they address temporal differences between the past and present. For instance, in a recent review article Benjamin Edwards voiced concern that increasing number of recent archaeological works present interpretations which advance

[e]ssentialist views of how people of the past may have ‘felt’ in particular circumstances. This is the readvancement of a discredited phenomenological agenda beneath the banner of studies of embodiment and personhood (Edwards 2010: 255).

Some of the critique of phenomenology’s tendency to present-centeredness, perhaps with a tint of narcissism, can be traced back to the reactions evoked by British landscape archaeology. Especially Neolithic monuments have been interpreted through the bodily experiences of archaeologists in a phenomenological framework. In spite of the impact which the approach has had on the development of landscape archaeology, even archaeologists situating themselves into the phenomenological tradition have criticized landscape archaeology for effacing the difference between present and past lived bodies. For instance, John C. Barrett and Ilhong Ko (2009: 280) distinguish three premises on which the phenomenologically informed British landscape archaeology is based, but subscribe only two of them. The first premise states that ‘the archaeological record cannot be understood without a human presence’, and the second that ‘the body is the medium through which this engagement occurs’. According to Barrett and Ko, in addition to the two premises, sounding almost trivial in today’s atmosphere of theoretical awareness, however, there is the third claim, that by using archaeologist’s own body as

the medium of engagement we encounter the past experience and grasp the meaning of the archaeological record as such. The bodies of past and present become, in effect, too simplistically aligned.

In their revisioning of the fundamentals of landscape phenomenology, Barrett and Ko turn to Heideggerian thought. An alternative point of entry into the phenomenology of the body is provided by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Although his earlier works display convergence with the phenomenology practiced in British landscape archaeology, his late writings, in particular, sketch out another way of understanding the aims and assumptions of phenomenology. In his last writings, Merleau-Ponty begins to re-evaluate the basis of his philosophical project, and address issues of difference and intersubjectivity, often pointed out as the key problems of phenomenological thought.

From body schema to the flesh of the world

In works such as the *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), Merleau-Ponty launched a sustained critique of the self-sufficient and detached Cartesian *cogito*. The latter considers a human subject primarily as a thinking mind, and only secondarily as a bodily presence in the world. Throughout his writings, Merleau-Ponty develops the concept of the body-subject as an alternative for this idea of a mind-subject. The notion of the body-subject, furthermore, refers to the first-person point of view in the world, though not in the sense of a modern personal or subjective individual (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 250, 405; Carman 2008: 94). Rather, the body-subject denotes that in perception the surrounding world and human body are intertwined and mutually engaged in forming a consciousness. Perception is thus a primary situation that takes place in the midst of being in the world. The body-subject has no capacity of perceiving the world before entering into it, or perceiving the world outside it.

For Merleau-Ponty, perception is essentially a dimension of being a body in the world instead of an inner subjective experience, or an external set of objective facts. Since it forms the middle ground between subjectivity and the object, inner and outer, bodily perception is passive in the sense that is based on previous experiences, it is historical; but at the same time it is an active, bodily skill. Perception enables the interpretation and transformation of the world: 'The structure of the world, which is a double moment of sedimentation and spontaneity, is at the centre of consciousness' (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 150).

The idea of bodily *sedimentation*, a concept borrowed from geology, is of particular interest for archaeology. Sedimentation describes how previous grounded bodily experiences and gestures are always present in every new posture that the body acquires. It has a kinaesthetic memory, even before conscious remembering and memorising. In archaeology, sedimentation draws attention to the ways in which patterns of repetition, whether spatial or temporal, are identified in the material record and interpreted. Another archaeologically useful concept of Merleau-Ponty's is the *body schema*, denoting how the body's sedimentation constitutes its precognitive familiarity with itself and the world, with the movements and gestures that are available to it. The body schema, like perception, lies between the body and the world. It orientates the body towards the world and provides it with the dynamic capacity to act in the world (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 114–15). The body schema is created in interaction with the world, and it exemplifies the duality of sedimentation and spontaneity.

In the late 1950s, primarily in his posthumously published *The Visible and Invisible* (1964), Merleau-Ponty began to question the underpinnings of his previous phenomenological analyses. He considered them still to function in too dualistic a framework and in the realm of consciousness. Merleau-Ponty's new insights do not necessarily mark a departure from phenomenology, but a further development of its basic attitudes (Carman 2008: 79). He, nevertheless, introduces the new concept of *flesh* to describe the common ground upon which the body and the world dwell in and emerge from. They do not form a reaction–response system, but a much more intimately integrated connection, or a *chiasm* in a single fabric of being (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 214–15). Flesh is the shared ontological condition, or ground, for the world and body: 'It is that the thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing is constitutive for the thing of its visibility as for the seer of his corporeity; it is not an obstacle between, it is their means of communication' (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 135).

Although flesh as such remains beyond naming, Merleau-Ponty characterises it with the idea of *reversibility*. The reversibility of a touching body-subject means that the act of touching is at the very same time an event of being touched by the world and other bodies. When I touch the world, it touches back as a sensation of itself and my place in it. He especially presents the act of the left hand touching the right one as a paradigm for all connections of the body with the world and other beings (Stawarska 2006: 92–3). In this co-presence of active touching and the passivity of being touched, there is a constant reversal between active and passive. But this reversibility is never complete, never the same: 'My left hand is always on the verge of touching

my right hand touching the things, but I never reach coincidence; the coincidence eclipses at the moment of realization' (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 147). This incessant escaping of touches as the same is not a failure, though, but in flesh, there is always this ontological difference, or pregnancy of possibilities between touches (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 148, 250).

The critics of phenomenology

John Carvalho (1993: 44) summarizes the impediment of which phenomenology is often accused as its claim to be a theory that unifies all experiences under one single structure of meaning and being. This erases prospects of alternative ways of being. Especially feminist and post-colonial thinkers have posed the question as to whether Merleau-Ponty's concept of flesh avoids the trap of ontological sameness. For instance, Frantz Fanon (1998) argues that phenomenological ontology conceals difference, particularly the white mythology, which has always already structured the body schema available for people of colour to be as body-subjects (Weate 2001). Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological analysis of a single lived world is simply inadequate in describing and approaching different kinds of bodies. Along similar lines, Luce Irigaray (1993) exposes the apparent gender neutrality of Merleau-Ponty's vision of the world, bodies, and the flesh in and around them. Instead of reversibility between bodies, she argues, there exists certain incommensurability, or sexual difference, between bodies, which has to be acknowledged. Beata Stawarska (2006: 92) expands Irigaray's critique and argues that his monolithic ontology effaces an even larger series of differences. The claim of the reversibility of flesh forgets that the bodies of others occupy radically different positions in the world, and thus their peculiarities cannot be simply reduced into the common flesh of the world.

Although the shortcomings of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology might appear devastating, it is noteworthy that both Irigaray and Fanon engage in a double gesture. They do criticize Merleau-Ponty for forgetting other bodies, but at the same time, they situate themselves within the phenomenological tradition and develop their own thinking through it. They bring difference into the core of phenomenological project. A similar appropriating gesture continues in Judith Butler's (2006) and Gail Weiss' (2006) re-readings of Irigaray, and Jeremy Weate's (2001) re-reading of Fanon.

According to Butler (2006), the embodied status of a body-subject installs it into the flesh of the world, but the reversibility between the seer and seen

does not mean that the latter is reducible to the former. There is always temporal non-coincidence between seeing and being seen. In fact, this temporal non-coincidence of reversibility is in the ontology of flesh. The body-subject is thus already in some sense lost, or decentred in the world. To be implicated elsewhere from the start suggests that the body-subject, as flesh, is primarily an intersubjective being. It finds itself in the midst of the world as other. The body-subject's being is part of relations that are never fully recoverable or traceable. Butler thus introduces the concept of power into the flesh. Moreover, in a similar vein, Weate (2001; see also Biernoff 2005) argues that Merleau-Ponty's notion of the body schema implicates a conception of history as difference, because cultural continuity, or the intelligibility of a culture, is based on the agency of body-subjects. These body-subjects, in turn, are sites of their own continuous differentiation. Consequently, the historical horizon of living bodies is always open to alteration, transformation and disruption.

More important than any single concept or precise methodology practiced by individual phenomenologists is the style in which the tradition approaches phenomena and writes of them. Installing oneself into a hermeneutic circularity, or to put it differently, intertwining oneself with the tradition of phenomenology is vital in order to find alternatives for conceiving embodiment as a representation or discursive construct. The lived experience and its material complexity are evasive phenomena, but are still crucial points of departure for understanding bodies, and bodily differences.

After positioning oneself within the phenomenological tradition, there remains a question of how to proceed with the analysis of medieval relics. Merleau-Ponty (1968: 136) is quite poignant in that he 'does not mean to do anthropology, to describe a world covered over with all our own projections, leaving aside what it can be under the human mask', and what is more, flesh has, according to him, no name in philosophy. Any attempts of exposing its essence deflect the analytic eye.

Although flesh as such is inhuman and in a constant state of differentiation, this still does not mean that the actions of body-subjects would not affect flesh or the ground of their emergence in the world. Inquiry into the human is not futile, but its groundedness on the inhuman, on flesh, is not to be bypassed. Flesh as the differentiating ground of the body-subject and the world divests archaeology from attempting to uncover the lived body of the past and its experience without a temporal and spatial difference. Can one even speak of *the* experience of a body? Any and all body-subjects inhabit unique positions in the world, which can be approached but not grasped and communicated without acknowledging the radical difference between them

and in them. Hence the reversibility of flesh opens up a prospect of approaching relics and medieval embodiment through the difference created, for example, in the encounter of the relics and parishioners. Through difference, it is possible to trace past trajectories of movements and intensities of action as trajectories through which the past bodies and experiences emerged.

The difference between embodiments entails also that there was never only one, homogenous conception of the body. Paul Veyne (1988) notes that in antiquity the symbolic field was Balkanized, and this was reflected in each 'mind'. In other words, every body-subject inhabited a range of modalities of belief and embodiment, which may well have excluded each other, but which still resided in the same body. The spectrum of embodiments was inhabited without conscious reflection and thinking, depending on the situations in which the bodies found themselves.

This plurality of modalities is sometimes questioned when the embodiment of the Christian Middle Ages are being scrutinized (McCarthy 2009). Indeed the majority of medieval written sources seem to evince the Christian theological conception of the body as a battleground between matter and spirit. The body bound people to a transient world of sin, pain and death, and only by transcending the body could one attain eternal life. Nonetheless, Caroline Bynum points out that there existed a cacophony of bodily discourses besides the theological one. They are exemplified by a range of texts (Bynum 1995b: 7), not forgetting the diverse folk traditions across Europe. One way of approaching the body was medical, deriving from classical medical authors, who saw the human body as being composed of four humours. Imbalances in these humours were the source of illnesses and other bodily disorders. The other, more vernacular conception of the body saw it a source of vitality, pleasure and expressiveness—something experienced abundantly in eating, drinking, sexual acts, and work. It was celebrated in such activities as hunting, and in such genres of literature as courtly romance.

The intertwining of the sacred and secular

The most obvious feature of the relics in Turku and of medieval relics in general is their fragmentary state. Peter Brown (1981: 78) has epitomized the phenomenon of relics as the one of inverted magnitudes: such tiny relics have such a great role in linking heaven and earth. Besides the small finger relic of St Eric, Turku Cathedral very likely also had the finger relic of St Henry of Uppsala, although nowadays no such item survives (Lahti 2003). After he had

arrived into the country and converted the pagans, St Henry was martyred by a Finnish farmer, Lalli, who killed him with a blow of an axe. Lalli also cut St Henry's finger off, because he wanted to get the saint's episcopal ring, but the finger, with its ornament dropped into to the snow and was lost (Heikkilä 2005: 162). In the following spring, however, a boy and blind man found the ring floating on a piece of ice. A folktale adds that at the moment the finger was found, a miracle occurred and the man recovered his eyesight (Heikkilä 2005: 160-3, 173-4, 257-9, 410-11). This event of discovery is engraved on one of the brass plaques fitted on St Henry's sarcophagus in Nousiainen Church in Southwest Finland (Fig. 3). The plaque is one of the scenes illustrating the saint's hagiography and was produced, as was the whole monument, in Flanders in the 1420s.



Fig. 3. The miraculous discovery of St Henry of Uppsala's finger as engraved on one of the 1420s brass plaques fitted on the saint's sarcophagus in Nousiainen Church in Southwest Finland. Photo: Edgren & Melanko 1996: 43.

The art historian Lena Liepe (2003: 127) indicates the size of the depicted finger. It is as big as the crow beside it, or even larger than the two men in a rowing boat. She explains the finger's proportions by its value in the medieval relic cult. Any part of a saint's body acquired a significant status, because the holy person continued to influence the world through her or his bodily remains, regardless of their size. 'When the body is divided', the fifth-century father of the church Theodoret of Cyrus states, 'the grace remains undivided' (Bentley 1985: 95). Like Christ, who was in his complete presence in each and every consecrated Eucharist host, the relics were the saint *pars pro toto* (Geary 1990: 39; Montgomery 2010: 59). Thus even the tiniest piece of the body had the entire presence (*praesentia*) of the saint.

Relics had a special power, *potentia* or *virtus*, conferred by God to saints alone. This power was revealed by distinct physiological signs (Snoek 1995: 11; Vauchez 1997: 36, 427–8). The saint's flesh was incorruptible and beyond deterioration or degeneration. After their death, the body tissue of holy persons became as soft as that of a child. It also emitted the odour of sanctity, the pleasant scent of God's anointed. The souls and bodily remains of saints, and even the objects with which they were in contact, were through and through imbued by *virtus*. Hence closeness and bodily contact with relics was a fundamental element in approaching them. Relics, parts of human flesh, secured a palpable and thoroughly human connection with the saints and sacred (Brown 1981: 61, 68).

In principle, all fragments of a saint were equally important and drenched in sanctity, but there were theological classifications of relics according to their wholeness (Bentley 1985: 51–2). *Reliquare insignes* included, if not the whole body, at the minimum its head, arms and legs, while *reliquare non insignes* were individual limbs. The latter ones could be further distinguished either as *notabiles*, or hands and feet, or as *exiguae*, referring to fingers and teeth. The preference for certain parts of the body is also visible in the surviving reliquaries of the so-called speaking type. They are metallic containers which speak or express the body part underneath. Caroline Bynum and Paula Gerson (1997: 4–5) note that most popular of them are heads and arms, 'the most expressive and communicative parts of our bodies'. Also fingers could be added to the list (Trumble 2010: 69–70). Heads, arms, and fingers occupied an emphasised position in the liturgy and cult, for instance, as the body parts used for making the sign of the cross. Bynum and Gerson remind that many of the body-part reliquaries, in fact, did not contain the body part they imitated. Instead their shapes seem to have depended more on the referentiality of certain body parts and the function of each reliquary, not on its contents.

The divine character of the relics and saints' bodies is mirrored in the profane body and in the effects of its dismemberment. About 1495, Paulus Scheel, who worked as the canon of Turku Cathedral, and the secretary of the Bishop of Finland, was returning by ship with his employer from the east to the episcopal residence, Kuusisto Castle near Turku. To signal their arrival at the castle, the bishop ordered Scheel to fire a bomb (*bombarda*), or a weapon of some sort. As a man of the church, Scheel apparently was not very accustomed to using such items, and the action cost him his thumb. The documents of the event and its aftermath (FMU 4781, 4782, 4783), however, do not focus on the pain of losing a body part, or even the physical difficulties it must have caused, but on the judicial obstacle which it posed for Scheel's clerical career. According to Canon Law, a man with abnormalities in his body was unfit to serve Mass and thus to act as a priest (Salonen 2003).

The severed body of Paulus Scheel threatened his vocation as a priest and his professional career in the diocese. The missing thumb subsequently put his position in the network of the medieval society at stake. This forms a stark contrast between profane and sacred bodies. Such a situation resembles Mircea Eliade's (1959: 14) phenomenologically grounded thoughts on the sacred and profane as two modes of being in the world. In the pre-modern period, he argues, the sacred, saturated with being, was equivalent to power, to reality. The sacred constituted a space of significance and vitality, while the profane spaces unfolded around it as formless expanses without structure and consistency. In this divided world, hierophany denotes the manifestation of the other mode of being in the mundane. It is a fixed point which breaks the homogenous space of the profane and provides an orientation for lived bodies. Moreover, Eliade describes objects of hierophany as ordinary things which become something else, yet continue to remain themselves. These objects, like relics, participate in both modes of being, and establish a passage from the profane to sacred.

Anthropologist Maurice Godelier (1999: 171–9), in an argument based on Marxist dialectics, conceives the relationship between the sacred and profane in an opposite light. He concurs that the sacred is a certain relationship with the origin of things, but this relationship replaces real humans with their imaginary replicas, imaginary forces. 'The sacred can appear only if something of human beings disappears' (Godelier 1999: 171). This means that humans as active body-subjects, as social beings, have to fade away to enable them to become objects to be acted upon. Hence this relationship inverts the structure of cause and effect, and divests humans of their agency. It creates the body of powerlessness, which desires for mediated agency and claims to open itself to the intercessory agency of God and the saints (Clucas 2000: 115–16).

The approaches of Eliade and Godelier seemingly exclude each other, and consequently present diametrically opposed notions of the sacred. They nevertheless share the idea of a division separating the sacred from the profane and establishing a desire to overcome the two modes of being. The sacred manifests itself as hierophany in the person or event acting as an intercessor between the two orders. Eliade, however, does not analyse the constitution of the sacred; it remains a given, whereas Godelier follows it back to the profane, to the body-subject whose agency is removed from the sacred.

Instead of overcoming the difference between Eliade and Godelier, however, the present article will focus on the bodies which the reversibility between the two modes of being bring forth. The flesh of the world is the ground from which both these varieties of bodies emerge and which allows the communication between the sacred and profane. Lastly, the flesh denotes something shared, though inverted, in these embodiments, a quality which can be expressed with Merleau-Ponty's term *chiasm*. The significance of chiasm in the following analysis can be clarified with the manner in which it is formulated in linguistics (Butler 2006): chiasm is the application of two or more clauses that are related to each other through a reversal of structures. An example of chiasm is the phrase from the Bible: 'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed' (Gen. 9:6). Chiasm is a structural inversion and repetition of grammatical elements, which produces a difference in meaning. In the case of relics, the bodies of the devotee and holy persons establish a chiasmic relationship.

Traces of alternative cult practices, and the body–house–cosmos homology

Theological views of the saintly body allowed various experiences of embodiment, and even more importantly, co-existed with a range of conceptions of the body. Many medieval texts outside Finland, for instance, provide ample evidence of highly differing responses to relics and reliquaries, from fear to familiarity (Bynum & Gerson 1997: 5). In Finland, the scantiness of written sources hampers possibilities of approaching the whole variety of conceptions of the body, since even most of the ecclesiastical cult practices have to be reconstructed on the basis of sources and secondary literature from other parts of Europe. This probably overemphasises the homogenous theological cult of the relics. Nonetheless, the relics of Turku Cathedral were for the most part in the hands of the Church and controlled by the ecclesiastical administration.

The cult and its development probably followed the theological and dogmatic views or at least were conditioned by them. Yet a few glances at a vernacular and somewhat unorthodox cult of relics can be seen in the continuing tradition of their veneration (for the Lutheran view of the cult of relics, see Hirvonen 2004).

The survival of the relics in Turku Cathedral in the first place is one symptom of an unorthodox continuity. In the sixteenth century, after the Reformation was launched in the kingdom of Sweden, the relics and their reliquaries of textile remained in the cathedral. Some of them were placed in the late-medieval wooden casket traditionally attributed to the Blessed Hemming, which has been kept in the cathedral throughout the centuries (Fig. 4). The items lay deposited inside the casket until the twentieth century. The rest of the relics were found in a bricked-up recess in the sacristy wall in 1924 (Fig. 5), when the cathedral underwent a thorough restoration. Juhani Rinne (1932), director of the restoration, suggests that the recess was not sealed until as late as the early nineteenth century, after which their existence was forgotten.

Another hint of continuing cult practices are the ruins of the Chapel of St Henry on Kirkkoluoto Islet in Köyliönjärvi Lake, West Finland (Salminen 1905, Ahl 2005). According to the oral tradition, the chapel was founded by



Fig. 4. The late-medieval wooden casket traditionally attributed to the Blessed Hemming is on display at Turku Cathedral. Photo by Visa Immonen.



Fig. 5. The sacristy of Turku Cathedral. Part of the relic collection was found in a bricked-up recess in the wall in 1924. The recess, which now has a fitted wooden door, is the furthest one from the camera. Photo by Visa Immonen.

St Henry of Uppsala himself. The site was quite clumsily excavated in the early twentieth century, but the finds nevertheless include medieval artefacts: a pilgrim badge, fragments of window glass, a gold ring, and coins from the first half of the fifteenth century onwards (Hiekkanen 2008: 157–8). Interestingly, a significant portion of the coins were minted as late as the eighteenth century. They have been interpreted as offerings made by locals to St Henry long after the official end of the relic cult.

Admittedly, the two examples of the continuation of Catholic cult practices or, at least, of the appreciation of the old tradition after the Reformation do not reveal non-ecclesiastical, alternative practices of the Middle Ages. However, there survive traces of a practice which did not conform with Christian views held during or after the medieval period. The long-lived custom of depositing a gift in the foundation of a house, usually in the form of artefacts or animal remains, is attested to in the Nordic countries. In Finland, Sonja Hukantaival (2007) has identified nine medieval houses with such deposits, sixteen houses from the seventeenth and eighteenth century, and nineteen houses built in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. No pre-Christian Late Iron Age deposits are known from the country, probably because so few houses from the period have been excavated, but Ann-Britt Falk (2006, 2008), who has stud-

ied the same phenomenon in Southern Scandinavia, detects an uninterrupted continuation from the pre-Christian to the modern period. Because there was no real break in the tradition, Falk considers building deposits as a highly dynamic and adaptable practice. In fact, the clergy seems to have been rather indifferent to them. There are no medieval written sources claiming such deposits as being either heresy or acceptable in the eyes of the church.

Falk paraphrases a legion of scholarly interpretations of the practice. According to ethnographical sources, the custom was a means of bringing good luck to the household, or guarding the house against evil, while the pre-Christian practice has been seen as an agricultural fertility ritual. Such deposits have, moreover, been considered as offerings made in order to manipulate supernatural forces, or as ways to transform the house from an entity of nature into a cultural thing. Falk (2008: 60) does not refute these interpretations, but shifts her attention from symbolic concerns to an analysis of depositing as an activity. She argues that the deposits were indeed ritual acts, and thus significant, but not necessarily religious at all. The deposited artefacts are often household utensils or personal items, not objects with particularly religious connotations.

In a similar vein, Hukantaival (2007) approaches pre-modern and early modern buildings as physio-social units with boundaries, which were in need of reinforcement against malicious agents and deeds. Deposits were often laid in the horizontal and vertical outer perimeters of the house, in other words, at its concrete and symbolic borders. They thus played an important role in the maintenance of boundaries. Vesa-Pekka Herva (2010) goes on to argue that houses were person-like structures, and consequently in a need of continuous nurturing, which included strengthening them with deposits. Deposits were part of establishing reciprocal relations between people and buildings. This suggests an ontology in which the lines between animate and inanimate, as well as human and inhuman are drawn differently than in the modern period. Consequently, following these lines, the experience of a lived body is necessarily constituted differently.

Through Herva's interpretation of houses as person-like and deposits as gift-like relational phenomena, there seems to emerge a homology which Eliade (1959: 30, 32, 57, 172–9) calls as the body–house–cosmos. According to him, because the body-subject is open to the world, through that openness it has the potential to communicate with gods. Dwellings and houses are similarly microcosmic sites, which communicate with the cosmos aligning with it. The consecration and simultaneous delineation of a territory, a building, or a body, is the repetition of a cosmogony, equivalent to turning them into a cosmos, setting their borders and giving them a meaningful structure.

From this perspective, building deposits appear as a parallel or reversible case to the creation and maintenance of bodily borders.

House deposits emphasise the importance of connecting the analysis of body-subjects and their borders with other kinds of material thresholds and divisions. Body-subjects inhabit spaces which echo and enforce the making of bodily differentiations and divisions. Sacred bodies as material entities also share spaces and the flesh of the world with profane bodies. This is the bodily condition for their communication. However, the body–house–cosmos homology in the form revealed by the house deposits is not directly applicable to the embodiments related to the cult of relics. Although the deposition of house gifts and the relic cult are chronologically simultaneous phenomena, which appear to be structurally congruent, and were possibly practiced even by the same people, they represent two different traditions and orders of embodiment. Having said that, however, the possibility of the same body-subject emerging through both of these different orders, and perhaps living one through the other cannot be excluded.

The sacred and secular bodies at the point of disintegration

Among the finds from the chapel of St Henry in Köyliö, as mentioned, there is a fifteenth-century finger ring of gilt silver (Immonen 2009b: Cat. 23:21). Its engravings and use provide further insights into the relations between secular bodies and medieval relics. The ring has a circular disc, c. 1 cm in diameter, mounted on its bezel. The disc has the engraved face of suffering Christ, a popular medieval motif referring to the cloth of St Veronica on which his face was imprinted during the passion. The cloth with the ‘true image’, or *vera icon*, is a relic venerated at the St Peter’s Basilica in Rome, but copies of it were spread to every corner of Christian Europe during the Middle Ages.

The vernicle motif engraved on the disc is not a relic, but a depiction of one. Relics were also worn, however, as part of personal jewellery during the Middle Ages (Immonen 2009a: 187). In Finnish written sources, there are two references to privately owned reliquaries. The first is a ‘silver chain with a reliquary’, which Henrik Klasson Dieken bequeaths to the nunnery of Naantali in his wills dated 1449 and 1452 (FMU 2817, 2908). The other reliquary, attached to a silver chain, in addition to three silver belts and undefined object copper, was given to Peder Eriksson in 1477, when he sold a farm to the bishop (FMU 3688). It is conceivable that the reference to a chain indicates that the two reliquaries were also attached to a belt or dress. Whether

this was indeed the case or not, the phenomenon of private relics in the Middle Ages, and their close relationship with profane bodies nevertheless emphasises the intertwining of sacred and profane bodies and their borders.

There are altogether eight such so-called vernicle rings known from Finland (Fig. 6) (Immonen 2009a: 277–81). Although the Finnish examples do not have engraved magical formulae or invocations to holy persons, their parallels in other Nordic countries and Central Europe do. Rather typical is the formula *Caspar (or Iaspar) Melchior Balthasar* referring to the Three Magi (e.g. Hammervold 1997: 65, 124), and associated with epilepsy and its cure. Other formulae were also resorted to in the search for protection for the wearer's body, especially against sudden flows of blood (Kolsrud 1943: 160–75). The meaning of another formula, *buro berto beriora* (e.g. Buchholtz 1892: 24; Lexow 1955: 81) remains obscure. It appears to be nonsensical Latin, but Olof Kolsrud (1943: 168) suggests that the beginning *ber-* is related to the name *Βερενίκη/Berenice/Veronica* (see Solin 2000). Veronica and the vernicle motif have a connection, in turn, with the medieval cult of the Holy Blood. In medieval tradition, St Veronica was associated with the anonymous woman, mentioned in the Bible (Matt. 9:20) and cured by Christ of the flow of blood, which she had suffered for twelve years. In addition to the vernicle, other motifs typical for late medieval finger rings—a garland with five flowers referring to Christ's five wounds, the *Arma Christi*, heart, and Golgotha scene—can also be associated with blood and the cult of the Holy Blood.

Olof Kolsrud (1943: 188–93; cf. Hildebrand 1884–98: 417–18) states that since ancient times, the finger upon which the ring was put was important. The *digitus medicus*, or the ring finger on the left (or right) hand was very significant, since it was considered to have a nerve or vein leading straight to the heart. Carl af Ugglas (1951: 191–5) connects the *digitus medicus* belief to the heart symbolism present in the late medieval rings. The use of magical rings on the ring finger made them transmitters of a sort with a direct line into the core of the user's soul. The devotional dimension of finger rings can be thus connected with the medical belief that there was a direct physiological link between the ring finger and the heart.



Fig. 6. A fifteenth-century vernicle finger ring of gold found in Ulvila. Photo by Visa Immonen.

The prevention of cramps and especially bleeding appears rather a tame reason for using such powerful devices as the religious symbolism present in finger rings. This disproportion can be explained, however, by the medieval notion of an enclosed body. According to Bettina Bildhauer (2006: 69–70), although medieval attitudes towards the body were fluid in comparison with modern ones, the integrity of the body still concerned people. The corporal incoherence, however, should not be understood in terms of any actual danger to life and health, but rather as a transgression of the body's boundaries. In many European legal systems a bleeding scratch was deemed more serious than concussion, because it meant a danger to the conception of the body as always enclosed. Moreover, the popularity of maces as weapons of war was justified by the avoidance of bleeding wounds without compromising the lethal outcome. Any bleeding was a terrible threat, a transgression of the rigid, but vulnerable limits of the bounded body. In a similar, though reverse way, the focal position of the Eucharist and the suffering body of the Christ in medieval culture exemplified the anxiety invested in the violated boundaries of the body. Scheel's missing thumb, its abnormality, also transgressed the idea of a unified body, although, at the same time, the orders of Canon Law are explained by highly practical concerns of performing liturgical and clerical duties.

The chiasmic structure between holy and secular bodies is repeated also in the realm of smell. The vile odour of death, of corpses, never touched saints. Instead, relics emitted, as an indication of their holiness, the sweet scent of sanctity (Bentley 1985: 196–7). Profane smells, in contrast, potentially constituted a threat to the integrity of the body. The plague and other diseases were thought to spread as stench. Scents had thus significance, and people such as Thomas Aquinas were sensitive to them when describing the motives for using censers during the liturgy: one reason was theological; the incense symbolizes the elevation of the soul towards God in the form of rising smoke, and the other reason was practical, as the scent obscured the foul odours of the gathered people (Lilja 1978: 140).

Both relics and ordinary corpses share the horizon of death; the moment when the body breaks down and its borders collapse. Their fate after the event were, however, very unlike. In the late medieval theology, body and soul were intimately related to the extent that one's soul was depicted and described as a corporeal entity. In a way, the soul was somatised, and conversely the body was an integrated part of an individual. The holy and the ordinary were crucially their bodies, not only their souls. In this concept of self, physicality was integrally bound to sensation, emotion, reasoning, identity, and ultimately to salvation. At the moment of death, however, soul and body parted. The

corpse became a source of contamination. The opening of graves, or handling of remains of the dead was abhorrent. Hence the remains of the dead were normally quickly and definitively disposed through burial. The wages of sin were, after all, death, the fragmentation and disintegration of one's profane body (Bynum 1995a: 186–99, 291–305).

As Scott B. Montgomery (2010: 59) points out, the saints were 'very much alive, cognizant, and interactive' in their relics. At the same time, the cult of relics crucially involved the transformation of a mundane corpse into a holy body. Although, when speaking of relics, it might seem self-evident that they are pieces of *dead* bodies, it is important to acknowledge that relics are indeed dead and *therefore* active. The transformation from a living body to a dead body was vital for saints' body parts to function as relics, as entities with agency. An extreme indication of the death's importance was the danger that holy persons could face—the danger of been murdered by someone wanting to extract a relic (Geary 1986: 177).

Caroline Bynum (1995a) argues that the fear of disintegration of one's worldly body was the reason why it was important to depict saints unaffected by their physical torments, whether due to the violence or asceticism. Their bodies were kept intact by faith. In ecclesiastical art, saints, especially women, were represented in highly stereotypical fashion which expressed eternal and unblemished beauty corporeally. The cult of relics was consequently a sort of physical rehabilitation of holy bodies. According to Peter Brown (1981: 78) the detachment of the relic from its original physical associations, in fact, reveals the imaginative dialectic of saintly bodies, and the way in which their continuous existence suppress the fact of death.

With a slight shift in emphasis, Karmen MacKendrick (2010) considers relics, not so much as instances of overcoming bodily fragmentation, but rather as sites of multilocation. The relics of a saint are partaking in the singular incorruptibility of soul and thus the same body could be spatially scattered. The wholeness of relics lay in the multiplication of their presences, not as reunification into one body. This helps to understand, as MacKendrick suggests, why in the Middle Ages there was such a disregard for the proper provenance of individual relics, and why there could be multiple versions of the same body part belonging to a single saint.

Eliade (1959: 25–7) writes that there exists a boundary, threshold of some kind that distinguishes and opposes the two modalities of the sacred and profane. It is that paradoxical space where those worlds communicate, and a passage from one to the other becomes possible. He describes it as 'the solution of continuity in space immediately and concretely', and argues that there is often

a desire for the emergence and discovery of such a site of hierophany. This place emerges through signs of sacredness. 'When no sign manifests itself, it is provoked', Eliade concludes.

As a sign hierophany has fundamentally a material and social dimension, and thus it is also a phenomenon of the flesh, of the ground upon which body-subjects dwell. The relics as bodies have to attract intelligibility, or in other words, they have to be recognized as bodies. This leads to the question which Montgomery (2010: 60) aptly poses: how is the power and status of relics as relics recognized? His answer is the reliquary image, which 'fleshes-out the accepted truths about the relics, giving them form'. He reminds us, however, that the relic and the image cannot work without each other. The relic needs the image to make its meaning visible, while the image is powered by the bodily remains of the saint. It is undoubtedly true that medieval relics needed images in order to perform their devotional task, but diverging from Montgomery, the crux does not lie so much in the duality between relics and images, but in that which they share, namely their materiality. Through materiality, through material bodies, relics acquire their position and affective properties in the cult. Here archaeological emphasis on material practices makes an important contribution to the study of medieval relics.

Communal acceptance as a material process

Any special corpse which emitted signs of the sacred had to be recognized as such in order to become a venerated relic. The classification of a body part as a relic acknowledged its agency and potential to engage in social practices (cf. Gilchrist 1997: 46). The recognition or acceptance that each relic required was always made communally. Again the relic was caught in a chiasmic structure where its existence required an accepting community, but on other hand, this community and its collective memory was partly formed through the act of recognition. The possession of a saint's relics unified communities (Brown 1981: 90–103), like the bones of St Henry of Uppsala, who was the patron saint of Turku Cathedral and the whole diocese, and who inspired long-lived local oral traditions.

The authentication of a body part as a relic was an issue that frequently preoccupied clergy and laymen. Patrick Geary (1986: 175–6) identifies three interrelated beliefs required for the communal acceptance of relics. Firstly, during the saint's life and after her death, the individual had to have a special connection with God, manifested through her actions. Secondly, the corpse or

its body part had to be authenticated as belonging to a particular saint. Thirdly, the remains of such a person were to be prized and treated in a special way.

The recognition of a relic involved a formal ceremony called *inventio*. It was carried out by assessing the relic candidate, and evaluating whether it met the extrinsic and intrinsic standards for a true relic (Geary 1986: 176). The extrinsic criteria involved the formal processes of investigating the tomb or reliquary and an examination of *authenticae* documents. Internal criteria denoted the miracles the saint performed after her death. The saint usually indicated where the body parts were to be found, and during the authentication process, she showed by supernatural interventions that the remains were indeed genuine. If its results were affirmative, the relic was presented for public veneration in a ritual known as *elevatio*, and when relic was moved from a location to another, a *translatio* took place involving a series of formal ceremonies and possibly a procession.

Two instances of relic transportation have been recorded in the written sources related to the Diocese of Turku (Klockars 1960). In 1493, the Bishop Magnus Stjernkors wrote a letter to the Archbishop of Nidaros (Trondheim, Norway), and requested for relics of St Olaf, which were needed for many churches consecrated to the saint in the diocese (FMU 4505). In return, he offered some relics of St Henry of Uppsala. Five years later in 1497 the Pope granted permission for Hemmingus (1290–1366), Bishop of Turku, to be venerated as blessed (*beatus*) (FMU 4759, 4829). This was a step towards his canonization. However, Hemmingus's remains were moved from his tomb to a reliquary in a grand ceremony in Turku as late as 1514 (FMU 5714, 5715). In the same year, a bone from his left arm was transported to Stockholm in a festive procession (FMU 5736). Although the process of canonizing Hemmingus came to halt due to the Reformation in the 1520s, the multilocalisation of his remains had already started before that.

The communal acceptance of relics was not limited to these ceremonial events of heightened public attention. It was crucially also a continuous material process in which relics were framed and made into objects of veneration. The presentation of a relic was a concrete manifestation of, and support for, communal acceptance. An obvious aspect of this process was the placing of relics into sumptuous reliquaries. The relic containers of precious metals have vanished from Turku Cathedral, although, for instance, the stone of Gethsemane has traces of silver mixed with tin and gold on its surface. They are probably left by a reliquary in which the stone was at some point stored. Nevertheless, the ostentatious wrappings around the relics, made of imported luxurious silks and gold brocades, still echo the sumptuousness of their pres-

entation. The use of valuable materials follows the same idea as ecclesiastic art, where saints were depicted as physically impeccable. Moreover, in the medieval representations of human figures and their particular identity, the social position was communicated primarily through dress and dress accessories (Liepe 2003: 58).

As Montgomery (2010: 60) shows, pictorial narratives in reliquaries gave further support for authentication. Such visualisations are lacking in the assemblage of Turku, with one notable exception (Fig. 7). The skull relic of St Henry or St Eric—the attribution is disputed (Lahti 2006)—is wrapped in Chinese red silk damask with an embroidered figurative scene. Here a knight stands wearing chainmail and holding a sword. He has cut off the head of a kneeling man with hands raised in prayer. The head lies on the ground between the two men. The saint has just been martyred. Placed in front of the skull's face, the pictorial scene weaves together the narrative of martyrdom with the bones underneath the silk. In effect, the relic and its reliquary form a highly expressive entity.

Another indication of the authentication process in the collection of the cathedral might be the mysterious fragments of wax seals. They are rather poorly preserved, and although their appearance is medieval, the fragments cannot be identified or attributed to any person or institution. Similarly it is not apparent, why they have been kept with the relics. On the basis of the aura of seals as identity technology *par excellence*, however, it can be suggested that their presence in the collection supported in a way or another the authentication and authorisation of the relics.

The results of scientific datings of the relics develop further the idea of an on-going process of authentication. The assemblage has the relic of the Holy Innocents, or the young male children who, according to the Gospel of Matthew (2:16–18), Herod the Great ordered to be massacred so as to get rid of the newborn King of the Jews. The relic in Turku comprises a bone wrapped in textile and a slip of parchment attached to them. Altogether four samples have been obtained from the materials. The results reveal that the bone itself is from the tenth century (1080 ± 31 BP, 95.4%, Ua-39383), while the surrounding textile (565 ± 37 BP, 95.4%, Ua-38642) and the *authentica* (563 ± 34 BP, 95.4%, Ua-38643) date back to the fourteenth century, and the thread used to stitch them to the fifteenth or sixteenth century (428 ± 33 BP, 95.4%, Ua-38273). Similarly differing dates have been acquired from the other relics of the assemblage. This is an indication how the relics have been continuously taken care of and freshened up over the centuries.

A closer examination of St Eric's finger relic revealed that the textile wrapping does not contain any kind of bones at all, but instead a piece of black textile. The textile (575 ± 30 BP, 95.4%, Ua-37859) and the thread (560 ± 30 BP, 95.4%, Ua-37853) date to the fourteenth century, while the parchment is from the eleventh to thirteenth century (881 ± 36 BP, 95.4%, Ua-38647). There are several ways of interpreting the situation, but perhaps most likely option is that an erroneous parchment slip was added to the wrapping at some later period. In multispectral filming, where parchments were exposed in various light spectra, the *authentica* of the relic did not reveal palimpsests or other signs of reuse, but still the slip is older than the wrapping around the relic. This could be read as supporting the idea of a wrong *authentica* being attached to the relic at some point in time.



Fig. 7. The skull relic of St Henry of Uppsala or St Eric of Sweden at Turku Cathedral is wrapped in Chinese red silk damask with an embroidered figurative scene. Photo by the Turku and Kaarina Parish Union.

Chiasms of corporeality

The material intricacies of medieval reliquaries, and the multilocational spatiality of relics would have remained muted without encountering the body-subjects or the devotees. In Turku, these encounters took place in the cathedral, a sacred space, where the body in all its aspects was given a central position. The immediate situation of the devotion was a bodily event, but even such turning points of one's life as baptism, marriage, and burial took corporeal form in the confines of the church (Liepe 2003: 87). Spaces orientate bodies, or rather encourage them to make particular postures and gestures. In a sacred place, these bodily stances organize the relations between the profane and sacred, and enable communication with the other mode of being (Clucas



Fig. 8. A reliquary cross, found in the medieval altar of Föglö Church. The piece is c. 6 cm in height and made of gilt silver in the early sixteenth century. Photo by Visa Immonen.

2000: 116). Stephen Clucas (2000: 115–16) describes this bodily constitution of a sacred space as translation of the body: the lived body and its desire for an invulnerable soul are articulated spatially and translated into space.

The exact presentation of the relics in Turku Cathedral is poorly known due to the lack of adequate sources. Nevertheless, much of their positioning can be discerned from general medieval ecclesiastical practices. Some of the relics were hidden and walled into

a small cavity, *sepulcrum*, made in the body of an altar. In this way altars become the resting places of saints, and Masses were concretely celebrated on the tombs of martyrs. Sepulchral reliquaries could be made by folding undecorated sheets of lead around the valuable contents, as with the remains of a sepulchral reliquary found in the excavations of Finström Church (Immonen 2008), while some of them were elaborately produced works. One such sumptuous piece is the early-sixteenth-century reliquary cross of gilt silver with a figure of Christ, found in the altar of Föglö Church (Fig. 8). The reliquary contained the relic of St Mary Magdalene (Immonen 2009b: Cat. 10:1). The contrast between the sepulchral reliquaries of Finström and Föglö show that the reliquaries not intended to be seen by the parishioners and clergy were not necessarily visually less impressive than those produced as objects of visual devotion.

Many of the relics at Turku Cathedral were placed inside impressive reliquaries, some of them shaped as arms and heads, to be seen and perhaps even touched by visitors. These reliquaries were distributed on the altars of various saints or special shrines. The number of medieval altars in the cathedral was at least 30, but perhaps over 40, although these figures include all references to altars regardless of temporal fluctuations (Rinne 1948: 2–3; Hiekkänen 2007: 206). The basic plan of the cathedral was an elongated rectangle. The

numerous chapels were placed along each of its long sides. This rather typical west–east scheme of a late-medieval church suggests certain lines of movement for approaching and departing from the altars and chapels.

All of the senses were engaged in establishing the sacred space of the cathedral. It was scented by humans as well as incense, and perhaps by the odour of sanctity. Also visually, through lighting and works of art, the cathedral was distinguishable from profane spaces. Here visitors were faced with the remains of saints, or, to be more precise, the reliquaries in which they were deposited, since in 1215 the Fourth Lateran Council decreed that relics were not to be displayed outside their containers (Herrmann-Mascard 1975: 214–16, 348–9). Particularly body-part reliquaries were like an epidermal layer over the saint's body, facilitating the conflation between the bodily presence of saints and their representations (Montgomery 2010: 60). They encouraged a sensory contact with the sacred.

Both the body-subject and the relic lived in the flesh of the world, but this series of bodies and body parts emerged in the situation very differently, although they all shared the reversibility of the flesh and the communicativeness that it enabled. Relics dwelled in the two modes of being, and were thus spatially multilocalized and sources of *virtus* in this-worldliness. By entering the cathedral, profane bodies sought to connect with them, perhaps through the gestures of kneeling and praying, or by lifting and focusing their eyes to the relics, or closing them (see e.g. Hayes 2003).

The encounter with relics was an encounter with invulnerable otherness, while, in contrast, the profane body was established as spatially bounded and vulnerable. The three fingers mentioned; Scheel's secular thumb, and the sacred fingers of Saints Henry and Eric, constitute three human body parts representing these various positions available for embodiment. Together they provide highly differing views of medieval bodies, and reveal the ways in which the boundaries between various bodies were drawn. They also bring forth a range of material processes affecting bodies and body parts. In the face of this complexity and in respect to the maintenance of bodily relations and borders, the vernacular tradition of house deposits is a congruent phenomenon. Nevertheless, such deposits belong to a different bodily order, which diverges from relics both chronologically and institutionally.

Scheel's accident exemplifies the vulnerability of an ordinary human. Such a fragile body could be protected from the fearfully uncontrollable discharges of blood, for instance, with the means of finger rings and other private objects. In them, piety and the desire for invulnerability is present and tangible through the use of pictorial motifs, and their positioning on bodily surfaces.

Lastly, the case of Scheel shows flexibility in approaching bodily abnormalities. After applying a special permission from the Pope, Scheel was eventually granted a dispensation to continue as a priest (Salonen 2003). It appears that certain bodily injuries could be accommodated into the social fabric without severe consequences.

Sacred bodies had a corporeal existence and consequently they participated in the materiality of the world. The finger of St Eric, revealed by new studies to be misidentified, was an element in the tangible practices of authentication and their particular ways of treating and presenting relics. Scientific datings have also contributed to the understanding of the temporal dimension of the material processes affecting the relics. The tiny relics and their wrappings show centuries of careful upkeep and resuscitation. The smallness of bodily remains forms a stark contrast with the inhuman proportions which St Henry's engraved finger has gained on his sarcophagus. The depiction contributed to the veneration of his relics by focusing attention to a part of a holy body and creating a framework for valuing and approaching it.

Spaces and body-subjects dwell in the flesh of the world, one extending into the other. The space of a sanctuary is materially circumscribed and bounded to allow this bodily extending to take certain shapes. It persuades us to repeat certain practices and sediments them into the body schema. The phenomenological analysis of embodiment proceeding in these lines situates the encounter of relics and devotees into the flesh of the world. A reading and rereading of the phenomenological tradition shows also that although the act of interpretation is indeed corporeal, this does lead to equating the present and past bodies in a single structure. By contrast, revealing the difference in the reversibility of the flesh, phenomenology rejects both subjective and objective ways of approaching embodiments. Instead, bodies of the past and present emerge through the spiralling inquiry into their differences. In this way, the social aspect of embodiments is acknowledged, but crucially anchored into the inhuman flesh of the world, into its material sedimentations and moments of spontaneity.

References

Printed sources

FMU

Finlands Medeltidsurkunder samlade och i tryck utg. af Finlands statsarkiv genom Rein. Hausen I–VIII. Helsingfors: Statsarkivet, 1910, 1915, 1921, 1924, 1928, 1930, 1933, 1935.

Paulus Juusten

Paulus Juusten, *Catalogus et ordinaria successio episcoporum finlandensium*. Edidit Simo Heininen. Suomen Kirkkohistoriallisen Seuran Toimituksia 143. Helsinki: Societas historiae ecclesiasticae Fennica, 1988.

Literature

Ahl, Eva

2005 Piispa, kirves ja Lalli? Arkeologisten tutkimusten jäljillä Köyliössä. *Arkeologia NYT!* 2/2005: 7–9.

Barrett, John C. & Ilhong Ko

2009 A Phenomenology of Landscape: A Crisis in British Archaeology? *Journal of Social Archaeology* 9 (3): 275–94.

Bentley, James

1985 *Restless Bones: The Story of Relics*. London: Constable.

Biernoff, Suzannah

2005 Carnal Relations: Embodied Sight in Merleau-Ponty, Roger Bacon and St Francis. *Journal of Visual Culture* 4 (1): 39–52.

Bildhauer, Bettina

2006 *Medieval Blood*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.

Brown, Peter

1981 *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Buchholtz, Anton

1892 *Goldschmiedearbeiten in Livland, Estland und Kurland*. Riga: Gesellschaft für Geschichte und Alterthumskunde der Ostseeprovinzen Russlands.

Butler, Judith

2006 Sexual Difference as a Question of Ethics: Alterities of the Flesh in Irigaray and Merleau-Ponty. In: Dorothea Olkowski & Gail Weiss (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations of Maurice Merleau-Ponty*; pp. 107–25. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press.

Bynum, Caroline Walker

1995a *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336*. Lectures on the History of Religions: New series 15. New York: Columbia University Press.

1995b Why All the Fuss about the Body? A Medievalist's Perspective. *Critical Inquiry* 22 (1): 1–33.

2007 *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Bynum, Caroline Walker & Paula Gerson

1997 Body-Part Reliquaries and Body Parts in the Middle Ages. *Gesta* 36 (1): 3–7.

Carman, Taylor

2008 *Merleau-Ponty*. London & New York: Routledge.

Carvalho, John

1993 The Visible and the Invisible: In Merleau-Ponty and Foucault. *International Studies in Philosophy* 25 (3): 35–46.

Clucas, Stephen

2000 Regiment Animarum et Corporum: The Body and Spatial Practice in Medieval and Renaissance Magic. In: Darryll Grantley & Nina Taunton (eds), *The Body in Late Medieval and Early Modern Culture*; pp. 113–29. Aldershot, Burlington, Singapore & Sydney: Ashgate.

Edgren, Helena & Kirsti Melanko (eds)

1996 *Pyhän Henrikin sarkofagi*. Helsinki: Museovirasto.

Edwards, Benjamin

2010 Three Prehistories Reviewed: Writing the Present into the Past. *American Journal of Archaeology* 114: 353–5.

Eliade, Mircea

1959 *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. New York: Harcourt.

Falk, Ann-Britt

2006 My home is my castle: Protection against evil in medieval times. In: Anders Andrén, Kristina Jennbert & Catharina Raudvere (eds), *Old Norse Religion in Long-term Perspectives: Origins, Changes, and Interactions*; pp. 200–5. Lund: Nordic Academic Press.

2008 The power of tradition. In: Ann-Britt Falk & Donata M. Kyriltz (eds), *Folk Beliefs and Practice in Medieval Lives*; pp. 59–65. BAR International Series 1758. Oxford: Archaeopress.

Fanon, Frantz

1998 *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Weidenfeld.

Geary, Patrick

1986 Sacred Commodities: The Circulation of Medieval Relics. In: Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*; pp. 169–91. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

1990 *Furta sacra: Thefts of relics in the central Middle Ages*. Rev. edn. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Gilchrist, Roberta

1997 Ambivalent Bodies: Gender and Medieval Archaeology. In: Jenny Moore & Eleanor Scott (eds), *Invisible People and Processes: Writing Gender and Childhood into European Archaeology*; pp. 42–58. London & New York: Leicester University Press.

Godelier, Maurice

1999 *The Enigma of the Gift*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Hammervold, Alf

1997 *Fingerringe fra middelalderen i Norge: En undersøkelse av fingerringe fra middelalderen og ringe av middelaldertype*. Universitetets Oldsaksamling: Varia 40. Oslo: Universitetet i Oslo.

Hayes, Dawn Marie

2003 *Body and Sacred Place in Medieval Europe, 1100–1389*. New York & London: Routledge.

Heikkilä, Tuomas

2005 *Pyhän Henrikin legenda*. Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seuran Toimituksia 1039. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura.

Herrmann-Mascard, Nicole

1975 *Les reliques des Saints: Formation coutumière d'un droit*. Société d'histoire du droit: Collection d'histoire institutionnelle et sociale 6. Paris: Klincksieck.

Herva, Vesa-Pekka

2010 Buildings as persons: Relationality and the life of buildings in a northern periphery of early modern Sweden. *Antiquity* 84: 440–52.

Hiekkänen, Markus

2007 *Suomen keskiajan kivikirkot*. Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seuran Toimituksia 1117. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura.

2008 The Cult of Saint Henry of Finland: Sites, Remains, and Traditions 1400–1700 AD. In: Barbara Scholkmann, Sören Frommer, Christina Vossler & Markus Wolf (eds.), *Zwischen Tradition und Wandel: Archäologie des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts*; pp. 153–60. Tübinger Forschungen zur historischen Archäologie 3. Büchenbach: Verlag Dr. Faustus.

Hildebrand, Hans

1884–98 *Sveriges medeltid: Kulturhistorisk skildring: Andra delen*. Stockholm: P. A. Norstedt & Söner.

Hirvonen, Vesa

2004 Luther ja pyhäinjännökset. *Teologinen Aikakauskirja* 4/2004: 364–73.

Hukantaival, Sonja

2007 Hare's feet under a hearth: Discussing 'ritual' deposits in buildings. In: Visa Immonen, Mia Lempiäinen & Ulrika Rosendahl (eds), *Hortus novus: Fresh approaches to medieval archaeology in Finland*; pp. 66–75. *Archaeologia Medii Aevi Finlandiae* 14. Turku: Society for Medieval Archaeology in Finland.

Immonen, Visa

2008 The Medieval Sepulchre Reliquary of Finström Church. *SKAS* 4/2007 (2008): 2–9.

2009a *Golden Moments: Artefacts of Precious Metals as Products of Luxury Consumption in Finland c. 1200–1600: I Text*. *Archaeologia Medii Aevi Finlandiae* 16. Turku: Society for Medieval Archaeology in Finland.

2009b *Golden Moments: Artefacts of Precious Metals as Products of Luxury Consumption in Finland c. 1200–1600: II Catalogue*. *Archaeologia Medii Aevi Finlandiae* 16. Turku: Society for Medieval Archaeology in Finland.

Irigaray, Luce

1993 *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Joyce, Rosemary A.

2005 Archaeology of the Body. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34 (1): 139–58.

Klockars, Birgit

1960 *Biskop Hemming av Åbo*. Helsingfors: Skrifter utgivna av Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland 379. Helsingfors: Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland.

Kolsrud, Olof

1943 Gullringen fraa Traæna. *Instituttet for sammenlignende kulturforskning: Serie B: Skrifter XLI*: 167–96.

Lahti, Sofia

2003 Capse pro reliquiis: Turun tuomiokirkon reliikit ja relikvaariot. *Mirator* November 2003. <http://www.glossa.fi/mirator/pdf/lahti.pdf> (accessed on 19 October 2010).

2006 Pyhän Henrikin reliikit materiaalisena läsnäolona. *Suomen Museo* 113: 70–86.

Lexow, J. H.

1955 En magisk ring. *Stavanger museum: Årbok* 1954: 77–84.

Liepe, Lena

2003 *Den medeltida kroppen: Kroppens och könets ikonografi i nordisk medeltid*. Lund: Nordic Academic Press.

Lilja, Saara

1978 Kristillisen suitsutuksen alkuperästä. *Historiallinen arkisto* 73: 138–45.

MacKendrick, Karmen

2010 The multipliable body. *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* 1 (1–2): 108–14.

McCarthy, Michael C.

2009 Modalities of Belief in Ancient Christian Debate. *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 17 (4): 605–34.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice

1968 *The Visible and the Invisible: Followed by Working Notes*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

2002 *Phenomenology of Perception*. London & New York: Routledge.

Meskill, Lynn

2000 Writing the body in archaeology. In: Alison E. Rautman (ed.), *Reading the Body: Representations and Remains in the Archaeological Record*; pp. 13–21. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Montgomery, Scott B.

2010 *St. Ursula and the Eleven Thousand Virgins of Cologne: Relics, Reliquaries and the Visual Culture of Group Sanctity in Late Medieval Europe*. Bern: Peter Lang.

Rinne, Juhani

1932 *Pyhä Henrik: Piispa ja marttyyri*. Suomen Kirkkohistoriallisen Seuran Toimituksia 33. Helsinki: Otava.

1948 *Turun tuomiokirkko keskiaikana: II. Alttarit ja kirkolliset toimitukset*. Turku: Turun tuomiokirkon isännistö.

Salminen, Viktor

1905 P. Henrikin saari Köyliössä. *Suomen Museo* 12 (4): 73–88.

Salonen, Kirsi

2003 Paulus Scheelin puuttuvan peukalon tapaus. *Suomen Kirkkohistoriallisen Seuran vuosikirja* 92 (2002): 17–24.

Snoek, Godefridus J. C.

1995 *Medieval Piety from Relics to the Eucharist: A Process of Mutual Interaction*. Leiden, New York & Köln: E. J. Brill.

Solin, Heikki

2000 De Berenike à Veronique. *Suplementos a MINOS: Núm.* 16: 277–83.

Stawarska, Beata

2006 From the Body Proper to Flesh: Merleau-Ponty on Intersubjectivity. In: Dorothea Olkowski & Gail Weiss (eds), *Feminist Interpretations of Maurice Merleau-Ponty*; pp. 91–106. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press.

Taavitsainen, J.-P.

2009 Reliikkiprojekti nyt! Arkeologiaa, historiaa, taidehistoriaa, teologiaa, uskontotiedettä, folkloristiikkaa, kansatiedettä ja luonnontieteitä. *Henrikinkadun Helmi. Turun yliopiston kulttuurien tutkimuksen laitoksen tiedotuslehti* 2/2009: 9–13.

Trumble, Angus

2010 *The Finger: A Handbook*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Ugglas, Carl R. af

1951 *Efterlämnade konsthistoriska studier*. Kungl. Vitterhets-, historie- och antikvitetsakademiens handlingar 75. Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand.

Vauchez, André

1997 *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Veyne, Paul

1988 *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths? An Essay on the Constitutive Imagination*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press.

Weate, Jeremy

2001 Fanon, Merleau-Ponty and the Difference of Phenomenology. In: Robert Bernasconi (ed.), *Race*; pp. 169–83. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Weiss, Gail

2006 Urban Flesh. In: Dorothea Olkowski & Gail Weiss (eds), *Feminist Interpretations of Maurice Merleau-Ponty*; pp. 147–65. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press.

White, Carolyn L.

2009 Introduction: Objects, Scale, and Identity Entangled. In: Carolyn L. White (ed.), *The Materiality of Individuality: Archaeological Studies of Individual Lives*; pp. 3–18. Dordrecht & New York: Springer.

JAY JOHNSTON

The body in Wellbeing Spirituality

Self, spirit beings and the politics of difference

Introduction

New religious movements of the nineteenth century—notably the Theosophical Society and Spiritualism—endowed western culture with an energetic concept of the self: that is, with a model of the body that proposed the individual to be constituted by a ‘spiritual’ or subtle substance. This model of the body—the subtle body—was not new to western esoteric traditions, however, its presentation at this time melded with subtle body schemes from Hindu traditions (primarily Yoga traditions) and provided the groundwork for the popularisation of a concept of the body and self as being comprised of an energetic anatomy. This model of the self has continued unabated into contemporary consumer culture and underpins the vast majority of mind–body concepts in Complementary and Alternative Medical (CAM) practices. This article is concerned with the subtle body models currently found in Wellbeing Spirituality healing modalities. In particular, it considers their ontological and metaphysical propositions with regard to an ethics of difference: both energetic and cultural. Therefore, two distinct types of discourse will be examined and discussed: that of popular culture and that of Continental philosophy (especially feminist and post-structural). Both provide methods for understanding the enduring popularity of subtle body concepts of the self and the challenging ethical relations that the model presupposes.

‘Difference’ herein refers to the term’s use in the Continental philosophical tradition, in particular following the thought of Emmanuel Levinas in the proposition of a radical difference, or alterity. In broad strokes, Levinas argued that ethics was first philosophy (not ontology) and therefore that the relation between the One and the Other (between the subject and an other of radical difference) was generative of subjectivity itself. That is, the One and the Other were intimately related and mutually called each other into existence. Therefore, for Levinas, the responsibility to the Other (ethics) was primary. This relationship between the One and Other could not, in Levinas’

conception be described or understood via spatial analogies or description: it could not be measured in any linear sense. It was, what he termed a relation of 'proximity': a proximity that is intersubjective and erodes fixed boundaries between self and other:

The relationship of proximity cannot be reduced to any modality of distance or geometrical contiguity, not to the simple 'representation' of a neighbour; it is already an assignation, an extremely urgent assignation—an obligation, anachronously prior to any commitment (Levinas 1989: 90).

Feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray further develops Levinas' concept of proximity. In her reading this proximity is embedded in a concept of subjective interiority that is both intersubjective (shared by the One and the Other) and implicit in the recognition and respect of/for radical difference. According to Irigaray, interiority functions to constitute individuality: it is a mode of becoming through which the relation to the Other (alterity) is established (2000: 75): this concept of the Other is analysed in relation to energetic anatomy in more detail later in this chapter. Significantly, however, this 'Other' is one of radical difference; an alterity, not a repeat or variation of the One (the singular subject of ontology). To consider the Other as a version of the One would be to continue to work within what Levinas termed the discourse of the Same. The Other conceptualised as alterity is wholly different; different in ways that cannot ever be entirely known. Irigaray proposes that the only manner through which such a subject of difference can be known or perceived—partially—is via bodily-based modes of knowledge (rather than via intellectual abstraction). The concept of the body she utilises in her more recent work, is one that includes a pneumatic, or energetic anatomy. Here is proposed a subject that forever slips beyond discourses of mastery.

As this subject—or self—of radical difference is explored in relation to subtle bodies in Wellbeing culture the negotiation of a range of other differences come to the fore, particularly epistemological ones, including science—spirituality and biomedicine and CAM. This chapter ranges across these differences—which are so often in popular discourse presented as binary dualisms—to consider the way in which subtle body models of the self call in philosophical discourse (at an ontological level) for the presentation of non-oppositional relations (via models of intersubjectivity); while in their presentation in popular culture (Wellbeing Spirituality), ontological difference (alterity) is either collapsed (in an ethically dubious manner) or

reinforced via the reapplication of a dualist form of logic. A recently published 'handbook' text, Cyndi Dale's *The Subtle Body* (2009) is examined to illustrate the conceptualisation of subtle bodies in popular culture.

Wellbeing Spirituality and New Age culture

New Age spirituality scholar Paul Heelas discusses Wellbeing Spirituality as a specific cultural phenomenon in his relatively recent text *Spiritualities of Life: New Age Romanticism and Consumptive Capitalism* (2008). In his figuring, Wellbeing Spirituality refers to a range of practices that emerge from a New Age 'spirituality of life' orientation that emphasises immanence: that is, spirituality found 'within the depths of life' (2008: 25). Heelas proposes this focus on 'life' to counter critical evaluations—especially Foucauldian ones—of the New Age that condemn it as a set of disciplinary techniques that simply reproduce dominant (neo-liberal) subject positions and which are self-focused, individual, and therefore 'selfish' in orientation. Although countering a different set of arguments, Ruth Barcan argues that something *more* is happening with concepts of the body in alternative health practices beyond—or as well as—the internalisation of normative discourses (2008: 14–27).

In addition to acknowledging the complexity of the concept of the self in New Age and Wellbeing practices, it should also be noted that what actually constitutes the New Age, when it started, whether it has finished or not as a spiritual movement and the appropriateness or otherwise of the very term 'New Age', have all been hotly disputed (for an overview of the debates, see Chryssides 2007). Without delving into the numerous debates, it is enough for this context to note that there is no consensus on the suitability of either the terminology, or its proposed constituents. Nevertheless, the New Age (including Wellbeing Spirituality practices) has generally attracted readings of it as spirituality for self-obsessed, white middle-class westerners devoid of ethical responsibility with regard to cultural difference and identity politics—manifested via the 'pick-n-mix' approach to indigenous and Asian traditions—and the politics of difference more generally (see, for example, Carette & King 2004). That is, the 'all is one' motto implicit in much New Age metaphysics is read as a universalising and totalising framework in which very real social and cultural differences are erased and/or simultaneously positioned in a neo-liberal perspective as entirely the responsibility of the individual. Louise L. Hay's 'mega-selling' books are a good example of that genre (Hay 1988,

Johnston & Barcan 2006). As will be illustrated herein, these propositions can be made, and are sustained, by the employment of an energetic ontology and metaphysics. Simultaneously however, this same metaphysical and ontological framework introduces a range of issues regarding the conceptualisation of difference and subjectivity that challenge the universalist interpretation common to popular discourse.

Against such universalist interpretation and its criticism, Paul Heelas seeks to identify an Other-orientated politics in New Age practices: that is, to interpret the practices as being framed by, and producing, broader social and environmental effects (albeit while also being focused on individual well-being). He does this by arguing that the New Ager's focus is on life (and its relations), not on the individual self. Heelas argues: 'For participants, spirituality *is* life-itself, the "life-force" or "energy" which flows through all human life (and much else besides), which sustains life. . .' (2008: 27) and further that this 'holistic thrust of subjective-life spirituality is intimately bound up with the importance widely attached to healing' (p. 34). Hence, Wellbeing Spirituality (as an aspect, or 'out-growth' of the New Age) has, at its core, a concern for the healing of self and other.

Emerging from this perspective is a world-view and practice that understands changes to the self (self-care and responsibility) as intimately bound up with, and influential upon, the broader world and others within it (a care for and responsibility to Other). The substance that enables this engagement, and forms the logic of relation, is a subtle substance: the expansive, energetic, subtle bodies of self.

Subtle bodies in a contemporary context: definitions and practice

The models of the subtle body presented in this chapter as an example of a popular cultural framework are those presented by Cyndi Dale in *The Subtle Body: An Encyclopedia of Your Energetic Anatomy* (2009). Dale's concept of the subtle body has been built upon schemas devised by the Theosophical Society as well as other indigenous and esoteric traditions (Johnston 2008, Tansley 1977). Dale's presentation is a very contemporary version of the subtle body; one that is mobilised to 'fill' or 'bridge' the assumed gap between western and eastern culture in the popular imagination.

Dale has penned many books on chakras and healing for the metaphysical consumer market. She refers to herself as an 'intuitive coach' who practices healing modalities including shamanism, energy healing; intuitive healing;

therapeutic healing, faith healing and Reiki (www.cyndidale.com 2010). In her conceptualisation, all these modes of healing utilise an energetic form of the body, and further illness is itself caused by energetic disorder. She writes:

Everything is made of energy: molecules, pathogens, prescription medicines, and even emotions. Each cell pulses electrically, and the body itself emanates electromagnetic fields. The human body is a complex energetic system, composed of hundreds of energetic subsystems. Disease is caused by energetic imbalances; therefore, health can be restored or established by balancing one's energies. (Dale 2009: xxi.)

Energy in this conceptualisation is the 'substance' that constitutes and inter-relates all phenomena. Indeed, it is energy as an ontological substance—simultaneously spiritual and physical—that Dale employs to bridge biomedical and CAM health practices. Energy, according to Dale is a foundational building 'block', constitutive of all existence. Of course, subtle body models are themselves foundational to many CAM practices, but as has been discussed elsewhere, these propose a vastly different model of the body than the one understood, endorsed and proposed by biomedicine (Johnston & Barcan 2006). For Dale, energy itself erases the difference between the two medical models and provides a uniting logic for the spiritual and the somatic.

Indeed, there are many traditions (including Theosophical ones) that propose subtle bodies to be comprised of energy of the type described by Dale. Subtle bodies are commonly understood to interpenetrate the physical body and to exceed it: moving into the space beyond, or between self and Other (Johnston 2008, Tansley 1977). Yogic traditions, for example, propose an esoteric anatomy of subtle energy channels that criss-cross throughout the body (*nadi*) with major centres (*chakras*) typically identified as locations of intense exchange between the individual's subtle body system and the broader cosmic energetic system (Feuerstein 1990: 28). This is definitely not a body enclosed by skin and ontologically separated from the world and others. That is, this is not the type of body presupposed by biomedicine.

The relations between biomedicine and CAM are becoming increasingly important (financially, culturally, and ethically) with the development of multi-model medical centres and the slow integration of CAM practices into hospital contexts (meditation or Reiki in hospitals, for example). Much work in the negotiation of these various traditions both in terms of cultural analysis and practices is on the horizon. It is therefore of interest to consider the ways in which a popular author, like Dale, positions these relations between CAM

and biomedical practices in her text. A text, which is written for 'healing professionals' and 'patients' and is accompanied with a resounding endorsement from Christiane Northrup MD, a well-known (and best-selling with *Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom*, 1994) gynaecologist who discusses multi-modal surgeries in the United States (Dale 2009: np).

Cyndi Dale is acutely aware of the difference in conceptualisations of the body in energetic and biomedical systems. Indeed, she sets up a sharp dualism between western medicine (as biomedical) and eastern medicine (as energetic). This is of course, a view tinged by New Age romanticism and Orientalism.

In Dale's rendering, the cause of the energy-biomedical division is a cultural difference (of a particularly simplistic kind). Both types of medicine are built upon the same ontology (energy), with one, the 'western' designated allopathic and mechanistic, the other, the 'eastern' as 'traditional' and 'holistic' (2009: xx). In discussing this division Dale contends that the western approach must be honoured and revered but that, ultimately, 'a new health care process' needs to 'be born, termed *integrative* care; the marriage between West and East' (p. xx). The use of a marriage metaphor in this text is not surprising considering that the dualist terms—West and East—carry implicit stereotypical gender ascriptions in their deployment in dominant western discourse. These metaphors are mapped onto the health modalities; western medicine is proposed as stereotypically masculine: invasive, aggressive, goal orientated. CAM practices are presented as stereotypically feminine caring, gentle, low-impact, more 'natural'.

To claim, as is implicit in Dale's argument, that western cultural traditions have been devoid of subtle body schemas, energetic concepts of the body, and attendant healing traditions is simply incorrect. Dale, by and large, ignores subtle body schemas found in the western esoteric traditions (with the marked exception of the Jewish Kabbalah and a version of 'occult' Christianity) like those proposed by Renaissance physician and scholar Marsilio Ficino's astro-physiology (1996, first published in 1489), or the 'desire' body presented by Jacob Boehme (Deghaye 1995: 224). These subtle body schemas were also part of the modern Theosophical Society's mix upon which Dale's system develops. Dale's blindness regarding these esoteric traditions is also shared by feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray. Irigaray presents subtle bodies within a romanticised east-west dichotomy; with energetic subjectivity firmly located as 'eastern' (Irigaray 1999).

In order to attain the 'marriage' between eastern and western medicine that Dale proposes, she must also bridge a proposed epistemological dualism:

between science and empirical observation and spiritual or mystical experience. Once again, common stereotypes accompany the presentation of these modes of knowledge: reason–western–masculine and the mystical–eastern–feminine. Their integration in Dale’s framework however relies, not on challenging definitions of subjectivity, knowledge, embodiment and perception (as is common to post-structural and feminist philosophy for example), but to the discoveries of contemporary science as legitimising discourses. There is for Dale a singular ‘truth’ to these spiritual energetic bodies that can be known by exceptional empirical means. For example, regarding the illustrations in the book she writes ‘Richard Wehrman, illustrator, provided the most amazing and true renderings of the energy anatomy ever created’ (2009: xvii).

One wonders exactly how this visual ‘truth’ can be attested. This is noted, not to diminish Wehrman’s art, or his claim to accuracy in representation, but to pose the question of how consensus for the ‘truth’ of images of energetic anatomy can be established. The issue of scientific legitimacy, especially via empirical means, has long accompanied CAM practices (and vitalist philosophies and practices of all types). So it is not surprising to find Dale doing her own version of H. P. Blavatsky’s melding of scientific and spiritual agendas to validate her point. The contents of the text evidences this clearly, with the first few chapters devoted to detailed accounts of physical anatomy, the functioning of all the major bodily systems (for example nervous, reproductive, digestive), before turning to various scientific conceptualisations of energy fields (example Unified Field theories), after which a discussion of energetic healing techniques is found (the discussion of these traditions is taken up in the closing section of this chapter).

However, it is not only the thorny issue of scientific legitimacy that is invoked in contemporary discussions of subtle bodies, but also the plurality of ways in which spirit, spirit body and spirit beings are defined and deployed.

Spirit beings: sources or ‘transmitters’/‘channels’ of energy

Within the literature on energetic bodies and subtle body schemas there is a dual sense of a ‘spirit being’ to be found. Most easily identified are those practices that have been informed by Spiritualism or the Channelling movement, for example, practices described as spiritual healing. In these healing modalities an external agent (or agents: some healers work with more than one spiritual entity) is attributed with providing the healing energy, or directing the healing that ‘treats’ the patient’s body–mind–spirit. As such, these models

present the physical practitioner as a conduit, a bridge between the ephemeral spirit healer(s) and the physical patient. Often accompanying these practices are claims of extrasensory perception that render subtle bodies, or their afflictions, as visible or tactile, or, less commonly, audible to the practitioner (Barcan 2009: 209–31; Johnston 2010: 69–78). Indeed, as argued elsewhere, such healing modalities call for an individual to develop their perceptual literacy beyond the five senses in order to ‘keep track’ of their subtle bodies (Johnston 2008).

The second sense of ‘spirit being’ to be found amongst these practices is that which is implicit in the subtle body system itself. Each individual human is also simultaneously a being of spirit, because their very foundational substance—the energy—is conceptualised as both matter and spirit simultaneously. In many traditions (including Theosophical models) the cultivation of subtle bodies, and an individual’s capacity to see, recognise and adjust their subtle selves is directly linked to spiritual development. Indeed, subtle body systems are often presented as the bridge between this-worldly phenomena and other-worldly states: the ephemeral link between ‘gross’ matter and ‘pure’ spirit.

Dale proposes that her model of ‘integrative care’ (the ‘marriage’ of ‘western’ and ‘eastern’ medicine), is ‘a new level of medical excellence’ (2009: xxi). It takes part in an established spiritual hierarchy, linked directly to subtle bodies (for example in the Theosophical system there are seven subtle bodies linked to seven planes of existence: each with increasingly refined ‘energy’; the lowest and densest level being that of the physical world (Besant 1911)). The individual treated by Dale’s Integrative Care is a spiritual and a physical being: at one and the same time comprised of ‘spiritual energy’ while also—whether conscious of it or not—being a conduit for ‘spiritual energy’. The physical body, from this perspective, is spirit. Spirit beings are not ephemeral agents, but the embodied self.

Politics of energetic difference

If one’s subjectivity is proposed as being comprised of a series of subtle bodies, or a plurality of energies that extend beyond the physical body, then the question of difference—and in particular radical difference or alterity—become acute. How and where does one posit the boundaries of self and other? In this section an overview of Luce Irigaray’s particular approach, and its limitations, is discussed.

From a philosophical perspective there are two core ontological issues regarding the concept of subtle bodies and radical difference. The first is the way in which the ‘substance’ or ‘energy’ of which subtle bodies are thought to be comprised disrupts the ontological difference often employed to distinguish between ‘mind’ and ‘body’ or ‘spirit’ and ‘body’ (in substance ontologies in particular) (Johnston 2008). Second is the issue of energetic relations as they are understood to ‘play out’ in the real world while at the same time embracing ethical relations with radical difference. That is: how do we have ethical energetic relations? It is this second issue that Irigaray most clearly tackles in *To be Two* (2000). In this text she proposes a gendering of ontological energy that she then links as essential to the maintenance of radical difference.

For Irigaray, there are two—energetic—subject positions (hence ‘to be two’); this can be considered as a dual subjectivity (thus challenging the idea of subjectivity as singular). Irigaray—following numerous eastern and esoteric traditions—proposes the lived realization of this ontological proposition is via the cultivation of energetic relations. Her work is of course, based on sexual dimorphism (for which she has in the past been critiqued); where each ‘sexed being’ has an altogether different energetic subjectivity, but that each subject is necessarily linked in a relation to cultivating each other energetically. In this sense, they are linked in a Levinasian relation of interdependence: calling one another forth. Irigaray writes:

To be two would allow us to remain in ourselves, and would permit gathering, and the type of safeguarding which does not restrain, the kind of presence which remained free of bonds: neither mine nor yours but each living and breathing with the other. It would refrain from possessing you in order to allow you to be—to be in me, as well. (Irigaray 2000: 16.)

Therefore, the relation to the Other is one of interiority, not exteriority: a radical proximity established by psychic and energetic interrelations rather than physical distance. The simultaneous acknowledgment of energetic interrelation and energetic difference results for Irigaray in an acknowledgement of relations of intimacy and alterity that cannot be reconciled. It is a model of intersubjectivity that attempts to incorporate an ethics of radical difference. However, one can question the employment of gender dimorphism and ask: Why only two? Why not to be multiple? Indeed Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s ‘body without organs’ could be employed usefully for such a purpose (Johnston 2008, Johnston & Barcan 2006: 25–44).

In fact, thinking of subtle bodies as a radical form of intersubjectivity enables useful propositions, not only about relations with radical difference, but also by proposing extensive concepts of materiality. There are, however, considerable issues to be considered with regards to an ethics of subtle bodies (especially regarding relations of alterity) in popular cultural and Wellbeing Spirituality presentations. Again, Cyndi Dale's text illustrates the perplexing issue of various models of the subtle body—drawn from different cultures—being presented together without a discussion or logic to explicate their differences and what these differences might mean for the practitioner and patient. Dale presents whole series of subtle body models in her text; she writes, 'There are hundreds, maybe thousands, of energetic systems functioning in the world, many of which include, or allude to, the chakras and other energy bodies. The following handful of systems represents some of the different ways of looking at the subtle energy cosmos within ourselves' (Dale 2009: 287). After which follows descriptions of the Himalayan Bonpo chakra model (advocated by modern teacher Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche); a Mayan energy system; the Tsalagi (Cherokee) energy system; an Incan energy model; an occult Christian energy system (based on Zachery Landsdown's work); Egyptian and African energy bodies; and finally the 'Jewish mystical energy system: the ancient Kabbalah'.

Obviously, there are several orders of difference being elided here. Firstly, cultural difference: each of these systems is validated by reference to its 'traditional' context; with relations to a first nation, ancient or Asian people, as a legitimating feature.

Secondly, there is no discussion of the relation, disjunction, difference (radical or otherwise) between these different schemas of energetic anatomy. The inference is that we can/do have any, or all, of them and therefore we have access to whatever system we may choose to work with. Like the worst of the New Age appropriation of indigenous traditions, the models employed in Wellbeing Spirituality—as illustrated by Dale—are not considered to be culturally located and specific. They are considered as universal. From such a perspective a white middle class Australian can choose to understand themselves as comprised of a Cherokee energetic system and perhaps a Yogic schema simultaneously.

Here then is the double edge of the energetic sword. On one hand, at the level of the individual practitioner in a wellbeing framework with its long histories of the single practitioner utilising a number of modalities as exemplified by Dale's book, energetic anatomy is deployed to elide difference. On the other hand, Heelas's contention regarding the way in which Wellbeing

Spirituality practices consider the self as implicitly bound up with the broader world (establishing an ethics of both self and other simultaneously) and my own previous work on subtle bodies as a form of radical intersubjectivity, do propose ways in which energetic anatomy can be formulated to take account of difference (cultural, sexual, socio-political and ontological). That is, there are frameworks available in philosophical discourse with which difference can be maintained: without collapsing into the New Age 'we are all one' soup. What is required is an ethics of energetic engagement: such an ethics is a lived, embodied, relation premised upon the cultivation of perception.

References

Barcan, Ruth

- 2008 *Alternative Therapies as Disciplinary Practices: The Uses and Limitations of a Foucauldian Approach*. In: Nicole Anderson & Katrina Schlunke (eds), *Cultural Theory in Everyday Practice*; pp. 14–27. South Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- 2009 *Intuition and Reason in the New Age: A Cultural Study of Medical Clairvoyance*. In: David Howes (ed.), *The Sixth Sense Reader*; pp. 209–32. Oxford & New York: Berg.

Besant, Annie

- 1911 *Man and His Bodies*. London: Theosophical Publishing House.

Carette, Jeremy & Richard King

- 2004 *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion*. London & New York: Routledge.

Chryssides, George D.

- 2007 *Defining the New Age*. In: Daren Kemp & James R. Lewis (eds), *Handbook of New Age*; pp. 5–24. Leiden & Boston: Brill.

Dale, Cyndi

- 2009 *The Subtle Body: An Encyclopedia of Your Energetic Anatomy*. Boulder, CO: Sounds True.
- 2010 <http://www.cyndidale.com> (accessed on 1 May 2010).

Deghaye, Pierre

- 1995 *Jacob Boehme and His Followers*. In: Antoine Faivre & Jacob Needleman (eds), *Modern Esoteric Spirituality*; pp. 210–47. New York: Crossroad Publishing.

Feuerstein, Georg

- 1990 *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Yoga*. London, Sydney, Wellington: Unwin Paperbacks.

Ficino, Marsilio

1996 *The Book of Life*. Trans. Charles Boer. Woodstock, Connecticut: Spring Publications. (First published in 1489.)

Hay, Louise L.

1988 *Heal Your Body: The Mental Causes for Physical Illness and the Metaphysical Way to Overcome Them*. Concord: Specialist Publications.

Heelas, Paul

2008 *Spiritualities of Life: New Age Romanticism and Consumptive Capitalism*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Irigaray, Luce

1999 *Between East and West: From Singularity to Community*. Trans. Stephen Pluháček. New York: Columbia University Press.

2000 *To be Two*. Trans. Monique M. Rhodes and Marco F. Cocito-Mondoc. London & New Brunswick: The Athlone Press. (First published in 1994.)

Johnston, Jay

2008 *Angels of Desire: Esoteric Bodies, Aesthetics and Ethics*. Gnostica Series. London & Oakville: Equinox Publishing.

2010 Subtle Anatomy: the Bio-metaphysics of Alternative Therapies. In: Elizabeth Burns Coleman & Kevin White (eds), *Medicine, Religion and the Body*; pp. 69–78. Leiden & Boston: Brill.

Johnston, Jay & Ruth Barcan

2006 Subtle Transformations: Imagining the Body in Alternative Health Practices. *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 9 (1): 25–44.

Levinas, Emmanuel

1989 *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence*. The Hague: Martinus Nijoff. English extract reprinted in Seán Hand (ed.), *The Levinas Reader*; pp. 88–126. Oxford & Cambridge: Blackwell. (First published in 1974.)

Northrup, Christiane

1994 *Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom*. New York: Bantam.

Tansley, David V.

1977 *Subtle Body: Essence and Shadow*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Asceticism: an endangered value?

Mutations of ascetism in contemporary monasticism

At the conference, held in May, for the millennium of the Abbey of Solesmes in France, I asked an old abbot of the congregation of Subiaco: 'Are you an ascetic?' and he answered me: 'No!' as if it were a real mistake to consider it. Yet it is usually taken for granted that monastic life means asceticism, and Max Weber writes that monks are professional, virtuosi of asceticism:

As the exemplary religious individual, the monk was the first *professional*, at least in those orders that practised rationalized asceticism, most of all the Jesuit order. The monk lived in a methodical fashion, he scheduled his time, practised continuous self-control, rejected all spontaneous enjoyments and all personal obligations that did not serve the purposes of his vocation. (Weber 1978: 1172–3, italics in the original.)

In Weber's books, religious virtuosity is especially defined by asceticism. Early monasticism was actually a real struggle against the body, as the stylites, or desert monks, show us, but this is no longer a kind of monastic life we can observe. So, in the face of these observations, some questions come to mind: Is monastic asceticism really changing and in which terms? Why has the place of the body in religious virtuosity changed? As religious virtuosity is based on ascetic practices, we cannot consider that monastic life nowadays has totally eschewed asceticism. So we have to understand the new sense given to this traditional religious practice.

The research I am going to present here is only at its beginning and I ask more questions than I give answers. In this article, I will seek to understand the shifts which are affecting monastic asceticism in modern society. After having stated some facts which demonstrate the decline of asceticism, I will make some assumptions about the reasons, religious and social, which can explain it. Finally, I will discuss the apparent disaffection with this practice, compared to a new goal of self-fulfilment that monks want to aim for in monastic life.

The decline of monastic asceticism

To start with, we have to explain what asceticism exactly is. Here is a definition by Max Weber:

Salvation may be viewed as the distinctive gift of active ethical behaviour, performed in the awareness that god directs this behaviour, i.e., that the actor is an instrument of god. We shall designate this type of attitude toward salvation, which is characterized by a methodical procedure for achieving religious salvation, as 'ascetic'. . . Religious virtuosity, in addition to subjecting the natural drives to a systematic patterning of life, always leads to the control of relationship within communal life, the conventional virtues which are inevitably unheroic and utilitarian, and leads further to an altogether radical religious and ethical criticism. (Weber 1963: 164-5.)

For the first ascetics, who were famous in society for their performances, we could think that asceticism is their purpose. But this is not entirely true. Asceticism is theoretically only a tool used in achieving the aim of a more perfect religious life. It is meant to control the body in order to make it be quiet, so as not to disturb the contemplation of God. Ernst Troeltsch says that 'asceticism always remained simply one element among others; it never became the logical expression of Christian morality' (Troeltsch 1992: 104), and he underlines that when it becomes a goal, it is suspect for the Church. All the mortifications of these first ascetics aimed to combat sexual desire because they thought they were able to overcome it. Some monks threw themselves into cold water, or fasted over many days. But this struggle was not the aim: they wanted to be closer to God and to go beyond original sin, as it will be in paradise.

Its drastic physical changes, after years of ascetic discipline, registered with satisfying precision the essential, preliminary stages of the long return of the human person, body and soul together, to an original, natural, uncorrupted state (Brown 1988: 223).

A monk wants to concentrate his being totally on God, but organic functions escape from him, because human judgement has no place in this. Monasticism wants, consequently, to regulate and control these functions, giving a place for judgment and, in particular, religious judgment. According to Max Weber, monastic asceticism

has become a systematically formed method of rational living, its aim being to overcome the *status naturae*, to release man from the power of irrational impulses, and from dependency on the world and nature, to subject him to the supremacy of the purposeful will and to subordinate his actions to his own continual control and to the consideration of their ethical consequences (Weber 2002: 81).

Asceticism does not forbid human functions, but rationalizes them. So, we can say, as a definition, that asceticism is a religious rationalisation of organic life.

It must be underlined, as I said before, that monks are theoretically professionals of asceticism. When I went into monasteries to pursue my inquiries I had present in my mind this definition of the classical sociology. But I noted that monks did not speak about asceticism if I did not take it up directly. It was revealed that monks do not need this concept to define their own life. In addition, reading the commentary of the rule of Saint Benedict by the specialist Adalbert de Vogüé, a French monk, I discovered a strange affirmation: 'asceticism no longer makes sense in your life' (Voguë 1977: 321). This amazing contradiction deserves therefore to be interrogated, to understand what is going on with this traditional characteristic of monastic life.

According to de Vogüé, this monastic life discipline is organized around three main pillars, which are; food, sleep and sexuality. And before going further in explaining the meaning of asceticism in modern monastic life, we may note quantitative changes in these practices. The rule of Saint Benedict defines the correct amount of food and drink which can be given to monks. More precisely, Saint Benedict recommends to monks not to eat meat: 'Except the sick who are very weak, let all abstain entirely from eating the flesh of four-footed animals' (Voguë 1997: Chapter 24). Nevertheless, many communities eat meat nowadays even during Lent, as I was able to observe in an Italian community. Like other people in society, actual monks do three meals a day, and sometimes an afternoon tea. In this sense, we can conclude that food asceticism is weakening in regard to the recommendations of the rule.

The second observation concerns sleep. The early monks of the desert prayed throughout the night in order to be ready at any time to welcome Christ if he appeared. This is why monks of the Middle Ages awoke once or twice during the night to pray. Christ says 'pray in order to not enter into temptation' (Matt. 26:41); this is what monks want to do. The office of the night takes usually place, according to the Rule of Saint Benedict (see Voguë 1977), between 1 and 2 a.m. Although the rule has not been modified, it is

very rare that the first office takes place before 5 or 6 a.m. in modern monasteries.

At least, concerning corporeal exercises, some instruments of mortification, such as discipline, cilice and so on, are no longer used in the majority of monasteries. I say 'in the majority' because I visited a monastery where a monk told me that they may use it if they want to, but it is exceptional today. If monks wish to use these methods, they have to ask permission to do so from the abbot, but these practices are no longer imposed on the whole community. Monks in early Christianity lived without any comforts and maintained purulent wounds in order to share the sufferings of Christ on the cross. From the fifth century onwards, when, with Constantine, Christianity loses its status of persecuted religion, 'the asceticism relieves the martyr' (Kleinberg 2005: 152). It takes the form of what was called 'a non-bloody martyr' (Guy 1987: 15). So it was a form of martyrdom which was imposed by the individual on his own body, any external pressure is put on him. But this is no longer true, a modern monk does not impose wounds on his own body deliberately. This kind of asceticism can be called an asceticism of imitation, because it aims to imitate the Christ. It is a reproduction of his life and his sufferings. The other one consists of an exercise which aims to compel the body to focus only on God's contemplation, what is not natural.

A modern monk eats meat, sleeps until 5 a.m., consults the internet and has heating in his cell: putting all this together, we can say that monastic asceticism is declining from a quantitative point of view. If we refer to the first ascetics, the Fathers of the Desert were indeed professionals of asceticism. Mortifications were at the heart of their life. We can quote a great number of histories, where, for example, monks lived on a column, refused all types of food, or flogged themselves.

Beyond these ancient practices, asceticism is mostly a discipline aiming at defining a perfect religious life. Asceticism finally concerns everything that could come between the monk and God. The body and the spirit have to be tamed by asceticism. In the early days of of ascetic practice, it was thought that the spirit was directly influenced by the body's humours.

The reasons for mutations of asceticism

To face these quantitative shifts, this research seeks to understand the main causes of this evolution. We argue that this quantitative decline in asceticism does not mean that monks are no longer virtuosi, and that they live the good

life. In order to understand what is really taking place in monastic life concerning the body, we have to investigate three kinds of influence which are changing asceticism in monastic communities. The first one takes place in the monastic life in itself; other changes concerning the community influence the way asceticism is practised. The evolution of the religious system, just as the general evolution of society, have furthermore, implications for asceticism and its meaning in monastic life.

To start with, asceticism takes place in the monastic system and it can be influenced by other changes in monastic life arising from modernity. In the secular society, gifts are no longer sufficient for the subsistence of monasteries. In addition, in France monks have to pay social contributions to the state. As a result, economic autonomy is no longer possible and monks have to develop efficient activities which can supply them with money in order to live and pay the social contributions. So monastic work is undergoing massive changes, and transformations affecting monastic work also have an impact on the way asceticism is practised. Work indeed is in the Rule of Saint Benedict; the first tool of asceticism by the implication of body that it supposes. It is the only physical activity in monastic life and in tiring the body, it constitutes an equilibrium with contemplation. The human body is not adapted to the rigours of remaining in continuous contemplation and it needs this physical equilibrium. Nowadays monastic work must be competitive on a global market. For these reasons, monks use new technologies to increase their efficiency. And because of computer work, which is sedentary, monks do not have any physical activity and as a consequence, the ascetic dimension of work is no longer corporeal. A French monk I interviewed said: 'Computer work is a work which is becoming more and more important in a monastery. But it is a sedentary work, there is no physical effort. It does not have the equilibrium value of manual work.' Computer work is dissolving the physical equilibrium given to work and in this way it can no longer have this hygienic role, as Max Weber puts it. Consequently the use of information technology in religious community is considered by monks as an abdication of asceticism in order to address constraints of efficiency and profitability.

Material evolution in monastic life can explain why asceticism is changing. But more relevant are changes of the meaning given to asceticism. This evolution is not peculiar to monastic ethics, but is a factor in the global religious system, which is undergoing massive changes. The Christian religion was based on eschatological salvation and sin, forming a system described by a process of asceticism–mortification–sin–eschatological salvation. Feeling guilt was at the heart of the relationship between God and the human being.

| | Saint Bernard | | | "Jour du Seigneur" French television mass | | |
|------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|--|-------------------------------|--------------------|
| | <i>Number of homilies</i> | <i>Percentage of homilies</i> | <i>Occurrences</i> | <i>Number of homilies</i> | <i>Percentage of homilies</i> | <i>Occurrences</i> |
| Love | 19 | 34.50 | 54 | 45 | 81.80 | 202 |
| Salvation | 27 | 49 | 48 | 10 | 18.20 | 18 |
| Total | 55 | | | 55 | | |

The vocabulary used in medieval and current homilies.

To work for salvation meant praying and repenting in order to expiate sins in the service of a God who judged humanity. And this expiation was mainly a physical act. In the same way as Jesus had suffered on the cross, man had to suffer to show his gratitude and continue to expiate his sins.

The first step which occurs in the redefinition of this whole system is the change from a severe God to a God who is love. In my doctoral dissertation I compared the vocabulary used in medieval homilies of Saint Bernard and current homilies from the French television mass. We can see here the results, and the importance taken by the term 'love' and how the term 'salvation' is collapsing. At the time of Saint Bernard, salvation was a common topic which was often tackled. By contrast, priests today do not speak about this topic in their homilies. The believers have stopped being concerned with their salvation, mostly because it is no longer mentioned to them.

If God, as father, loves humanity, he cannot wish that it suffers because of him: this God does not condemn his children and relegate them to Hell, but forgives them everything. Yves Lambert notes that 'the theme of Pope John Paul II is not focused on salvation in the hereafter, which he almost never speaks about, except for in terms of the resurrection, but on the construction of a "civilisation of love"' (Lambert 2000: 19). In addition, Lambert noted that the rate of confessions has been falling rapidly between 1952 and 1974 in France: in 1952, 15 per cent of Catholic people said they went to confession at least once a month, and only 1 per cent in 1974 (Lambert 1985: 259). This indicator reveals the way God is represented in society. In this system, mortification or penitence are no longer necessary since goods of salvation can be obtained without suffering. Monastic spirituality is not independent of the global evolution of the religious system and only one nun in all my inquiries spoke about work as penitence. In the Middle Ages noble families gave some of their children to monasteries, so that they could work for the salvation of all the family. Monks today entering into the religious life do not make their

choice in order to be sure to be saved. Their first work is not to ensure their salvation, but to live already with God.

Ascetic practices have to be resituated from the perspective of the evolution of a global society. Food asceticism, for instance, reflects the status of diet in society. At the time of writing of the monastic rules, scarcities and famines were current. That is why, if monks wanted to live in poverty and chastity, in order to testify that God is more important, they had to have a very strict diet. Meat was a symbol of abundance and wealth, and to refuse it affirmed the ethics of poverty. In addition, a link was thought to exist between food and fornication, and this was particularly true for meat, which had the power to cause excitation in the body. Food frugality was, according to Cassius, the ground of all monastic asceticism, because diet is the means of overcoming fornication and therefore is the origin of the causal chain (Foucault 1994: 297). The food limitation of monks thus takes root in this social background, which is nowadays very different. The question of food became commonplace in western society; the fear of seeing it drying up gave place to that of excess. In this context, food asceticism will mean eating less than society—but not less than the body needs—and especially eating healthy and simple food.

Concerning sleep asceticism, the same fluctuation can be observed according to social characteristics of this activity. Léo Moulin points out that in the Middle Ages everybody got up very early, at dawn, so if monks wanted to have an exemplary life, they had to awake at a moment when everybody else still slept (Moulin 1978: 30). That is why the first office was at 1 a.m. Changes in asceticism are contingent on the evolution of society, but we can observe that monks always live a degree of comfort below that of society. Thus, we cannot speak about asceticism without referring to society: the lifestyle of a society establishes a sort of yardstick by which the degree of asceticism can be measured. Moreover this ensures plausible practices, which they will not be if they are relatively too hard.

It is relevant to notice that the change in ascetic practice in monastic life has both material and rational reasons. So, if two of these three main pillars of asceticism—food and sleep—are no longer considered to be a pertinent means of perfection, maybe we have to search for them in another place. What is the best way to achieve religious perfection nowadays?

From asceticism to self-fulfilment

Young people in modern society do not enter monastic life to become ascetic. They do not decide to suppress their desires or self-aspirations, but to concentrate them on God, aiming at self-realization.

I may emphasize that we are witnessing a shift in emphasis in the perceived meaning of asceticism. For the Fathers of the Desert, asceticism was above all an exercise of suffering; it aimed at wounding the monk in his flesh; blood flowed from wounds that monks did to themselves for the glory of God. This is no longer plausible in modern society, due to the new image of God. As Peter Berger says, 'the peculiar Christian theodicy of suffering lost its plausibility' (Berger 1969: 125). More than a disappearance of asceticism, it is voluntary corporeal suffering which has left monastic life. But asceticism is actually not necessarily a form of suffering. A French monk of Landevennec told me that asceticism does not necessarily mean penance, harshness. For him, to live in community is an exercise which is not easy: this is an ascetic practice which is not physical suffering. In entering into religious life, monks seek to reach self-fulfilment, which can be reached for them by the religious vocation. When they say 'yes' to God, they do not agree to have a life of compunction, it represents for them the best way to realize themselves. Danièle Hervieu-Léger underlines that 'the world renunciation is perceived as an access . . . to the self-fulfilment' (1986: 11) by society, even it would not live it!

The second point is that such practices were considered in the Middle Ages as incentives to God. In medieval spirituality the practice of the 'fast is a joining with famine, death, and hunger. It is a choosing of lack that induces God to send plenty: rain, harvest, and life' (Bynum 1987: 39). The modern rationalisation of religion has suppressed incentives to God which man generated thanks to his hardships. Modern asceticism is no longer directly aimed at obtaining salvation, it is not perceived as a gift to God to make him grant salvation.

Asceticism is therefore not disappearing, but transforming into intellectual practices and no longer corporeal sufferings. This reveals a change in emphasis concerning the body in the religious system. Although the early Christian religion rehabilitated the body in comparison with the Ancient philosophies, the condemnation of the body increased gradually until the Middle Ages when, according to Jacques Le Goff and Nicolas Truong, the 'body was despised, condemned, humiliated' (Le Goff & Truong 2003: 11). The key point was virginity, which increased in value when sexuality lost its dignity. Conversely, the body in monastic life nowadays is no longer denied,

as the products of cosmetics and of activities of well-being prove very well. I have not yet mentioned sexual asceticism in current monastic life. At first sight it seems to be the least changed aspect because sexual asceticism is still very clearly observed. But with the same result, the sense given to this kind of asceticism has actually changed. Not denying desires of the body, monks try to express them in a religious way. The body is no longer hostile to religious life, as well as the soul, it has its place in monastic life and particularly in prayer, as a means to communicate with God. The weeks of 'dance and prayer' or 'yoga' proposed in monasteries prove how the body is acquiring a new place in the religious sphere.

Self-fulfilment is increasing in monastic life, but it does not mean that will replace asceticism. More precisely, the body in modern monastic life is no longer an object of suffering but of fulfillment; it is no longer the way to penitence but the way to prayer and to glorify God. As we said before, however, asceticism is necessary to religious life in order to achieve a self-mastery for contemplation and to give meaning to all acts of religious life. Thus asceticism, as an exercise, has not disappeared from monastic life; however it is now not physical, but intellectualized. A nun affirmed that they highlight more an inner asceticism than a corporal asceticism and a monk from Solesmes said that asceticism for him consists, above all, in accepting what we are—our human and biological condition with our limitations. According to Otto Zöckler, a theorist of asceticism in religious history, two kinds of asceticism can be discerned: a 'negative method of abstention' (Zöckler 1897: 6–8)—which concerns sex and food asceticism in particular—and a positive method, which is essentially an intellectual asceticism, adopted in order to focus the spirit on the contemplation of God. This second kind of asceticism seems to be the most widespread today.

Conclusion

In conclusion I would say that this paper is only an introduction to an ongoing research project and there is still a lot of work to do. But I am convinced, with Giuseppe Giordan, that 'the body is a privileged observation point for following the changes that are taking place within the contemporary religious field' (Giordan 2009: 227). According to classical sociology, asceticism defines religious virtuosity, so it is one of the main dimensions of monastic life. This is why it is very relevant to study these changing practices, which can engage a redefinition of religious virtuosity. Putting all these quantitative and

qualitative shifts together, it seems that both asceticism and the place of the body in monastic life are changing. Rather than a decline of asceticism, it is more accurate to say that its meaning is being redefined and it becomes more intellectual than physical. At the same time, the body acquires a new position: from mortification to self-fulfilment, it becomes a new ally—and no longer an enemy—of monastic life.

So, is asceticism an endangered value? Yes, in the sense that it is no longer a religious value, as was proved by monks who said they are not ascetics, or the nun who said that her community lives a 'non-ascetic asceticism'. However this does not mean that it has disappeared. The practice of asceticism is necessary to religious virtuosity, but the way to practise it and to define it has been changing, and this is contingent on other evolutions of the religious system and of society. The new kind of asceticism which monks are living nowadays is mainly intellectual asceticism. The monastic body is the sublimated body of the resuscitated Christ—it does not suffer any longer but can express emotions, such as love of God. This body communicates with God through prayer, and blooms. At this point, whereas the ascetic body was only a tool to perfect contemplation, this expressive body can become an aim. And finally, asceticism in modern monastic life remains a way to conduct monastic life, but it is no longer directly correlated with salvation.

Bibliography

Berger, Peter

1969 *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. New York: Anchor Books.

Brown, Peter

1988 *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Bynum, Caroline

1987 *Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Foucault, Michel

1994 *Dits et écrits 1954–1988*. Paris: Gallimard.

Giordan, Giuseppe

2009 The Body Between Religion and Spirituality. *Social Compass* 56: 226–36.

Guy, Jean-Claude

1987 *La Vie religieuse, mémoire évangélique de l'Eglise*. Paris: Le Centurion.

Hervieu-Léger, Danièle

1986 *Vers un nouveau christianisme*. Paris: Le Cerf.

Kleinberg, Aviad

2005 *Histoire de saints, leur rôle dans la formation de l'Occident*. Paris: Gallimard.

Lambert, Yves

1985 *Dieu change en Bretagne. La religion à Limerzel de 1900 à nos jours*. Paris: Le Cerf.

2000 Religion, modernité, ultramodernité: une analyse en terme de « tournant axial », *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 109. <http://assr.revues.org> (accessed on 20 August 2009).

Le Goff, Jacques & Truong Nicolas

2003 *Une histoire du corps au Moyen Age*. Paris: Editions Liana Levi.

Moulin, Léo

1978 *La Vie quotidienne des religieux au Moyen Age*. Paris: Hachette.

Troeltsch, Ernst

1992 *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*. Westminster: John Knox Press.

Voguë, Adalbert de

1977 *La Règle de saint Benoît. Commentaire spirituel et doctrinal. Sources Chrétiennes*. Paris: Le Cerf.

Weber, Max

1963 *The Sociology of Religion*. Boston: Beacon Press.

1978 *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociologie*. Edited by G. Roth and C. Wittich. New York.

2002 *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. London: Penguin Books.

Zöckler, Otto

1897 *Askese und Mönchtum*. Frankfurt a.M.: Heyder und Simmer.

SANDRA JUNKER

The disorderly body

Considerations of The Book of Numbers, 19 and ritual impurity after contact with a corpse

Introduction

Under the headline of ‘the body and religion,’ this article deals with the idea of ritual bodily impurity after coming into contact with a corpse in the Hebrew Bible.¹

The evanescence and impermanence of the human body testifies to the mortality of the human being. In that way, the human body symbolizes both life and death at the same time; both conditions are perceivable in it. In Judaism, the dead body is considered as ritually impure. Although, in this context it might be better to substitute the term ‘ritually damaged’ for ‘ritually impure’: ritual impurity does not refer to hygienic or moral impurity, but rather to an incapability of exercising—and living—religion. Ritual purity is considered as a prerequisite for the execution of ritual acts and obligations.

Mary Douglas assumes that impurity or dirt represents something which is out of place (1984: 52). It depends spatially and categorically on something which in contrast represents the prevailing order. It is not primarily medical acquirements which define the behaviour but the imaginations of a classified and controlled environment. Even nowadays something is classified as dirty when it disrupts or endangers the prevailing order. The logic of purity depends on the logic of a world order, the existence of which is endangered by impurity. Especially the boundary of the human body, as well as other border areas or limitations, receives ritual attention. Everything going in or out is ritually accompanied as well. Danger to the body symbolizes danger to the whole society, because the physical body is a microcosm of the social body, in other words, society as Douglas defines it (1984: 151). The physical body expresses the living social reality of the whole community.

1 For a critical linguistic reading I have to thank MA Heike Reifgens and Dipl.Bibl. Simone Gawandtka.

The dead body depends on a sphere which causes the greatest uncertainty because it is not accessible for the living. According to Mary Douglas's concepts, the dead body is considered ritually impure because it does not answer to the imagined order anymore, or rather because it cannot take part in this order anymore. This is impurity imagined as a kind of contagious illness, which is carried by the body.

In what follows, this article deals with the ritual of the red heifer in Numbers 19. Here we find the description of the preparation of a fluid that is to help clear the ritual impurity out of a living body after it has come into contact with a corpse. For the preparation of this fluid a living creature—a faultless red heifer—must be killed. According to the description, the people who are involved in the preparation of the fluid will be ritually impure until the end of the day. The ritual impurity acquired after coming into contact with a corpse continues as long as the ritual of the Red Heifer remains unexecuted, but at least for seven days.

Textual evidence for ideas of impurity in the Hebrew Bible

The guidelines for the cult in Numbers, Leviticus and Deuteronomy assume without question that contact with a corpse (*nefesh*) causes ritual impurity. The laws of purity and impurity are regarded as God's law, which is to say, they are implemented by God himself. Observance of these laws makes the nation of Israel holy (Plaut 2001: 106). The physical ritual impurity is characterized by temporary exclusion from attendance at the cult's ceremonies and does not apply to questions of hygiene and cleanliness, or to moral errors. The cultic action is perceived as ritual communication and secures a confrontation with God, therefore ritual impurity concerns participation in the cult. Cultic purity is the normal state which reflects the cosmic order of life (Hieke 2009: 44). It is a neutral, not transferable, physical status (Plaut 2001: 106).

Loss of this normal state makes the person unable to confront his or her god. He or she is not permitted confrontation because it is dangerous for themselves and the whole group respectively. The encounter with God necessitates conscientious and detailed preparation by the person so that he or she does not receive physical damage in this confrontation.² Ritual impurity stands in the way of a risk free association with God.

2 Lev. 16:2: '...and the LORD said unto Moses: 'Speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy place within the veil, before the ark-cover which

Ritual impurity ensues mainly from three sources: (a) contact with animal carrion (Lev. 1) and human corpses (Num. 19), (b) every kind of human discharge (lochia, menstruation blood, ejaculate, vaginal fluor), and (c) skin diseases and other abnormalities of the body's surface (Lev. 13–14). Jacob Milgrom puts all these sources of ritual impurity in the vicinity of the sphere of death (Milgrom 1991: 733, 1001–2). While this assertion applies to (a), (b) and (c) do not necessarily lead to physical death. However, all three sources of danger could (temporarily) weaken the human body and lead to the loss of the person's normal state, or rather make it impossible to come near to God.

The person who has come into contact with a corpse has lost some vital sacred power as a result of this experience. Before that person can enter the presence of the Lord in his sanctuary he or she must be raised back up to the 'normal' level. (Baumgarten 1993: 445.)

Becoming ritually impure is possible for certain groups of people, such as priests (discussed in Leviticus), for the whole nation of Israel as a collective and as individuals (discussed in Numbers), and finally for the land of Israel itself (discussed in Deuteronomy). Through positive counteractions such as washing, or the passing of a certain time-span, the temporal loss of the connection with God can be surmounted.

Below, I will deal with the ritual impurity of individuals and the social group respectively after contact with a human corpse. While in Leviticus this impurity is briefly mentioned (Lev. 22:4–8), the matter is discussed in detail in Numbers 19, and therefore the purpose of this chapter is the following exemplification.

Structure and exegeses of Numbers 19

The 19th chapter of the fifth Book of Moses gives an answer to the question of how to respond in the event of coming into contact with a human corpse. It is determined that the person who has had contact needs to undergo a cleansing process by being sprinkled with a fluid made out of the ash of a faultless red heifer (*parah adumah*) and spring water. The sprinkling on the third and seventh day after contact with a corpse has a cleansing effect. However, the

is upon the ark; that he die not; for I appear in the cloud upon the ark-cover' (JPS 1917). Further preparations follow in Lev. 6:3, cf. also Exod. 19:10–15.

people involved in preparing this fluid also become ritually impure for the rest of the day (Num. 19:7, 8, 10). In Mishna this chapter gets a whole tract for commentary (sixth order, fourth tractat: *pārāh*). The Jewish tradition numbers this rite of the red heifer among the four instructions of the Tora which man should follow even though their deeper sense remains closed to him or her.³ In the Hebrew Bible, this rite is mentioned just one more time (Heb. 9:13); the rabbinic literature, on the other hand, takes the rite up in many cases and interprets its obscurity as evidence of Israel's obedience to God.

Structure

In Numbers 19, seven objects and people are mentioned seven times: (1) the heifer and its ash, (2) things that are burnt, (3) the sevenfold sprinkling, (4) people who need to wash their clothes and themselves, (5) people and objects which are contaminated secondarily, (6) people and objects which need to be purified, and (7) priests. This systematic composition attests the structural uniformity of the chapter (Hieke 2009: 54; Milgrom 1990: 437).

The first part of the chapter (19:1–10) deals with the preparation of the special ash that is necessary for confecting the water of lustration (*mē niddā*). The second part (19:11–22) deals with the aforementioned water of lustration. The ash has to be that of a red heifer, which must not have spots or other deformities or abnormalities. That is God's law (19:2). The heifer must be taken outside of the camp for slaughtering (19:3) and the priest should sprinkle some blood on the meeting tent⁴ seven times (19:4)—as in the blood ritual of redemption in Lev. 4:6 and Lev. 4:17. For that reason, Philip J. Budd assumed that this comes from an older, autonomous rite, which has been embedded in the sacrificial ritual of Numbers 19 (Budd 1984: 211). The action itself can be interpreted as for the apotropaic protection of the sanctum from contamination by the killed heifer, as Baruch A. Levine assumes (1993: 472).

After the sprinkling the meeting tent comes the complete burning of the heifer (19:5), that is, including bowels, blood, skin, and dung, together with additional offerings which symbolize the blood of the killed animal in their colouring; cedar-wood, hyssop, and scarlet (cf. Frick 2002: 231; Milgrom

3 The other instructions are: a man has to marry the childless widow of his dead brother (Deut. 25:5–10), nobody should wear clothes made of two kinds of yarn (Deut. 22:11), and a scapegoat has to be sent into desert for Azazel (Lev. 16), cf. Malino 1995: 147.

4 Cf. Exod. 27:21: 'tent of meeting'; construction of a decomposable and mobile tent-sanctum, which is the central place of encounters with God until the time of King David, cf. *inter alia* Busink 1970.

1981: 65, 69; Levine 1993: 462–3).⁵ Yet it is not until Numbers 19:7 that one learns which purpose this action serves: the remains of the heifer are to be collected by a ritually pure man, and they will become ingredients of the special fluid, which itself should be used for lustration by sprinkling people and objects with hyssop. The clothes and bodies of the people who have been involved in the preparation of the ash must be washed afterwards, and they stay ritually impure until nightfall (19:7, 8, 10).

The second part of the chapter begins with the basic principle that everybody who comes into contact with a human corpse will be ritually impure for seven days (19:11). As per Horst Seebass, the number of days comes from the common mourning time span (2003: 258). Becoming contaminated by a corpse can happen, on the one hand, when one stays in the same house/tent, or rather under the same roof as the corpse (19:11, 14–16). On the other hand, contamination can occur outside of the house/tent by means of war victims, not buried corpses. But also a burial place itself can effect ritual impurity (19:16).

From the ash of the completely burnt heifer, the purifying fluid is to be prepared (19:17) by adding spring water, that is, running or living water. With this fluid every impure person or object is to be sprinkled by a ritually pure person with the help of hyssop (19:18).

Lines 13 and 20 of Numbers 19 deal with the sanctions to be executed if the necessary purifying ritual is not accomplished and someone ritually impure enters the sanctum. The sanctum will then also become impure, and the contaminated person must be cut off from the assembly (19:13, 20, so called *karet*-sanction⁶). Without the purifying ritual the contaminated person remains ritually impure for more than seven days, or more precisely for as long as he or she does not perform the ritual. Furthermore, the contamination spreads to the people and objects that come into contact with the impure person.

And so, ritual impurity is imagined as some kind of contagious illness that can be dispelled through isolation and certain counter-actions. Without nullification, the impurity would, plague-like, spread, and the sanctum and the encounter with God for the whole assembly would be threatened.

5 Hyssop as auxiliary means for coating the blood also occurs in Pesah, cf. Exod. 12:22.

6 It has been disputed what kind of judgement this sanction really follows: execution by a human court, divine punishment ahead of time, or exclusion from the assembly, cf. Piattelli 1998: 53.

Exegeses

This textual example shows clearly the uncertainty that is caused by the sphere of death. Death disrupts the order of life; it breaks off contact between the living and the dead, as well as of the living with each other. Talking of redemption (Num. 19:13) does not only apply to the separation from the bereaved, but also to the separation from God.

The circumstances that cut one off from God should be called sin or evil (Hieke 2009: 58). It has nothing to do with moral wrongdoing, but with the exposure of the connection to God by an abnormal event; in the case of death, the most abnormal event ever.

The characteristic difference with the ritual of redemption in Leviticus 4 is the complete burning of the heifer, including bowels and blood, which is also poured over the altar.⁷ Together with the offerings of hyssop, cedar-wood, and scarlet, the complete burning symbolizes the total destruction of life and an orchestration of death respectively (Rudman 2003: 74–5). By burning the blood, the ash becomes ritually pure, and it is possible to use the ash for the preparation of the purifying fluid, the water of lustration (Seebass translated *mē niddā* ‘water of deposit or dissociation’, 2003: 257). *Niddā* is also used as a term for menstruation (Lev. 12:2, 5 and 15:19–26). The shared element in these two nomenclatures, water of lustration and menstruation, is the act of dissociation: while during menstruation, something is excreted—blood and placenta—both contain the possibility of creating new life. However, in this case, the term refers to the sphere of death because now no new life will come. The women have come near the domain of death. By the same token, the water of lustration dissociates affected people or objects from the area of death that they came near to after coming into contact with a human corpse. The ritual of the red heifer and the water of lustration demarcate the area of death as a dissociation from the area of living:

Asche war dem Tod zugeordnet, und wenn sie in diesem Fall eine die Todesverunreinigung beseitigende Wirkung hatte, verhielt sie sich wie ein Gegengift zum Gift: Die Wirkung hob die Kultunreinheit auf (Seebass 2003: 256).

Actually, Numbers 19 speaks of two kinds of impurity. Both require different, severe and long-term processes of purification: the contact with a corpse causes ritual impurity for seven days and requires the ritual described above.

7 The burning of the blood here is singular in the Hebrew Bible, cf. Levine 1993: 462.

The people and objects should be sprinkled on the third and on the seventh day, so that redemption follows on the evening of the seventh day (Num. 19:19). Contact with the ash of the heifer and the water of lustration, although it has purifying effect, causes ritual impurity for the rest of the day. After washing their clothes and bodies, these people are ritually pure again. Evidently, ritual impurity after contact with a human corpse is apparently more serious than contact with ash of a ritually killed animal (cf. Lev. 1).

Further considerations

In the mindset of Numbers 19, death appears to be basically closer, more present and actual, than it does for us today in the age of hospitals, hospices, and mortuaries. Death becomes threatening and befalls the living; it is experienced immediately. Death remains in the direct vicinity of the living in the form of the corpse. It interferes with the living order. The disorder affected by this event is physically perceivable in the imagination of a ritual—bodily—impurity. The corpse is considered to be impure, but on the other hand, so are the living who have come into contact with it. In recourse to Mary Douglas, the impurity occurs because the corpse and the people coming into contact with death are outside of the living order. They are near to a realm of fear, upset, and unconsciousness—to be precise, the dead person belongs to this realm now. Most importantly the dead body is out of the order of the living, and the expression of this status is the idea of ritual impurity.

Through the death of a closely related person, one's own mortality and death become present. Mourning preserves this status of destabilization. A ritual can help to overcome destabilization and restore the order of life. This ritual needs to eliminate the bodily imagined impurity and reconstitute the relationship to God and to the other people in the assembly. The described ritual in Numbers 19 is an example of the attempt to convert the experienced disorder caused by death into an ordered state. The restitution of the organized and orderly status happens bodily: water of lustration should be sprinkled on the body of the living, contaminated person, and so the 'illness' of impurity is healed.⁸

8 As one may say, the ritual of the red heifer is the living analogy to burial rites in which the dead body is ejected from the social group. The question of the practicability of this ritual or the attempt at damning the superstitious praxis of the cult of the dead by this ritual could not be discussed here. For further information see Seebass 2003: 248–52, 262–3 and Levine 1993: 472–9. References to the cult of the

Bibliography

Baumgarten, Albert I.

1993 The Paradox of the Red Heifer. *Vetus Testamentum* 43: 442–51.

Budd, Philip J.

1984 *Numbers*. Word Biblical Commentary 5. Waco: Word Books.

Busink, Theodor A.

1970 1. *Der Tempel von Jerusalem. Der Tempel Salomos*. Leiden: Brill.

Douglas, Mary

1984 *Purity and Danger: An analysis of the concepts of pollution and taboo*. London: Ark.

Frick, Frank S.

2002 Ritual and Social Regulation in Ancient Israel. The Importance of the Social Context for Ritual Studies in a Case Study – the Ritual of the Red Heifer. In: David M. Gunn & Paula M. McNutt (eds), *'Imaging' Biblical Worlds. Studies in Spatial, Social and Historical Constructs in Honor of James W. Flanagan*; pp. 219–32. London: Sheffield Academic Press.

Hieke, Thomas

2009 Die Unreinheit des Leichnams nach der Tora. In: Tobias Nicklas (ed.), *The Human Body in Death and Resurrection*; pp. 43–65. Berlin: de Gruyter.

JPS = The Jewish Publication Society

1917 *Translation of the Old Testament*. <http://www.mechon-mamre.org> (accessed on 28 October 2010).

Levine, Baruch A.

1993 *Numbers 1–20*. New York: Doubleday.

Malino, Jerome R.

1995 Numbers 19:1–22. The Ashes of the Red Heifer: Religious Ceremonies and Obedience to Torah. In: Frederick D. Holmgren (ed.), *Preaching Biblical Texts. Expositions by Jewish and Christian Scholars*; pp. 144–8. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Milgrom, Jacob

1981 The Paradox of the Red Cow (Num. XIX). *Vetus Testamentum* 31: 62–72.

1990 *Numbers. The JPS Torah Commentary*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society.

1991 *The Anchor Bible*. Vol. 3: *Leviticus 1–16*. New York: Doubleday.

Piattelli, Daniela

1998 Religionsvergehen. II Altes Testament und Judentum. In: Gerhard Krause & Gerhard Müller (eds), *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* 29; pp. 51–5. Berlin u. a.: de Gruyter.

dead can be found in Deut. 14:1; Lev. 19:27–8; Ps. 106:28 and especially in 1 Sam. 28:3–25.

Plaut, Gunther W.

- 2001 *Die Tora. In jüdischer Auslegung.* Bd. III: *Wajikra. Levitikus.* Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus.
- 2003 *Die Tora. In jüdischer Auslegung.* Bd. IV: *Bemidbar. Numeri.* Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus.

Rudman, Dominic

- 2003 Water for Impurity or Water of Impurity? The Red Cow of Numbers 19 Revisited. *Old Testament Essays* 16 (1): 73–8.

Seebass, Horst

- 2003 *Numeri 2. Teilband, Numeri 10:11–22:1.* Neukirchen-Vlyn: Neukirchener Verlag.

The concept of the body in religious studies

The concept of the body is central in religious studies for one obvious reason: religious contents are dependent upon the material existence of human bodies. Recently it has become fashionable to speak about embodied religion, religion as bodily processes and embodiment in general. In what follows I analyze the different uses of the concept of the body and clarify the different contexts in which the concept can be used in coherent and systematic ways, and furthermore in such a way that it enhances the methodology of religious studies.

Religious bodies

I presume that the concept of the body refers to a human or other animal body, that is, the self-maintaining biological unit that starts in fertilization and transforms into a corpse in biological death. Bodily processes are what bodies do; for example, walking, sleeping, praying and singing. The related notions of embodiment and the embodied are usually trivial, as when for example one talks about embodied social interactions, or about embodiment in general. Humans are biological creatures, and therefore their bodies are involved in everything they do. There is no social interaction where bodies are not involved, nor is there embodiment that is somehow additional to the very fact that there are bodies.

Bodies are relevant in religious studies first and foremost for the reason that (1) some bodies support religious beliefs, desires and actions, or for the reason (2) that they are ascribed religious meanings.

In the first case we have examples such as priests in the Catholic Church or members of the organizations of charismatic Christianity. Religious experts as well as religious lay people are bodies that sustain religious beliefs, desires and actions, and therefore their bodies are relevant in religious studies. If we want to predict the dynamics of these bodies, we have to take into account their beliefs and desires, among which there should be some religious mental states as well. Religious bodies are thus actors with religious representations.

In the second case we have bodies that are ascribed religious meanings. That is, in addition to a human body *x*, we have one or more religious actors who ascribe religious meanings to this particular body. We could have, for example, an atheist Catholic priest—that is, a person with no religious beliefs or desires, but one who is working as a Catholic priest in the organization of the Catholic Church. His body would be a religious body for the reason that as a part of that organization, he would carry and act out religious meanings, when for example interacting with other actors in religious rituals. He would be treated as a bearer of religious meanings even though he would not have religious beliefs or desires at the steering wheel of his behaviour. Another case of a religious body that is religious due to the fact that it is ascribed religious meanings, is the situation where human bodies are believed to have been created by the Creator God. This belief is prevalent in charismatic Christianity, and it transforms bodies into religious bodies by means of assigning them supernatural origins. The human corpse is often ascribed religious meanings and also other fundamental meanings, and thus the cultural systems surrounding the dead bodies form an exemplary object for religious studies.

Thus we can distinguish the following cases:

1. religious body *x* is a body that has religious beliefs and desires ‘at the steering wheel’;
2. religious body *x* is a body that acts according to the rules of religious organization;
3. religious body *x* is a body that is ascribed religious meanings by other actors and treated on the basis of these religious meanings.

By means of distinguishing these cases of religious bodies that are relevant for religious studies, we have the exemplary cases of

1. bodies that are guided by mental states with religious contents;
2. bodies whose religiosity is due to the fact that they act according to the norms of a religious organization (that is, an organization that is constituted by religious contents);
3. bodies that are conceptually constructed and treated by means of religious contents.

To sum up, religious bodies in the threefold sense described above provide the central object of study for religious studies.

Other bodily activities

Since we humans are biological creatures, bodies are relevant in all areas of life; eating, reproduction, aesthetic experience, sports, music and dance, to name a few. These bodily activities involve specific mental contents and cultural models by means of which the bodily participants can engage in these areas of life. Eating or sports as such do not involve religious content and are not primary objects of research for religious studies. What is meant by the expression 'as such' can be elucidated by means distinguishing between primary and secondary theories (cf. Horton 1993). The primary theory of eating is a collection of mental contents that enable the actor to distinguish between different edible items and to consume them in an appropriate manner. By means of shared primary theories of eating, actors from different cultural backgrounds can share a meal together. Secondary theories of eating are composed of those mental contents that attach further interpretations and meanings to eating. For example; what is the culturally appropriate manner of eating, which foodstuffs are 'hot' or 'cold' and what are their health effects. Furthermore, the question as to whether eating or foodstuffs are related to supernatural entities is a question handled by secondary theories.

My claim is that even though bodily issues are important for biological creatures such as human beings, they are not relevant for religious studies if they do not involve secondary theories that attach religious contents to them. Therefore eating, reproduction or other bodily activities are not religious as such.

How about extreme areas of bodily activity, such as fanatic bodybuilding? There are groups of bodybuilders who devote almost their all waking hours to that bodily activity, who worship built bodies and share collective rituals. There may even exist a group of bodybuilders who would claim that bodybuilding is a religion to them. If we take the mental contents that postulate supernatural entities to be the hallmark of religion, we should react by saying that they are simply mistaken: the bodybuilding activities, no matter how intense or ritually coordinated, do not amount to religion. The same goes for music, dance, sports and other bodily activities: being bodily does not imply the presence of things religious.

Embodied religion, emotions and fieldwork

As Ivan Strenski (2010) has noted, the traditional philosophy of religion has investigated religion by means of studying the religious texts, not 'lived' religion. Texts host systems of arguments and they are therefore suitable objects of study for philosophical analysis. Other fields in religious studies, such as anthropology, history, or the sociology of religion have been accused of being too abstract as well. The counterpart for this textualized abstract religion is lived, embodied religion. But what is the meaning of embodiment and how is it related to bodies? The examples of embodied religion provided by Strenski include materiality, practices, emotions and bodies. Embodied religion is therefore something that involves actively engaged religious bodies, performing rituals, or otherwise communicating with supernatural entities.

Embodied religion is religion as it is studied in respectable fieldwork-based ethnography. Embodied religion is not a specific type of religion, but rather a research setting, where religious bodies are studied by means of interview and participant observation. In my ethnographic study of Amazonian folk religion, I observed a healing ritual where the patient was treated for snakebite. It was a magical snakebite and therefore the healer woke helping spirits by means of magical songs. He also addressed the spirit of the snake for the purpose of healing the patient. I observed the healing session and conducted interviews with the healer, the patient and other participants. I studied embodied religion, carried out by human beings who used their bodies to do things. Healing ritual is embodied religion at its best: religious contents steering the conduct of human beings and their bodily interactions.

The ethnographic study of embodied religion utilizes the same methods as any other ethnographic study. The study objects are conceptualized as intentional systems that have mental contents as parts of their beliefs and desires, and the contents as well as the complex systems of contents (cultural models) are traced by means of interview and observation techniques. Even though embodied religion is not a text as traditional books are, its propositional and argumentative features are studied and, by the same token, it is transformed into a text-like entity, or textualized.

Ole Riis and Linda Woodhead (2010) have claimed that bodily emotion and feeling are central in religious action, and that they should be studied instead of the propositional knowledge traditionally studied in religious studies. According to them, thoughts can be expressed in words, whereas emotions are expressed in embodied presence, movement, music, dance, dreams, images and symbols.

Once again the concept of the body appears to block the analysis of propositional contents, which is the central project in the ethnography of religion, based on intentional systems theory (Kamppinen 2010). But as a matter of fact, it does not. When we study emotions by means of using materials like movements or aspects of bodily presence, we try to figure out the propositional contents of emotions: what it is that the informants are afraid of, what it is that they hope for, and what they are feeling when they listen to the sermon or music. In order to make scientific sense of emotion we have to trace their propositional contents: feeling joy because god loves you is different from feeling joy because the dinner is ready. Also the bodily schemata like container model that lies behind various emotions are explicable in terms of their implied propositional contents, as we will see in the following section.

To place the concept of the body and the related notions of emotion and feeling at the centre of religious studies does not exempt us from the analysis of propositional contents. Rather, it challenges us to identify the propositional contents embedded in emotions. Take, for example, the emotion sorrow. In order to understand the particular variety of sorrow we need to find out, by means of interview and participant observation, what are the antecedent and consequent mental states (with propositional contents) that make up the functional environment of this sorrow. What the actor believes has happened and what he believes is causally responsible for the sorrow; how the sorrow is expressed in his further beliefs, desires and actions. Thus we have a schema where sorrow is functionally individuated by means of other mental states, beliefs, desires and actions (BDA for short):

BDA at time t_{n-1}
 Sorrow & BDA at time t_n
 BDA at time t_{n+1}

From the current time t_n where the case of sorrow exists as the object of our investigation, we identify the surrounding beliefs, desires and actions, and extrapolate on the basis of ethnographic and other material the contents of past beliefs, desires and actions. If, for example, our informant is sorrowful because his health (that he used to take for granted) is deteriorating, then we can trace the past beliefs about health status as well as past valuations of health. By means of forecasts we can guess at his future beliefs, desires and actions, and if he, for example, will start exercising, we will have confirmation for our hypothesis that the sorrow in question is a mood that stems from his belief that his health has worsened and that is not what he wanted.

As Ivan Strenski (2010) has noted, the philosophy of religion should keep up with the progress that takes place in the empirical study of religion. The ethnographic study of religious activities where bodies are involved by default, offers good cases for conceptual analysis.

Inferential schemas related to the concept of the body

Scientific concepts allow us to make inferences that, with the aid of theories, can be tested by means of empirical material. In other fields of research such as, for example biology, the central concepts are well systematized, operationalized and backed by theories. The concept of the ecosystem, for one, is composed of further concepts, such as nutrient cycles and prey–predator relationships, each of which is linked to various operationalizations, by means of which their presence and dynamics in the ecosystem can be assessed.

The theory building for the concept of the body should start with inferential schemas that can be constructed on the basis of *x* being a body. As George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (Lakoff 1987, Johnson 1988, Lakoff & Johnson 1980), the human body is generically a container. Therefore we can infer that

x is a body
∴ *x* is a container

The concept of container enables various inferential schemas that are applicable to the concept of the body as well. *Qua* container, a body

- is a bounded entity,
- is an extended entity,
- involves a distinction between inside and outside,
- can contain other entities and be itself contained,
- can involve heterogenous inside area,
- has specific areas for interaction with its environment.

As a special case of container, the human body furthermore

- is a biological system,
- reproduces,
- communicates,
- seeks well-being,

- has self-steering mechanisms related to well-being,
- is an intentional system, that is, has beliefs and desires, and acts.

If we utilize the concept of the body in our study of religion, we acquire first the above inferences that together tell us that we are dealing with human beings. The logic of beliefs, desires and actions is a complicated and rewarding object of study, and much of general ethnography studies this area on the basis of the assumption that the study object is an intentional system.

A natural continuation in using the concept of the body is to investigate the culturally specific, more detailed concepts of the body that are built upon the generic concept of the body. In various cultures bodies are conceptualized as containers of souls, for example. In the folk religion of the Peruvian Amazon, the body is seen as a vessel for at least two souls, one of which is responsible for bodily functions, and the other for thinking, personality and other mental characteristics (Kamppinen 1990a, 1990b). A parallel culturally specific concept of human body can be found in charismatic Christianity, where the human body is assumed to contain soul and spirit, each of which serves different functions during the course of human life and in interactions with supernatural entities. The material body, furthermore, is assumed to be reassembled at the resurrection and transported to heaven as a material entity. Therefore it will retain its container-based properties in the afterlife, and can interact with similarly embodied relatives and friends, can move from one part of the heaven to another, can have feelings of joy, and so on.

Therefore the inferential schemas that constitute the concept of the body are utilized not only at the beginning of the research process when we are tracing the culturally specific concepts of the body, but also after the culturally specific concept has been identified. Starting from the assumption that bodies are constructed as extended containers even in the afterlife, we can study the particular ways in which extended bodies interact in the constructed world of the afterlife.

The body as a source model

Functional equations of the form $f(x) = y$ are common in science. What they tell is that the value of y is a function of x . The function is something that transforms the variable x into y . In the humanities a parallel function is served by the concept of context. Religious context transforms entities into study objects that are relevant in religious studies. When bodies are placed in re-

religious contexts, they are transformed into study objects of religious studies. In the preceding examples, the bodies are in religious contexts and therefore they are of interest in religious studies. Bodies as such are not relevant, no matter how intensively used or manipulated.

But what happens if we think of the body as a function or context that transforms objects into new kinds objects? This

is exactly what happens when our informants use the concept of the body as a source model (or metaphor) that they apply to different entities. The body as a source model is a kind of container metaphor with more specific properties as we saw above. What the body model does is that it imposes bodily features into objects, transforming them into body-like entities. When the object to be transformed is a supernatural entity, we have a case that is relevant for religious studies.

Let us take an example. Years ago I was studying the belief systems pertaining to an Amazonian supernatural entity called *yashingo*. It is a forest spirit that has a human appearance and relates to human interests in various ways. It is a guardian spirit that has its own garden in the forest; it controls hunting and extracting activities, and so on. It is a fictitious entity, and it is constructed as having a human body, that can be at times transformed into animal appearance. The body as a source model transforms this supernatural entity into an anthropomorphic supernatural entity, and its constructed bodily properties consequently can be studied. The fact that it is constructed as a body helps us in explaining why its patterns of interaction are of a certain type—why, for example, it can be seen and heard (in the constructed reality where supernatural entities reside).

When conducting interviews on the forest spirit and asking about its appearance, couple of informants said that there is no need to guess its appearance, since they have a photograph of forest spirit.



Amazonian forest spirit in a tree. Photographer is unknown.

The older man I was interviewing looked at the picture and said that it is not a forest spirit, but rather a vagabond evil spirit. Since most people are taxonomists only when under pressure from the ethnographer, there is no way to settle the identity of the creature. But what is clearly seen is that the supernatural entity has been molded by means of using the human body as a source model. Consequently its further properties can be investigated—whether, for example, it can move from one place to another in an instant.

Conclusion

Bodies are relevant in religious studies for the obvious reason that religious entities are dependent upon material human beings who can confer religious meanings to different things. The concept of the body can be used in a precise fashion by distinguishing the material bodies placed in religious contexts from the use of the concept of the body as a source model. In the latter case the constructed world of supernatural fictions is given bodily properties, as in the case of anthropomorphism. Current fashionable terms like embodiment, embodied, or bodily, do not add information to these basic uses of the concept of the body.

Bibliography

Horton, Robin

1993 *Patterns of Thought in Africa and the West*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Johnson, Mark

1988 *The Body in the Mind*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Kamppinen, Matti

1990a Out of Balance: Models of the Human Body in the Medico-Religious Tradition among the Mestizos of the Peruvian Amazon. *Curare: Zeitschrift für Ethnomedizin und Transkulturelle Psychiatrie* 2: 89–97.

1990b Containers and Boundaries: Metaphors of Illness and the Flow of Knowledge in the Peruvian Amazon. In: W. Andritzky (ed.), *Yearbook of Cross-Cultural Psychotherapy*. Berlin: Verlag für Wissenschaft und Bildung.

2010 *Intentional Systems Theory as a Conceptual Framework for Religious Studies: A Scientific Method for Studying Beliefs*. Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press.

Lakoff, George

1987 *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Lakoff, George & Mark Johnson

1980 *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Riis, Ole & Linda Woodhead

2010 *A Sociology of Religious Emotion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Strenski, Ivan

2010 Philosophy of Religion. Paper given at the IAHR Meeting in Toronto August 17, 2010.

Towards a solution concerning female genital mutilation?

An approach from within according to Islamic legal opinions

Introduction

I don't need my razor blades anymore . . . A few years ago to say that was unthinkable. No woman spoke about what happened during circumcision. They said our stomachs would swell and burst if we did. But nobody was actually harmed. I'm not afraid anymore to speak up. I was maybe thirteen years old when I became a circumciser. For me that was a chance to learn something . . . I didn't pity the girls. To us the pain was a test. We can show that we are strong and courageous. When the girls have babies themselves later on, they have to endure the pain as well. I also circumcised my three daughters myself. Because I love them. Only through circumcision do girls become real women; an uncircumcised woman is considered dirty and debauched—that's what tradition has taught us, I've never doubted it . . . All of a sudden they said our tradition was wrong . . . Even the imam in the mosque said that we circumcisers are unworthy; there's nothing in the Quran about circumcision. I was confused. Have I believed in an illusion all my life? (Translated from Fofanah & Heimbach 2010: 54.)¹

- 1 *Meine Rasierklingen brauche ich nicht mehr. [...] Das war vor ein paar Jahren noch unmöglich. Keine Frau sagte, was bei einer Beschneidung passiert. Es hieß, unser Bauch würde sonst anschwellen und platzen. Aber niemandem ist etwas passiert. Ich habe keine Angst mehr zu sprechen. [...] Ich hatte kein Mitleid. Für uns ist der Schmerz eine Prüfung. Wir können zeigen, dass wir stark und mutig sind. Wenn die Mädchen später Kinder bekommen, müssen sie auch die Schmerzen ertragen. Ich habe auch meine drei Töchter selbst beschnitten. Weil ich sie liebe. Erst durch die Beschneidung werden Mädchen zu richtigen Frauen, eine unbeschnittene Frau gilt als schmutzig und zügellos – so hat es uns die Tradition gelehrt, ich habe nie daran gezweifelt. [...] Auf einmal hieß es, unsere Tradition sei falsch. [...] Dann sagte auch noch der Imam in der Moschee, dass wir Beschneiderinnen unwürdig sind, im Koran stehe nichts über Beschneidung. Ich war verwirrt. Hatte ich mein ganzes Leben an ein Trugbild geglaubt?*

These are the words of a woman from Sierra Leone who gave a report about her job as a circumciser in a German Christian monthly magazine and, more importantly, how she quit it with the help of a non-governmental organization (NGO). From the quote it becomes clear that she is Muslim like the majority of Sierra Leone's population, but also that she considered her job or activity as part of the tradition in her area. It is a tradition that is widespread and not restricted to predominantly Muslim countries. There is also contemporary evidence for the practice of female genital cutting in some Latin American ethnic groups (Akashe-Böhme 2006: 91) and among the adherents of natural religions in Australia (Badry 1999: 213). From a historical perspective, archaeologists have found well-preserved corpses of circumcised bog women from the Neolithic era in northern Germany, although the vast majority of bog bodies do not admit the conclusion that female circumcision was customary in central Europe at any time (Rosenke 2000: 60).² It is, however, prevalent among all religious groups in many parts of Africa and Western Asia, whether they are Coptic Christians, Ethiopian Jews, or Arab Muslims (*The Encyclopaedia of Islam* 1997: 913; Badry 1999: 213).

Female genital cutting or—more to the point—female genital mutilation (FGM), generally referred to as circumcision, occurs in at least five different forms. First, there is the so-called clitoridotomy, which means removing the clitoral hood, or prepuce. This is

effectively analogous to the removal of the penile foreskin that constitutes male circumcision. This delicate operation . . . is rare, especially in Africa, and, in any event, is extremely difficult to perform on small girls where it can be difficult to distinguish between the clitoris and its prepuce. (Ali 2008: 101.)

Second, the so-called clitoridectomy entails the cutting of part or all of the clitoris and/or the prepuce. This is the most common type of FGM in predominantly Muslim areas. Third, in addition to the removal of the clitoris, the labia minora can also be removed. Fourth, there is the so-called infibulation (or 'Pharaonic circumcision'), which results not only in the cutting of the clitoris, but also the sowing together of the labia with only a small hole left for urine and menstruation blood to flow through. Finally, there is a more or less

2 Interestingly enough, there has been a trend in Europe for plastic surgery to reduce the labia, correct the clitoris, or narrow the vulva according to temporary fashion (Rahmsdorf & Verlinden 2010: 29).

symbolic circumcision with a mere piercing or cutting of the female genitalia (Osten-Sacken & Uwer 2007; WHO 2010: 1). In any case, according to the World Health Organization (WHO 2010: 10) FGM refers to any 'injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons'. Furthermore, the WHO report states that

[t]he word 'mutilation' emphasizes the gravity of the act. Some United Nations agencies use the term 'female genital mutilation/cutting' wherein the additional term 'cutting' is intended to reflect the importance of using non-judgemental terminology with practising communities. Both terms emphasize the fact that the practice is a violation of girls' and women's human rights. (WHO 2010: v.)

Many reasons for performing FGM are usually identified, all of which can be characterized to be 'secondary rationalizations'. What is understood by these health, cosmetic, and hygienic reasons? People claim that female genital cutting increases sexual pleasure for both men *and* women, makes sexual intercourse easier, or increases fertility (Badry 1999: 213). The clitoris is believed to be 'dirty' in nature as the introductory example has shown. From a more socially oriented perspective, uncircumcised women have a bad reputation and difficulties in finding a husband (Osten-Sacken & Uwer 2007).

One also finds the argument that FGM preserves virginity and thus underlines the 'virginity cult' practiced in an Islamic context (Badry 1999: 219). For instance, there was a big uproar in 2007 when the Egyptian grand *mufti* Ali Gomaa ruled that women are allowed to have their hymens restored in surgery if they wanted to prove their alleged virginity to their newly-wed husbands. The *fatwa* (Islamic legal opinion) can be traced back to the former dean at al-Azhar University and *mufti* Souad Ibrahim Saleh, whose opinion Gomaa supported (Saleh 2007; cf. Gomaa Mohammed 2007).

All of this must be seen against the background of the established fact that Muslim women may also experience sexual pleasure (Badry 1999: 217). Several *fatwas* from IslamiCity.com support this when the *muftis* state that 'Islamic law protects a woman's right to sexual enjoyment, as demonstrated by the fact that a woman has the right to divorce on the grounds that her husband does not provide sexual satisfaction' (Doueiri 1997a-c, 1998 a-b). However, some claim that women's sexual desire is too great and that therefore the clitoris must be removed (cf. Akashe-Böhme 2006: 92). This leads straight to a statement the renowned Muslim jurist Khaled Abou El Fadl made about women's rights in Saudi Arabia:

To claim that a woman visiting her husband's grave, a woman raising her voice in prayer, a woman driving a car, or a woman travelling unaccompanied by a male is bound to create intolerable seductions, strikes me as morally problematic. If men are so morally weak, why should women suffer? (Abou El Fadl 2001: 269 f.)

In the end, circumcision is a powerful bodily sign of the human—male *and* female—covenant with God. According to the biblical Book of Genesis (17:10 ff.) this covenant was first made between God and Abraham. In the Quran it is reaffirmed in *sura* al-Nahl (16:123) and *sura* al-Nisā' (4:125) and quoted as example in the *fatwas* endorsing circumcision. It seems to be true that men are hardly involved in the actual decision in favour of female genital cutting. A man should not interfere in the decision of women to be circumcised. It is practiced and transmitted among women and midwives. Only sometimes is a (male or female) physician involved (*The Encyclopaedia of Islam* 1997: 913 f.; Osten-Sacken & Uwer 2007; cf. Slackman 2007: 3).

Normative prerequisites: between custom and law

On the basis of Islamic normativity, mirrored in *fatwas*, this paper aims to examine a very ambivalent approach concerning female genital mutilation. It might be preferable to speak of the *sharia* not as Islamic *law* because the binding and coercive character of law as understood in the European context does not exist in this legal tradition to the same extent (cf. Rohe 2009: 9 ff.). To illustrate the ambivalent approach, it serves well to look at the 'World Conference of Ulama Towards the Prohibition of the Mutilation of the Female Body' in November 2006. The German and international press praised the outcome of the conference, which had gathered together Muslim scholars from different backgrounds in Cairo, to ban FGM as un-Islamic (cf. e.g. El Ahl 2006; Al-A'sar 2006; Frank 2006). Among the participating scholars were Sayyid Muhammad al-Tantawi, the late *Sheikh* of al-Azhar University, which is one of the highest institutions in the Sunni branch of Islam, and Ali Gomaa, the Egyptian grand *mufti* and thus formally the highest-ranking religious jurist of the country. And again it was an NGO, the German human rights organization Target, which had helped to initiate the conference. In the end, the scholars passed a list of 'recommendations'. It contained eight points, which can be summarized as follows:

1. The human body is inviolable.
2. There is no basis in the Quran or in the prophetic traditions, the so-called *hadiths*, for the practice of FGM.
3. The practice causes pain to the women's bodies and souls.
4. The assembled scholars call for an end to the practice.
5. They call for education of the people to raise awareness.
6. And they call for legislation to outlaw the practice if performed 'in a dangerous manner' (*bi-l-shakl al-dārr*) (Dār al-Iftā' al-Misriyya 2006).

However, a *fatwa* issued by the notorious, Egyptian-born *sheikh* Yusuf al-Qaradawi³ and circulated on the internet at about the same time illustrates the contradictory ways in which Muslim jurisconsults address the issue—despite the fact that this *sheikh* himself also participated in the aforementioned conference. '[T]he most moderate opinion and the most likely one to be correct is in favour of practising circumcision in the moderate Islamic way indicated in some of the Prophet's hadiths—even though such hadiths are not confirmed to be authentic' (al-Qaradawi 2006b). This seems to constitute a contradiction which many other scholars have not been able to resolve. In another *fatwa*, of 2009, al-Qaradawi suggests that FGM is actually forbidden because of the pain inflicted on women and because it would be a severe alteration of God's creation (al-Qaradawi 2009). So why is it so difficult for Muslim authorities to forbid the circumcision of girls and women?

One can find some evidence supporting the practice of FGM in Islamic sources. While not in the *Quran*, there are a few prophetic traditions that mention the circumcision of women (see below). Muslim legal scholars often refer to these texts in order to justify the practice in terms of the Islamic deontology (*ahkām*) as mandatory (*wājib*) or virtuous (*mustahabb*).

At the same time, scholars acknowledge that female circumcision is a pre-Islamic practice (e.g. Doueiri 1997a–c), integrated into the corpus of Islamic normativity through the concepts of *'urf* and *'āda* (customary or common law). Often it is these very customs and habits that present disadvantages to women, where the application of *sharia* norms would have meant an improvement in their situation (Rohe 2009: 68 f.). Regional and tribal customs are also closely related to the principle of *maslaha* (community interest or common welfare), on whose basis they may well have been 'islamized' (Ebert 2005: 202; cf. Schacht 1964: 2; cf. Rosenke 2000: 71). In this context a quite remark-

3 Al-Qaradawi has been in the focus of controversial scholarly attention. See Skovgaard-Petersen & Gräf 2009 and Gräf 2010.

able argument in favour of female genital cutting should be noted. The *sharia* provides for the inviolability of the human body (*hurma*, cf. Krawietz 1991: 223 ff., 320; cf. Doueiri 1997a–c) and thus contradicts the practice of circumcision. In order to justify the breach of the *hurma*, the interest (*maslaha*) of the community in general, or of the individual in particular, must be greater than the expected harm inflicted on the woman. This harm could be considered less significant than the social unrest resulting from the abstention from the practice precisely *because* it is a respected custom (Badry 1999: 218). The argument is supported by real events. When a girl died from genital cutting in Egypt in 2007, the attempted legal ban of female genital mutilation by the Egyptian ministry of health caused a public ‘outrage’ in her village (Slackman 2007: 3). In the same vein, the aforementioned list of recommendations was described by the local press as ‘a move that is likely to win international support but fuel domestic dissent’ (Al-’Asar 2006).

It might not seem to be surprising that life under different circumstances in different regions of the Islamic world was guided by customary law. One learns from the writings of the medieval traveller and judge (*qāḍī*) Ibn Battuta how (Islamic) law was understood and applied differently at the various destinations of his journey. Even though he tried to uphold Islamic law as he had learnt it, he faced local customs and established politics that often proved more prevalent than his ‘imports’. That ‘medieval Islamic regimes had no place for non-Shari’a jurisdictions. . . was far from being the case’ (Harvey 2007: 111). In short, the law of the land has always quite flexibly been incorporated into the *sharia*—a fact expressly acknowledged by al-Qaradawi in his above-mentioned 2009 *fatwa*—as long as it did not interfere with the basic principles of the Islamic faith. Circumcision did *not*. And even though the practice has been labelled as ‘barbaric crime’ (*jarīma wahshiyya*, quoted in al-Qaradawi 2006a) or ‘bad habit’ (*al-’āda al-sayyi’a*, Dār al-Iftā’ al-Misriyya 2006), *muftis* still refrain from classifying it as prohibited (*harām*) or abominable (*makrūh*).

This paper argues that with this very ambivalent approach Muslim legal scholars try to accommodate *social* rather than *religious* constraints—or so it seems. As mentioned before, FGM is a phenomenon prevalent in African countries among Muslims and non-Muslims alike. By contrast, it is almost unheard of, for instance, in countries perceived to be firmly Islamic, such as Saudi Arabia or Afghanistan. However, this does not imply that the practice is non-existent in these places. In fact, the Arabian Peninsula is frequently named among the regions where FGM is or was common (Wensinck 1986:

20; Badry 1999: 211; Birch 2005; Salmān 2007;⁴ Osten-Sacken & Uwer 2007). Circumstantial evidence also stems from the fact that the prophet knew about it, if the *hadiths* to this effect are authentic. Some studies suggest that the practice of FGM is also prevalent in Iraqi Kurdistan, Oman, Yemen, and Gaza—areas outside the African continent. Hence, the silence on the practice might not be so much a sign of the non-incidence of the problem, as of the strength of the taboo imposed on sexuality (Osten-Sacken & Uwer 2007).

That female circumcision is known in regions of the Islamic periphery may very well be traced to the fact that in those regions Muslims are less scriptural and more attached to rituals, customs, and religious feasts. One can almost safely conclude that female genital cutting is a pre-Islamic practice which the early Muslim community adopted—perhaps because the social forces were so strong or because it was a useful means of distinguishing Muslims from non-Muslims, or for both reasons. With the spread of Islam it was exported to the other regions. In later centuries, Islam was then instrumentalized to embed the practice into the context of marriage, family, and social honour (cf. Badry 1999: 213).

Female genital mutilation in the legal sources

The efforts of countless human rights activists, NGOs, and circumcised women such as Waris Dirie⁵ and others demonstrate the desire for religious and legal scholars to disclose ways of condemning and abolishing the practice of female genital mutilation from within. Western involvement instead is sometimes seen as anti-Islamic propaganda or as espionage for Israel, which was the case in both a 2004 and a 2005 Iraqi-Kurdistan study on FGM (Birch 2005; Osten-Sacken & Uwer 2007). For this reason several examples from *fatwas* will be given, pointing to and elaborating on the problems Muslim scholars face. Unfortunately, there is no available record of how *female muftis* argue in the case of female genital mutilation.

A review of the legal sources yields mixed results. These sources include the Quran, the *sunna* of the prophet (*hadiths*), the consensus of the scholars (*ijmā'*), and deductive analogy (*qiyās*). To start with, circumcision is not

4 For an excerpted English translation see MEMRI 2007.

5 In early 2010, there was a feature on female genital mutilation in the German youth culture magazine *Bravo*, which is probably best known for its efforts at sexual education. A portrayal of Waris Dirie formed part of the series. Cf. e.g. Dirie nd.

mentioned expressly in the Quran. Generally, *sura* al-Nahl (16:123) can be related to circumcision: “Then We revealed to thee: “Follow thou the creed of Abraham, a man of pure faith and no idolater”” (Arberry 1964: 272). To follow the example that Abraham set—see also *sura* al-Mumtahana (60:4)—means to be circumcised, because it is narrated in the *hadiths* that Abraham was circumcised when he was 80 years old (Muslim ibn al-Hajjāj al-Qushayri 2000: 1013). Therefore there is no dispute concerning *male* circumcision, even though Sami Aldeeb argues that it should be prohibited for the same reasons (*hurma*, Aldeeb Abu-Sahlieh 2006: 48). But the Quran does not explain female circumcision satisfactorily.

Consequently, the prophetic traditions must be considered. There are four relevant *hadiths* which are usually quoted in the context of female genital mutilation. First, ‘[w]hen a man sits between the four parts (arms and legs of his wife) and the two circumcised parts meet, then ghusl [ritual washing] is obligatory’ (Islam Q&A nd.a). Referring to the practice in pre-Islamic Arabia, many scholars claim that the formulation of the phrase ‘when the circumcised parts meet’, which is to say, when the couple engage in sexual intercourse, indicates that the woman is circumcised as well. Another (minority) reading, though, implies that in the Arabic version the phrase ‘the two circumcised parts’ (*al-khitānān*) is just a doubling of the male circumcision. For example, one finds the same grammatical construction in *al-wālidān*, which is the male dual form for two fathers, hence parents (Ali 2008: 106; cf. Rosenke 2000: 71; cf. al-Qaradawī 2006a). It must, however, be noted that ‘iltiqā al-khitānayn’ is only part of the chapter title (Muslim ibn al-Hajjāj al-Qushayri 2000: 152). The proper translation of the available *hadith* would have to read ‘If he sat between her four parts and the circumcision touched the circumcision (*wamassa al-khitānu al-khitāna*), then ghusl would be mandatory’ (p. 153).

According to the second *hadith*, Muhammad said to a midwife who circumcised women in Medina: ‘Reduce the size of the clitoris but do not exceed the limit, for that is better for her health and is preferred by husbands’ (al-Qaradawī 2007; cf. Doueiri 1998a–b). The transmission chain (*isnād*) of this *hadith*, however, is considered to be weak (*daʿif*) and not authentic. Even if one deems it to be valid then it merely describes the way in which a woman should be circumcised, but does not locate its status within Islamic deontology. According to al-Qaradawī’s (2006a) opinion, female genital cutting is neither mandatory (*wājib*) nor recommended (*mustahabb*), but a matter of guidance (*irshād*) and preference of the couple involved. Hence it is permissible (*jāʿiz*), but by no means forbidden (*harām*).

Third, '[c]ircumcision is Sunnat for men and an honour for women' (Desai 2004; cf. Al-Munajjid nd). The transmission chain (*isnād*) of this *hadith* is also considered to be weak (*da'īf*). Again, even if it were authentic, circumcision would only be a recommended customary operation for women (*'shay' mustahsan 'urfan*). However, this opinion is subject to change depending on time and place, because human civilization is in continuous change (al-Qaradawi 2006a).

The strongest point probably comes from the fourth *hadith*: 'Five are the acts quite akin to *fitrah* [pure human creation or nature]: circumcision, shaving the pubic areas, cutting the nails, plucking the hair under the armpits, and clipping (or shaving) the moustache' (A Group of Islamic Researchers 2004; cf. al-Bukhārī 2000: 1213 f.; cf. Muslim ibn al-Hajjāj al-Qushayri 2000: 125). To start with the inclusion of the irreversible circumcision in this sequence of personal hygiene concerning hair and nails, which grow back again, is at least interesting to note. Nevertheless, it underlines the importance of purity in Islam, based on *sura* al-Baqara (2:222): 'Indeed Allah loves those who keep to Him constantly as He loves those who keep themselves pure' (quoted in Desai 2004). The tradition is narrated in all six authoritative collections and therefore recognized as *sunna* (recommended or established in accordance with prophetic tradition, cf. Krawietz 2002: 115).⁶ One can, however, argue that it refers to men only. Besides, it leaves much leeway when it comes to exactly how a woman should be circumcised. Consequently, the legal schools in Islam differ as to the degree of the practice. It may be considered a duty as much as a recommended act (cf. A Group of Islamic Researchers 2004; cf. Krawietz 1991: 227 f.).

Furthermore, according to Yusuf al-Qaradawi (2006a) there is no consensus among the scholars (*ijmā'*) regarding female genital mutilation. The only agreement he derives from the absence of a formal consensus is that it is permissible in principle because scholars would usually consider it mandatory or recommended, or at least an honourable custom, all of which implies the general permission (*jawāz*) of the practice.

Finally, al-Qaradawi argues that deductive analogy (*qiyās*) is not useful in this context. Even if God usually refers to both genders equally in the Quran (e.g. *yā ayyuhā al-nās*), several other principles of analogy would be violated. For instance, one must neither discriminate between the origin of the analogy

6 Especially in the context of circumcision it is understood to mean 'recommended' (cf. Rohe 2009: 10, 426, endnote 6).

or its conclusion, or violate the divine creation. Al-Qaradawi summarizes his findings as follows:

Without doubt, when we looked at the evidence in the Quran, the Sunna, the consensus, and the analogy, we did not find in them a proof for female circumcision to be mandatory or recommended. Nor did we find in them a proof for it to be forbidden or abominable. (Translated from al-Qaradawi 2006a.)⁷

A survey of relevant legal opinions

The *fatwas* in this survey have all been published on four large Muslim websites.⁸ One of the most prominent portals has been IslamOnline.net, which was set up under the auspices of *sheikh* Yusuf al-Qaradawi, and features news as well as a *fatwa* service. The same is true for IslamiCity.com, which is a California-based Muslim web portal, whose *fatwa* service is mainly run by Dani Doueiri and his team. In contrast to these two portals there are two *fatwa*-only websites. AskImam.org is based in South Africa and operated by *sheikh* Ebrahim Desai, while IslamQA.com (Islam Question & Answer) is the *fatwa* website of the Saudi Arabian *sheikh* Muhammad Salih al-Munajjid. In their English language sections one can search for the truncated word *circumcis**, which yields a total of 94 *fatwas* dealing with the subject in question. Of course, not all of them deal with female circumcision. Only those which can be considered characteristic of Muslim scholars' attitudes towards FGM have been chosen for presentation.

The questions range from 'How do women have to be circumcised?', which already implies that the practice would be permissible, to 'What does the tradition of the Prophet have to say about it?', which refers to the *hadiths*, to 'What is the opinion of the *mufti*, that is, the legal scholar?' As will be seen, all of the above-mentioned *hadiths* are usually repeatedly quoted in the *fatwas*.

On November 23, 2006, a *fatwa* by Yusuf al-Qaradawi was simultaneously published in Arabic and English at IslamOnline.net, where he signals his support for the circumcision of women 'under the current circumstances in the

7 *Lā shakka annanā 'indamā nazarnā ilā al-adilla min al-Qur'an wa-l-sunna wa-l-ijmā' wa-l-qiyās, lam najid fihā dalīlan 'alā wujūb khitān al-ināth wa-lā 'alā istihbābihi. Kamā annanā lam najid fihā dalīlan 'alā tahrīmihi aw karāhiyyatihi.*

8 For a more detailed presentation of the websites in question see Kutscher 2008: 228 ff. and Kutscher 2009a: 138 ff.

modern world'. He does not elaborate on this statement. Yet he rules that the abstention from female circumcision is not sinful in contrast to the mandatory male circumcision (al-Qaradawi 2006b). The same *fatwa* was published again on July 1, 2007 with the identical wording. The much longer Arabic version includes, among others, also the records of *sheikh* Mahmud Shaltut, the former president of al-Azhar University (d. 1963), who in his *fatwa* collection defends the practice of female genital cutting because the Arabs were used to it and Muhammad reported it. And yet he only lists counter-arguments: even if the cutting of the clitoris reduces the sexual desire of women, it might lead to the men's use of forbidden substances such as addictive drugs (cf. *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* 1997: 914). The *muftis* conclude that the calls for a prohibition of female circumcision would contradict the *sharia* and that they could merely distinguish between duty and recommendation (Majmū'a min al-muftin 2006).

The ambivalence of their position becomes clear when al-Qaradawi states that the related *hadith* 'Do not exceed' cannot be regarded as strong, but at the same time considers the position in favour of 'circumcision in the moderate Islamic way' to be most probably correct. Circumcision would strengthen a woman's health and marriage (al-Qaradawi 2006b and 2007). This serves to illustrate the internal conflict that there is about the issue in the Islamic world.

In another IslamOnline.net *fatwa*, dated August 28, 2002, the Canadian *sheikh* Ahmad Kutty emphasizes the words 'prescribed' and 'obligatory', referring to female genital mutilation. In both instances, however, he adds an almost invisible 'not' in the concrete contexts. It is noteworthy, though, that due to the absence of an unambiguous prophetic tradition he refrains from calling female genital mutilation an Islamic ritual:

[I]f the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, had wanted female circumcision to be an integral aspect of religious practice in Islam the same way that male circumcision is, he would have said so clearly. Since he did not do so, we can safely assume it is not a prescribed ritual of Islam. (Kutty 2002; also quoted in Doueiri 2005.)

Another *fatwa* by Yusuf al-Qaradawi from December 13, 2004, already contains the essential points he made in his previously quoted *fatwas*. A few additional remarks point to the differences regarding female genital mutilation in the four Sunni legal schools (*madhāhib*). The Mālikī school considers it to be *sunna*, while the Hanafiyya and some Hanbalites hold it to be a 'meritorious action or noble deed' (*makrūma*, cf. Aldeeb Abu-Sahlieh 2006: 56). It is

the Shāfiites and most Hanbalites who consider it to be *wājib* (mandatory) in accordance with *sura* 16:123. The latter group also brings forth another argument in favour of FGM with regard to the *hadith* of the midwife who talked with Muhammad in Medina (see above). They argue that Muhammad implicitly allowed the midwife to see another woman's most private parts. These parts are, however, only to be exposed in mandatory cases. Consequently, the circumcision of women must be mandatory as well. In contrast to this opinion other scholars argue 'that exposing one's private parts for unnecessary medical treatment is allowed, as long as the benefit sought by such treatment is greater than the benefit of keeping the private parts covered'. Al-Qaradawi himself follows the *sunna* opinion (cf. also al-Qaradawi 2004a). Furthermore, he believes that any analogy between male and female would not be suitable in this case.

If unbiased experts prove that it really has harmful effects on females, it should be banned so as to ward off such effects. At the same time, if it is proved by some specialized doctors that some females are physically in need of being circumcised, this operation can be performed. (Al-Qaradawi 2004b, cf. also al-Qaradawi 2004a.)

He goes on to quote a physician who says that '[t]his operation violates a human right for women' on the grounds that they would lose their ability to feel an orgasm. This in turn would displease them and their husbands and hence disturb or even end their marriage. Still, al-Qaradawi concludes by saying that circumcision is permissible—regardless of all the contrary evidence given before.

Even though IslamOnline.net—despite the quarrels at its Cairo headquarters in early 2010 and the ensuing reconstruction of its online services—as well as al-Qaradawi personally are among the most prominent authorities in contemporary Islam, they are not the only ones where rulings about female genital mutilation can be found. *Mufti* Ebrahim Desai, an Indian-born scholar from South Africa, endorses female circumcision on AskImam.org on the grounds of its 'numerous physical benefits', its prevention of illnesses, its support of cleanliness, and its 'benefit for men'. Hence it is an honour for women (*makruma*) in accordance with prophetic tradition. Therefore it is permissible and recommended (*mustahabb*) according to him. Similarly to al-Qaradawi, Desai explains that only a light circumcision (clitoridotomy) should be performed (Desai 2004; cf. Krawietz 1991: 223). Besides, the *hadith* 'Do not exceed' is authentic in his opinion (Desai 2000 and 2002).

Since Desai also serves as a teacher for Muslims who study to become scholars themselves, his opinion is of some additional relevance. That it gains followers can be seen from the *fatwa* one of his students issued concerning female genital mutilation. On an extensive quotation of the *hadith* ‘Do not exceed’ and with reference to the *hadith* ‘Five are the acts’, he also comes to the conclusion ‘that “female circumcision” will be regarded as *Mustahab*’ (recommended). He explicitly acknowledges the controversial discussion about the issue in Islamic scholarship and restricts the permission to clitoridotomy (bin Said 2010).

Mufti Muhammad Salih al-Munajjid from Saudi Arabia, who hosts IslamQA.com, generally represents a traditional view. Like Desai and his student he states in one *fatwa* entitled ‘Circumcision for women is not obligatory’, that FGM ‘is an honour for women, but it is not obligatory’ (Al-Munajjid nd). Also, in his opinion the *hadith* ‘Five are the acts’ ‘includes circumcision of both males and females’. He acknowledges, though, that the prophetic traditions concerning that matter are not without ambiguity (Islam Q&A nd.a).

What makes al-Munajjid’s rulings noteworthy beyond the usual scholarly reasoning is the voices he quotes which are almost exclusively in favour of FGM and, moreover, several decades old. Such is the case with a 1986 *fatwa* by the Egyptian *Dār al-Iftā’*, which claims that people condemning female genital cutting represent ‘individual opinions which are not derived from any agreed scientific basis’ (Islam Q&A nd.a). Furthermore, he even quotes the supportive physician Hāmid al-Ghawābī, who identifies several medical and sexual benefits of female circumcision and denies that it results in frigidity ‘except in the case of Pharaonic circumcision’ (Islam Q&A nd.b). According to Islam Q&A this medical opinion was copied from a 1950s issue of *Liwā’ al-Islām* magazine, where it was printed as a response to the controversy surrounding FGM at the time (cf. Krawietz 1991: 223; Aldeeb Abu-Sahlieh 2006: 59).⁹ Their perhaps principal witness is a female Muslim gynaecologist who maintains that

[i]f the benefits [of female circumcision] are not apparent now, they will become known in the future, as happened with regard to male circumcision—the world now knows its benefits and it has become widespread among all nations despite the opposition of some groups (Islam Q&A nd.b).

9 Al-Ghawābī’s article is translated and reprinted in Abdu’r-Razzaq 1998: 30 ff.

Unfortunately, al-Munajjid's *fatwas* are published without giving the date. They can, however, be traced back at least to September 2006, which is prior to the world conference of *ulama* in Cairo mentioned in the beginning (see above).

In contrast to these rather favourable voices, according to *Mufti* Dani Doueiri and his team at *IslamiCity.com* there is no mention of FGM in the Quran and hence there is no duty to be circumcised as a woman. When the circumcision does not harm the woman, however, a small circumcision is permitted. They admit that this would be a recognition of pre-Islamic customs (Doueiri 1997a–c).

It is quite interesting to note that over the course of more than sixteen months, these muftis answered different questions pertaining to female circumcision with the very same *fatwa* text. The only passage that changes is the question. People want to know what the *hadiths* mention about the practice (Doueiri 1997a), whether it is allowed and if so, how much should be cut (Doueiri 1997b), and whether it is mandatory for women based on the *hadith* 'When the two circumcised parts meet' (Doueiri 1998b). One question even recurs to the anti-Western bias: 'What is Islam's position on the assertion by non-Muslims that "circumcision" of women is prescribed by the religion of Islam' (Doueiri 1997c)?

In conclusion, Doueiri and his team suggest that the *sharia* prohibits partial or complete clitoridectomy or infibulation, 'or any genital mutilation which impairs the woman's ability to enjoy sexual relations' (Doueiri 1997a–c). There is no mention of a symbolic circumcision, which might be left as a loophole as long as the practice of FGM has not come to an end (cf. Ali 2008: 101).

Finally, Doueiri and his team refer the readers to an article on their website which clearly mentions FGM in the title: 'Female Genital Mutilation: An Islamic Perspective' (Doueiri 1997a–c). The author is even quoted in the *fatwas* though without proper reference. His *fatwa*-like article seems to have been written against the background of immigrant Muslims in the United States, whom he encourages to leave FGM behind. He defends attempts to declare FGM prohibited (*harām*), or at least abominable (*makrūh*) in the ongoing struggle 'to fight against superstition and oppression' adding that it 'would be wise to remember that there is a great burden of proof that Islam puts upon those who wish to prohibit a practice, and that the requirement for such a proof is a strength of the Islamic law' (Ahmad 2004).

Conclusion

In the past, several steps and attempts at legally banning FGM failed repeatedly. An undated *fatwa* requested by a questioner who gave Germany as his country of residence seems to be as symptomatic as it is provocative in asking about female genital mutilation: ‘So was it *harām* when people have performed the circumcision of their daughters for decades?’¹⁰ His insinuation clearly reveals the strength of traditional practices, habits, and customs (*urf*, *āda*). Consequently, it is not surprising that already in the 1950s contradictory *fatwas* were issued on that question (Aldeeb Abu-Sahlieh 2006: 59).

The reason for the ambivalent approach of *muftis* presented in this paper may well be a tribute to social constraints. On the other hand, it is also likely that the ambiguity really is a balance of weighing pros and cons and a mere compilation of the religio-legal evidence. Thus reflecting the tradition of *iftā* the *muftis* might not actually intend to give a clear answer, but leave it to the discretion of the questioners to choose what is suitable in their specific situations. After all, a *fatwa* is not a binding court verdict. The historical nature of *fatwas* is rather to instruct and inform (cf. Skovgaard-Petersen 1997: 385).

There is, however, some evidence that *muftis* in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries compete for the conclusive authority over Muslim minds by providing clear behaviour guidelines or religious guidance (*hudā*, cf. Kutscher 2009b: 33 ff.). Hence positioning themselves on one side of the spectrum also leads to a certain reputation within their respective contexts which again reflects a certain social accommodation. The one-sidedness of some of their *fatwas* with arguments either in favour of or against female circumcision supports this point of view. This seems to be true of *IslamiCity.com* where reference to Muslims in minority contexts is made. And it holds true for *IslamQA.com* where the Wahhabi principle to follow the virtuous early Muslim community is implicitly emphasized. Aside from this, the target audience does not seem to play a decisive role in formulating the *fatwas*. Al-Qaradawi as well as al-Munajjid have published *fatwas* on FGM in both Arabic and English. Yet their opinions remain consistent regardless of whether the reader is Arab or European. Hence, the ambiguity in one *fatwa* might be an attempt to appease both audiences.

In practice, two solutions seem to be possible if one discards the option of proving the mentioned *hadiths* and their transmission chains (*isnāds*) to be

10 Translated from IslamOnline.net (nd): *Fa-hal mā qāma bi-hi al-nās mundhu ‘asharāt al-sinīn min khitān banātihim kāna harāman?*

faulty and unreliable. On the one hand it might be helpful if the recognized exceptional cases of medical necessity could be emphasized as such even though, strictly speaking, medical necessity does not require religious justification. On the other hand, the historical context of those *hadiths* could be stressed more prominently. For instance, a woman's right to experience sexual pleasure has been established. Historically as well as relating to the hierarchy of the legal principles (e.g. *hurma*) there are newer and stronger arguments against female genital mutilation.

References

Works cited

Abdu'r-Razzaq, Abu Bakr

1998 *Circumcision in Islam*. London: Dar Al Taqwa.

Abou El Fadl, Khaled

2001 *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority and Women*. Oxford: One-world Publications.

El Ahl, Amira

2006 Theologians battle female circumcision. *Spiegel Online* (6 December). <http://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/0,1518,452790,00.html> (accessed on 23 February 2011).

Ahmad, Imad-ad-Dean

2004 Female genital mutilation: an Islamic perspective. *MFI Pamphlet* 1 (2 March). <http://www.islamicity.com/articles/Articles.asp?ref=MF0403-2234> (accessed on 23 February 2011).

Akashe-Böhme, Farideh

2006 *Sexualität und Körperpraxis im Islam*. Frankfurt a.M.: Brandes & Apsel.

Aldeeb Abu-Sahlieh, Sami A.

2006 Male and female circumcision: the myth of the difference. In: Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf (ed.), *Female Circumcision. Multicultural Perspectives*; pp. 47–72. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Ali, Kecia

2008 *Sexual Ethics & Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur'an, Hadith, and Jurisprudence*. Oxford: Oneworld.

Arberry, Arthur J.

1964 *The Koran Interpreted*. London: Oxford University Press.

Al-A'sar, Marwa

2006 Lawyers warn against loophole allowing FGM. *Daily News Egypt* (24 November). <http://www.dailystaregypt.com/article.aspx?ArticleID=4125> (accessed on 23 February 2011).

Badry, Roswitha

1999 Zur »Mädchenbeschneidung« in islamischen Ländern: religiös-rechtliche Aspekte und feministische Kritik. *Freiburger Frauen-Studien* 2: 211–32.

Birch, Nicholas

2005 Female circumcision surfaces in Iraq: A German aid group finds the first solid proof of the practice, thought to be prevalent in the Middle East. *The Christian Science Monitor* (10 August). <http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0810/p06s01-woiq.html?s=t5> (accessed on 23 February 2011).

al-Bukhārī, Muhammad ibn Ismā'īl

2000 *Sahīh al-Bukhārī*. Vaduz: Thesaurus Islamicus Foundation.

Dār al-Iftā' al-Misriyya (ed.)

2006 'Tawsiyyāt mu'tamar al-'ulamā' al-'ālamī nahwa hazr intihāk jasad al-mar'a. <http://www.dar-alifta.org/viewbayandar.aspx?ID=23> (accessed on 28 November 2006).

Dirie, Waris

nd Waris Dirie fordert in Bravo: »Schützt Mädchen vor Beschneidung!« <http://www.bravo.de/dr-sommer/koerper-gesundheit/waris-dirie-fordert-in-bravo-schuetzt-maedchen-vor-beschneidung> (accessed on 23 February 2011).

Ebert, Hans-Georg

2005 Tendenzen der Rechtsentwicklung. In: Werner Ende & Udo Steinbach (eds), *Der Islam in der Gegenwart*; pp. 199–228. 5th edn. Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung.

The Encyclopaedia of Islam

1997 Khafd. In: *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*. New Edition, Vol. 4; pp. 913–14. Leiden: E.J. Brill.

Fofanah, Kadiatu & Ariane Heimbach

2010 Sie beschneidet nicht mehr. Aber jetzt fehlt Kadiatu Fofanah aus Sierra Leone der Verdienst. Und manche Nachbarinnen verfluchen sie. *chrismon* 6: 54.

Frank, Charlotte

2006 An das Unmögliche glauben. Wie der Abenteurer Rüdiger Nehberg erreichte, dass es nun eine Fatwa gegen Frauenverstümmelung gibt. *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (23–6 December): 7.

Gräf, Bettina

2010 *Medien-Fatwas@Yusuf al-Qaradawi. Die Popularisierung des islamischen Rechts*. Berlin: Klaus Schwarz.

Harvey, L.P.

2007 *Ibn Battuta*. London & New York: I.B. Tauris.

Krawietz, Birgit

1991 *Die Hurma. Schariatrechtlicher Schutz vor Eingriffen in die körperliche Unversehrtheit nach arabischen Fatwas des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot.

2002 *Hierarchie der Rechtsquellen im tradierten sunnitischen Islam*. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot.

Kutscher, Jens

2008 Online-Fatwas. Verständnis und Wandel übermittelter Werte in Deutschland. In: Alev Inan & Andrea König (eds), *Medienbildung – Medienalltag. Theologische, pädagogische und interkulturelle Perspektiven*; pp. 223–40. München: kopaed.

2009a Online-Fatwas – Islamische Rechtsgutachten und ihre Bedeutung für politische Partizipation. In: Matthias Brückner & Johanna Pink (eds), *Von Chatraum bis Cyberjihad. Muslimische Internetnutzung in lokaler und globaler Perspektive*; pp. 135–53. Würzburg: Ergon.

2009b The politics of virtual fatwa counseling in the 21st century. *Masaryk University Journal of Law and Technology* 3 (1): 33–49.

MEMRI (ed.)

2007 Saudi feminist Wajeha al-Huweidar: the campaign for women's right to drive Saudi Arabia is just the beginning. *Special Dispatch* 1722 (21 September). <http://www.memri.org/report/en/o/o/o/o/o/o/2383.htm> (accessed on 23 February 2011).

Muslim ibn al-Hajjāj al-Qushayrī

2000 *Sahih Muslim*. Vaduz: Thesaurus Islamicus Foundation.

Osten-Sacken, Thomas von der & Thomas Uwer

2007 Is female genital mutilation an Islamic problem? *Middle East Quarterly* (Winter): 29–36. <http://www.meforum.org/1629/is-female-genital-mutilation-an-islamic-problem> (accessed on 23 February 2011).

Rahmsdorf, Inga & Britta Verlinden

2010 Mit dem Skalpell gegen die Natur. Der Markt für Schönheitsoperationen wächst. Ärzte warnen besonders vor Operationen im Intimbereich. *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (25 June): 29.

Rohe, Mathias

2009 *Das islamische Recht. Geschichte und Gegenwart*. 2nd edn. Munich: C.H. Beck.

Rosenke, Marion

2000 *Die rechtlichen Probleme im Zusammenhang mit der weiblichen Genitalverstümmelung*. Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang.

Saleh, Yasmine

2007 Mufti's 'Hymen fatwa' causes shock wave among scholars. *Daily News Egypt* (20 February). <http://www.dailystaregypt.com/article.aspx?ArticleID=5719> (accessed on 23 February 2011).

Salmān, 'Umrān

2007 Wajīha al-Huwaydir li-»Āfāq«: Nurīdu min bint al-malik wa-l-amīrāt al-ukhrayāt al-indimām ilā hamlatinā. *Āfāq* (20 September). http://www.aaafq.org/news.aspx?id_news=2113 (accessed on 23 February 2011).

Schacht, Joseph

1964 *An Introduction to Islamic Law*. London: Oxford University Press.

Skovgaard-Petersen, Jakob

1997 *Defining Islam for the Egyptian State: Muftis and Fatwas of the Dār al-Iftā*. Leiden et al.: Brill.

Skovgaard-Petersen, Jakob & Bettina Gräf

2009 *Global Mufti: The Phenomenon of Yusuf al-Qaradawi*. London: Hurst.

Slackman, Michael

2007 In Egypt: Voices Rise to Protect Girls from the Blade. *The New York Times / Süddeutsche Zeitung* (1 October): 3.

Wensinck, A. J.

1986 Khitān. In: *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*. New Edition, Vol. 5; pp. 20–2. Leiden: E.J. Brill.

WHO (ed.)

2010 *Global strategy to stop health-care providers from performing female genital mutilation*. Geneva: World Health Organization. http://whqlibdoc.who.int/hq/2010/WHO_RHR_10.9_eng.pdf (accessed on 23 February 2011).

Fatwas cited

Desai, Ebrahim

- 2000 What does Islam (Holy Quran, Shariah, Hadith) say, if at all, about the female circumcision [sic] or FGM—Female Genital Mutilation? (15 October): Question no. 1239. <http://askimam.org/> (accessed on 23 February 2011).
- 2002 What is the Islamic ruling on female circumcision? Please explain in detail (20 March): Question no. 5229. <http://askimam.org/> (accessed on 23 February 2011).
- 2004 What is the area to be circumcised for females? (29 April): Question no. 11271. http://askimam.org (accessed on 23 February 2011).

Doueiri, Dani & Imam Team

- 1997a Female Circumcision (15 April): Question no. 1026. <http://www.islamicity.com/qa/> (accessed on 23 February 2011).
- 1997b Female Circumcision (6 November): Question no. 1917. <http://www.islamicity.com/qa/> (accessed on 23 February 2011).
- 1997c Female Circumcision (27 December): Question no. 2403. <http://www.islamicity.com/qa/> (accessed on 23 February 2011).
- 1998a Circumcision (2 February): Question no. 2641. <http://www.islamicity.com/qa/> (accessed on 23 February 2011).
- 1998b Female Circumcision (18 August): Question no. 3740. <http://www.islamicity.com/qa/> (accessed on 23 February 2011).
- 2005 Women: Circumcision (22 June): Question no. 7378. <http://www.islamicity.com/qa/> (accessed on 23 February 2011).

Gomaa Mohammed, Ali

2007 Hymen restoration surgery (6 March). <http://www.dar-alifta.org/ViewFatwa.aspx?ID=416&Home=1&Home=1&Home=1&LangID=2> (accessed on 23 February 2011).

A Group of Islamic Researchers

2004 Medical Ethics of Male Circumcision (12 February). http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?pagename=IslamOnline-English-Ask_Scholar/FatwaE/FatwaE&cid=1119503545032 (accessed on 28 November 2006).

IslamOnline.net (ed.)

nd Khitān al-banāt. http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?pagename=IslamOnline-Arabic-Ask_Scholar/FatwaA/FatwaA&cid=1122528605466 (accessed on 28 November 2006).

Islam Q&A (ed.)

nd.a Circumcision of girls and some doctors' criticism thereof. <http://islamqa.com/en/ref/60314> (accessed on 23 February 2011).

nd.b Medical benefits of female circumcision. <http://www.islamqa.com/en/ref/45528> (accessed on 23 February 2011).

Kutty, Ahmad

2002 Female circumcision: is it really obligatory? (28 August). http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?cid=1119503545826&pagename=IslamOnline-English-Ask_Scholar%2FFatwaE%2FFatwaEAskTheScholar (accessed on 28 November 2006).

Majmū'a min al-muftīn

2006 Bayna al-tibb wa-l-shar': al-khitān (23 November). http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?cid=1122528600670&pagename=IslamOnline-Arabic-Ask_Scholar%2FFatwaA%2FFatwaAAskTheScholar (accessed on 28 November 2006).

Al-Munajjid, Muhammad Salih

nd Circumcision for women is not obligatory. <http://www.islamqa.com/en/ref/427> (accessed on 23 February 2011).

al-Qaradawi, Yusuf

2004a al-Khitān qadiyya fiqhiyya wa-tibbiyya wa-ijtimā'iyya (28 April). http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?pagename=IslamOnline-Arabic-Ask_Scholar/FatwaA/FatwaA&cid=1122528622892 (accessed on 28 November 2006).

2004b Circumcision: juristic, medical & social perspectives (13 December). http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?cid=1119503548446&pagename=IslamOnline-English-Ask_Scholar%2FFatwaE%2FFatwaEAskTheScholar (accessed on 28 November 2006).

2006a al-Hukm al-shar'ī fī khitān al-ināth (November). http://www.qaradawi.net/site/topics/article.asp?cu_no=2&item_no=4609&version=1&template_id=226&parent_id=17 (accessed on 23 February 2011).

- 2006b Islamic ruling on female circumcision (23 November). http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?cid=1119503543886&pagename=IslamOnline-English-Ask_Scholar%2FFatwaE%2FFatwaEAskTheScholar (accessed on 28 November 2006).
- 2007 Islamic ruling on female circumcision (1 July). http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?cid=1119503543886&pagename=IslamOnline-English-Ask_Scholar%2FFatwaE%2FFatwaEAskTheScholar (accessed on 21 July 2007).
- 2009 *Khitān al-ināth.. ru'ya shar'iyya* (16 March). http://qaradawi.net/site/topics/article.asp?cu_no=2&item_no=6873&version=1&template_id=130&parent_id=17 (accessed on 23 February 2011).
- bin Said, Mohammad Ashhad**
- 2010 I want to know about female circumcision in detail (13 April): Question no. 18589. <http://askimam.org/> (accessed on 23 February 2011).

Islam and tattooing

An old question, a new research topic*

Abū Bakr looked out over his people from the enclosure while Asmā' bt. 'Umayy was steadying him with tattooed hands [*mawshūmat al-yadayni*]. He said, 'Will you be satisfied with him who I have left as [my] successor over you? For, by God, I do not shun the effort [to reach] the best opinion, nor have I appointed a relative. I have designated 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb as my successor; therefore, hear him and obey.' They responded, 'We hear and obey.' (al-Ṭabarī 1993: 146–7.)¹

Apart from its great significance relative to the formation of early Muslim society, the above quotation from Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'riḫ al-rusul wa'l-mulūk* (*History of the Messengers and the Kings*) contains an interesting, if incidental, bit of information: the hands of Asmā' bt. 'Umayy were tattooed. This fact, as we shall see in the following discussion, is an important reminder that when scrutinizing and comparing historical sources on religious dogma and societal practices, discrepancies between theory and practice are commonly found.

While most Muslim theologians have argued on the basis of the ḥadīth-literature that tattooing is *ḥarām* (forbidden), it is nonetheless possible to find both historical and contemporary examples indicating that, at different times and in different places, this art was practiced by certain Islamic groups. The historicity of the above quotation and the election of 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb has, of course, been called into question—not the least by historians associated with Shī'a Islam, but also by other ḥadīth-reports which stress that Asmā' bt. 'Umayy was tattooed prior to the rise of Islam, that is, in the age of *jāhiliyya*

* I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Abdulwahid Morrone and Tetz Rooke, both have commented on, discussed and improved my arguments for this text on several occasions.

¹ A reference to Asmā' bt. 'Umayy's tattooed hands can also be found in Ibn Sa'd 1904: 207.

and consequently it is argued that this practice has nothing to do with Islam. For example, in the *Tahdhīb al-Āthār*, which is collection of ḥadīth by Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, the practice of tattooing is associated with the *jāhiliyya* and the fashion of the Berbers, but this background information is not mentioned in the *Taʾrīkh al-rusul waʾl-mulūk*.²

Although discussions concerning the art of tattooing with needles and colour have occurred in most societies and cultures, from Greco-Roman antiquity until today, in terms of Muslim societies, it is evident that most Islamic authorities have concluded that tattooing, or *al-washm*,³ is forbidden and contrary to religious law.⁴ It is here important to note that the Arabic word *washm* should not be confused with *wasm*, which refers to cauterising, marking or branding and can be found both in the Qurʾān and in popular literature on folk medicine.⁵ With specific reference to *washm*, or tattooing, it has been well documented that certain Muslim groups (e.g., the Berbers and the Bedouins) in places such as Africa, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Iran and West Pakistan have used tattoos for beautification, prophylaxis and the prevention of disease (especially for sicknesses caused by supernatural forces such as the

2 For the purpose of this text I have used an online edition of the *Tahdhīb al-Āthār*, see ḥadīth no. 154, Book 1/168. For the whole text, see <http://www.islamport.com/b/3/alhadeeth/motoon/%DF%CA%C8%20%C7%E1%E3%CA%E6%E4/%CA%E5%D0%ED%C8%20%C7%E1%C2%CB%C7%D1%20%E1%E1%D8%C8%D1%ED/%CA%E5%D0%ED%C8%20%C7%E1%C2%CB%C7%D1%20%E1%E1%D8%C8%D1%ED%20001.html> (accessed on 15 October 2010).

3 *Al-washm* is the most common Arabic word for tattooing, but words like *daqq*, *dagh*, *khāl* and *sham* are also used when referring to this practice. While all the theologians mentioned in this article use the term *washm*, *daqq* is often used as well. Among the Aghāch Eris of the Kuh-e Giluyeh region in southwest Iran, the word for tattooing is *khāl*, and branding is called *dāgh kardan*, see Oberling 1962: 127.

4 A detailed discussion of tattooing and branding, and of the methodological and source-critical problems related to this field, can be found in Jones 1987: 139–55. C. P. Jones especially emphasises that, often, it is very difficult to determine whether the sources are referring to branding with hot irons or tattooing with needles and colour. Because of this, many of the early sources that mention this custom have been misinterpreted by academic researchers. A similar methodological problem is discussed by Per Beskow, who notes that we are not even able to ascertain the precise nature of the mark that is supposed to have been placed on the foreheads of the initiates of Mithras (Beskow 1979: 487–501). He concludes: ‘There is no evidence for branding or tattooing, nor for crosses or X-marks applied to the bodies of the initiates, nor any indication that such marks were considered to symbolise the sun in the mysteries’ (Beskow 1979: 499). For Judaic opinions on tattooing, see ‘Tattoo’, in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Vol. 15, 1971: 832.

5 Regarding this practice, see, for example, Ghazanfar 1995 and Ambros 2004: 289.

evil eye).⁶ Among Islam's lay populations, tattooing has been considered significant as a healing practice for a very long time despite the formal opinions of Islamic scholars and theologians. And while in more recent times these Muslim groups appear to have abandoned past notions about the function of tattoos, which had caused a certain waning of the practice,⁷ of late it has had a resurgence—although for reasons that differ from those of distant times. The rise of interest in tattoos among Muslims has been directly observed by a handful of contemporary researchers, and is indirectly indicated by the fact that many contemporary Muslim authorities have expressed growing concern about the practice.⁸ In 2007, for example, the newspaper *Radikal* (2.5.2007) reported that the Turkish *Diyanet* (Directorate of Religious Affairs) had decided to ban tattooing, judging it to be contrary to Islam.⁹ The article also mentioned that the *Diyanet* was determined to combat local traditions that accepted the practice of tattooing and curb its recently renewed popularity, especially among Turkish youths. Because they fear that Muslims worldwide will be influenced by the explosion of interest occurring in the West, many of today's theologians consider it essential to explain why tattooing is problematic from the perspective of Islam.¹⁰ This development has been further spurred on by the fact that many Muslims are actively seeking advice and clarification about where Islam stands on the matter of tattoos.

- 6 See, for example, Smeaton 1937, Carswell 1965, Kossiakov 1966, Schönig 2002: 308–14, Oberling 1962 and Turner 1987: 272. Cf. also Westermarck 1918: 219, and van Dinter 2005 (especially Chapters 7 and 8).
- 7 The fact that the practice of tattooing had begun to wane at a certain historical point is confirmed by Winifred Smeaton, who, in 1937, wrote: 'Tattooing is a custom which already shows signs of disappearing, especially in the cities. It is rarely observed among the upper classes, and it is despised by city-dwellers of the lower classes as well.' (Smeaton 1937: 53.) Cf. Lancaster 2002: 160.
- 8 During a May 2007 workshop in Turkey, for example, I personally observed that Istiklal Caddesi, one of Istanbul's most popular streets, contained a good number of tattooing and body-piercing studios.
- 9 'Önce dövme sonra tövbe', *Radikal* 2.5.2007. I would like to thank Hege Irene Markussen for her translation of the above mentioned newspaper report and for bringing the views of the *Diyanet* to my attention.
- 10 Post-Saddam Hussein Iraq provides a good example of a Muslim country in which the increased demand for tattoos is very evident. Largely due to the arrival of American and other Western troops, many of whom came well adorned with tattoos, a good many Iraqis have been drawn to the practice, despite the fact that tattoos and tattooing are officially banned by the religious establishment as something contrary to Islam. With regards to this development, see Partlow 2006.

While it would certainly be interesting to empirically test whether or not the processes mentioned above have engendered a new attitude of acceptance among the general Muslim population, the aim of the remainder of this article is first to sketch the background of the more formal theological discussion on tattooing (especially in the ḥadīth-literature). Secondly it aims to examine a number of contemporary religious texts that specifically deal with Muslim theological opinions about this practice: what is considered to be the problem; and what types of arguments are employed by the selected theologians in their attempts to provide answers. Is it possible to see the renewed interest in tattoos as an example of the fact that there is a gap between theory (what the theologians say) and practice (what the believers actually do)? At the outset, however, it is important to note that this article explores the views of only a handful of theologians, whose arguments and conclusions may not be representative of all Muslims. Nonetheless, it can confidently be said that regardless of the historical period, geographical location, or Islamic tradition to which they belong, most Muslim scholars basically agree with the theological opinions expressed herein.¹¹

I

Muslim theologians often justify their prohibition of tattooing by citing the following Quranic passage: '[Satan] will command them (his devotees) to change what Allah has created' (Q4:119). However, apart from this rather vague and indirect reference, there is no mention of *washm* or tattooing in the Qur'ān—that is to say, the Arabic root consonant *w-sh-m* cannot be found in this seminal text.¹² Thus for a primary historical discussion on this topic, one must turn instead to the ḥadīth-literature.

11 For example, it is possible to find several *fatwas* condemning tattooing on the homepage of Ask the Imam (<http://www.islam.tc/ask-imam/index.php>), headed by Mufti Ebrahim Desai, from the Darul Ifta, Madrasah in'aamiyyah Camperdown, South Africa (see, for example, 'Regarding the Rule of Tattooing in Islam. . .', <http://www.islam.tc/ask-imam/view.php?q=16590> and 'Can a Muslim have a Tattoo of a Moon and Star on His/Her Body?', <http://www.islam.tc/ask-imam/view.php?q=14769>). In *The Beard between the Salaf & Khalaf*, Muhammad Al-Jibaly notes, in relation to tattooing, that it is forbidden for any believer to change the way Allāh has created things—in this case, the body. Al-Jibaly's book is published by Al-Kitaab & al-Sunnah Publishing, but it is possible to download it from <http://www.al-sunnah.com/pdf/beard.pdf>.

12 It should be mentioned, however, that the Qur'ān does contain two references to 'branding/markings': according to Arne A. Ambros's *A Concise Dictionary of Koranic*

In a search conducted on the Muslim Student Association's online ḥadīth-database, the query 'tattooing' generated thirteen 'hits' in Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī and one 'hit' in the partial translation of the Sunan Abū Dā'ūd; the query 'tattoos' generated one 'hit' in Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim and four 'hits' in Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī. Regardless of the possibility that this search engine contains some errors and that its Arabic-to-English translation is questionable, it is nevertheless a useful tool for locating specific topical discussions in the vast body of ḥadīth-literature. As a further measure, the findings in the search engine were compared with A. J. Wensinck's *A Handbook of Early Muhammadan Tradition* (1927: 227, s.v. 'tattooing'). Since most of the *aḥadīth* references to tattooing are found in al-Bukhārī, I include a table (see pp. 242–3), which provides an overview of the topic under discussion. The numbering of the books (which varies between different editions) and the English translation used to create this table are taken from the Arabic–English edition of the Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī, published by the Darussalam in Riyad Saudi Arabia (1997).

It is argued by Sunni Muslims who follow the *shāfi'ī* school of law that tattooing causes impurity, that tattoos are prohibited by the prophet Muhammad (see, e.g. Ibn al-Naqīb al-Miṣri 1997), and that those who are decorated with tattoos are contaminated with *najas* (Izutsu 2002: 241).¹³ Why tattoos are considered *najas* by the *shāfi'ī* school of law is explained in the following *fatwa* by Amjad Rasheed:

Tattoos are considered filthy [*najas*] in our school and they prevent the validity of prayer. This is because tattooing—according to the explanation of the fuqaha—is extracting blood from the hand (for example) using a needle and then mixing a coloured pigment with it that will mix with the blood and then dry so that its substance remains on the outer body. (Rasheed 2005.)

Arabic, the verb *yasimu* in Q5:35 means 'to brand' and '*inna fī dālika la-āyātin li-l-mutawassimīna* in Q15:75 can be translated as 'marking' (Ambros 2004: 289).

- 13 Here it must be emphasised that in the entirety of the Qur'an, the term *najas* appears only once, and in a passage that makes no direct reference to tattoos: 'O you who believe, polytheists (*al-mushrikūn*) are only *najas* [i.e., entirely contaminated]; do not let them draw near the sacred mosque after this, their year' (Q9:28). According to A. Kevin Reinhart, although it is generally believed that the 'contamination' referred to in the above quotation is *not* transferable to others, being a polytheist nonetheless 'disqualifies one from attending the sacred mosque'. Beyond this, however, the 'filth' of polytheism is equated by some Islamic scholars with the 'filth' of dogs and swine—two animals that Muslims are directed not to even touch. See Reinhart 2001: 410.

| Vol., book, narrator | Report |
|--|---|
| <p>Vol. 3, Book 34 (<i>The Book of Sales</i>), No. 2086, p. 175. Narrated: 'Aūn bin Abū Juḥaifa</p> | <p>My father bought a slave who practised the profession of cupping. (My father broke the slave's instruments for cupping.) I asked my father why he had done so. He replied, 'The Prophet forbade the acceptance of the price of a dog or blood, and also forbade the profession of tattooing, or getting tattooed [<i>al-wāshima wa-l-mawshūma</i>] and the eater of <i>Ribā</i> (usury), and one who gives it, and cursed the picture-makers.'</p> |
| <p>Vol. 6, Book 65 (<i>The Book of Commentary</i>), No. 4886, pp. 340–1. Narrated: 'Alqama</p> | <p>'Abdullāh (bin Mas'ūd) said, 'Allāh curses those ladies who practise tattooing and those who get themselves tattooed [<i>al-wāshimāt wa-l-mūtashimāt</i>], and those ladies who get their hair removed from their eyebrows and faces (except the beard and moustache) and those who make artificial spaces between their teeth in order to look more beautiful whereby they change Allāh's creation.'</p> |
| <p>Vol. 7, Book 68 (<i>The Book of Divorce</i>), No. 5347, p. 170. Narrated: Abū Juḥaifa</p> | <p>The Prophet cursed the lady who practises tattooing and the one who gets herself tattooed [<i>al-wāshima wa-l-mustawshima</i>], and one who eats (takes) <i>Ribā</i>' (usury) and the one who gives it. And he prohibited taking the price of a dog, and the money earned by prostitution, and cursed the makers of pictures.</p> |
| <p>Vol. 7, Book 76 (<i>The Book of Medicine</i>), No. 5740, p. 351. Narrated: Abū Hurairah</p> | <p>The Prophet said, 'The effect of an evil eye is a fact.' And he prohibited tattooing [<i>al-washm</i>].</p> |
| <p>Vol. 7, Book 77 (<i>The Book of Dress</i>), No. 5931, pp. 432–3. Narrated: 'Abdullāh</p> | <p>Allāh has cursed those women who practise tattooing and those who get themselves tattooed [<i>al-wāshimāt wa-l-mustawshimāt</i>], and those who remove their face hairs, and those who create a space between their teeth artificially to look beautiful, as such women alter the features created by Allāh.</p> |
| <p>Vol. 7, Book 77 (<i>The Book of Dress</i>), No. 5939, p. 435. Narrated: 'Alqama</p> | <p>'Abdullāh cursed those women who practised tattooing [<i>al-wāshimāt</i>] and those who removed hair from their faces, eyebrows etc. and those who created spaces between their teeth artificially to look beautiful, as such ladies alter the features created by Allāh.</p> |
| <p>Vol. 77, Book 77 (<i>The Book of Dress</i>), No. 5937, p. 434. Narrated: Ibn 'Umar</p> | <p>Allāh's Messenger said, 'Allāh has cursed the lady who lengthens (her own or someone else's) hair artificially, and also the one who gets it lengthened, and also a lady who tattoos (herself or someone else) and also the one who gets herself tattooed [<i>al-wāshima wa-l-mustawshima</i>].</p> |

| Vol., book, narrator | Report |
|--|--|
| Vol. 7, Book 77 (<i>The Book of Dress</i>), No. 5943, p. 436–7. Narrated: Ibn Mas'ūd | Allāh has cursed those women who practise tattooing and those who get it done for themselves [<i>al-wāshimāt wa-l-mustawshimāt</i>], and those who remove hair from their faces, eye-brows etc. and those who create spaces between their teeth artificially to look beautiful, and those ladies who alter the features created by Allāh. |
| Vol. 7, Book 77 (<i>The Book of Dress</i>), No. 5944, p. 437. Narrated: Abū Hurairah | Allāh's Messenger said, 'The evil eye is a fact,' and he forbade tattooing [<i>al-washm</i>]. |
| Vol. 7, Book 77 (<i>The Book of Dress</i>), No. 5945, p. 437. Narrated: Abū Juhaifa | The Prophet forbade taking the price of blood and the price of a dog, and he also forbade the one who takes (eats) <i>Ribā</i> (usury) the one who gives <i>Ribā</i> (usury) the woman who practises tattooing and the woman who gets herself tattooed [<i>al-wāshima wa-l-mustawshima</i>]. |
| Vol. 7, Book 77 (<i>The Book of Dress</i>), No. 5946, pp. 437–8. Narrated: Abū Hurairah | A woman who used to practise tattooing was brought to 'Umar. 'Umar got up and said, 'I beseech you by Allāh, which of you heard the Prophet saying something about tattooing?' I got up and said, 'O chief of the Believers! I heard something.' He said, 'What did you hear?' I said, 'I heard the Prophet (addressing the ladies), saying, "Do not practise tattooing and do not get yourselves tattooed [<i>lā tashimna, wa-lā tastawshimna</i>]."' |
| Vol. 7, Book 77 (<i>The Book of Dress</i>), No. 5940, p. 436. Narrated: Ibn 'Umar | The Prophet has cursed the lady who lengthens her hair artificially and the one who gets her hair lengthened, and also the lady who tattoos (herself or others) and the one who gets herself tattooed [<i>al-wāshima wa-l-mustawshima</i>]. |
| Vol. 7, Book 77 (<i>The Book of Dress</i>), No. 5948, p. 438. Narrated: 'Abdullāh | Allāh has cursed those women who practise tattooing and those who get it done for themselves [<i>al-wāshimāt wa-l-mustawshimāt</i>], and those who remove hair from their faces, eye-brows etc. and those who artificially create spaces between their teeth to look beautiful, and those women who alter the features created by Allāh. |

According to this opinion, the process of tattooing is causing impurity because it creates a mixture of blood and coloured pigment to remain upon the surface of the skin. Since the tattoo will always contain a trace of this drawn blood, 'the prayers of a person with such a mark are not valid until the tattoo is removed, because blood is filth and it is not valid to pray with traces of filth on one's body' (Rasheed 2007). Today, however, one can create a tattoo via

modern processes that no longer involve the ‘mixing of dye with blood after it exits onto the outer surface of the body’ (Rasheed 2007); since it is precisely the trace of blood that is said to be the cause of the impurity, this should meet the above objection, making it theoretically possible for a Muslim to wear a tattoo and perform a valid prayer. This notwithstanding, the followers of the *shāfi‘ī* school of law in any case insist that all forms of tattooing, regardless of method, are unlawful and prohibited by Islamic law. Sheikh Amjad Rasheed makes the point as follows: ‘tattooing is unconditionally unlawful regardless of the method that is employed because it involves altering Allah’s creation without necessity, even if it no longer comprises the infliction of pain or the filthification of the skin’ (Rasheed 2007).

II

When attempting to analyse theological discussions, it is important to remember that there tends to be a gap between the opinions and interpretations of theologians on the one hand, and the so-called common beliefs, practices and customs of lay Muslims on the other. This discrepancy is clearly illustrated in several passages of Edward William Lane’s classic book, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (1836). Among the many portrayals in this book, there is a vivid description of how certain Egyptian women apply indelible markings to their bodies in order to beautify themselves—a tattooing practice that is clearly at odds with the strict opinions of the ‘*ulamā*’. Lane writes:

Among the females of the lower order, in the country-towns and villages of Egypt, and among the same classes in the metropolis, but in a lesser degree, prevails a custom somewhat similar to that above described [i.e., the *henna* colouring]: it consists in making indelible marks of a blue or greenish hue upon the face and other parts, or, at least, upon the front of the chin, and upon the back of the right hand, and often also upon the left hand, the right arm, or both arms, the feet, the middle of the bosom, and the forehead: the most common of these marks made up the chin and hands are represented in the next page. The operation is performed with several needles (generally seven) tied together: with these the skin is pricked in the desired pattern: some smoke-black (of wood or oil), mixed with milk from the breast of a woman, is then rubbed in; and about a week after, before the skin has healed, paste of the pounded fresh leaves

of white beet or clover is applied, and gives a blue or greenish colour to the marks: or, to produce the same effect, in a more simple manner, some indigo is rubbed into the punctures, instead of the smoke-black, &c. It is generally performed at the age of about five or six years, and by gipsy-women.¹⁴ The term applied to it is “*daḳḳ*.” (Lane 1973: 39–41.)¹⁵

Lane also notes that women in Upper Egypt tattoo their lips and that both male and female Copts decorate themselves with a tattooed cross symbolising their religious affiliation (Lane 1973: 41, 531).¹⁶

The descriptions given by Lane could be easily supplemented with numerous examples from similar studies of countries dominated by Muslim traditions, customs and cultures.¹⁷ Although it is rather rare, these studies sometimes contain accounts of tattoos having been used for the purpose of expressing Muslim belonging. The following quotation from John Carswell’s 1960s interview with a tattoo artist in Beirut, for example, clearly indicates that Muslims have practiced tattooing as a means of demonstrating their religious loyalties and/or beliefs:

- 14 Regarding so-called gypsy women that perform tattooing, see Newbold 1856: 292 and Sinclair 1908.
- 15 It should be noted that Lane uses the verb *daqq* to refer to tattooing rather than the verb *washm*, which is used by the modern theologians who will be discussed herein. According to Hans Wehr (1979: 331–2), *daqq* means ‘crushing, bruising, braying, pounding; pulverization, trituration; grinding (down); beat(ing), throb(bing); bang(ing), knock(ing), rap(ping); tattoo(ing)’. With regard to the terminology of tattooing, see also Smeaton 1937: 53; Carswell 1965: 41 and Schönig 2002.
- 16 Tattooing is also explicitly forbidden in the Old Testament, where it appears to be adversely associated with so-called pagan cults; cf. Lev. 19:28, Dt. 14:1. Victor Turner is convinced that the Second Council of Nicaea forbade tattooing in AD 787. However, to the best of my knowledge, the text issued by the Second Council of Nicaea makes no direct reference to this practice. Cf. Tanner 1990: 131–56. See also May 1989: 520 and Turner 1987: 270. Maarten Hesselt van Dinter also provides a large number of references to the practice of tattooing among Christians (2005: esp. 36–40). For references regarding modern tattoos among the Copts, see van Doorn-Harder 2005: 37.
- 17 Apart from Westermarck 1918: 219, who discusses tattoos and tattooing, see, for example, Maxwell 2003: 109; and the cover of Lila Abu-Lughod 1986. Several historical and ethnographical accounts, and even photos, are provided in Schönig 2002: 308–14, Abbildungen nos. 120–4. I am indebted to Ingvild Flakerud for introducing me to Maxwell’s travel book, as well as his references to tattoos and tattooing. A general overview is also found in van Dinter 2005.

. . . the fanatical followers of Imam Ali, the Shi'ah sect, tattoo the forked sword to show their love of him [i.e. Imam Ali]. The followers of Abu Bakr, the Sunnis, tattoo another design of two curved crossed swords with the words *'llah Mohammed* between the blades. (Carswell 1965: 42.)

The use of tattoos among Shi'a men and women is further confirmed by P. Molesworth Sykes's early twentieth-century notes from a field trip to Persia (1909). In these he observes that Shi'a women had 'birds, flowers, or gazelles tattooed, but occasionally verses from the Koran' and that victorious male wrestlers and/or gymnasts (the sports of the *zūrkhāna*¹⁸) were honoured with the tattooing of a lion on the arm (Molesworth Sykes 1909: 177–8).¹⁹

The case of Sharif Olayan presents a more contemporary example of tattooing for the purpose of highlighting one's religious affiliation. To celebrate his Muslim heritage, Olayan, an American of Middle Eastern cultural background, had himself tattooed with the Arabic expression *al-mu'minūn*, which means 'believers'. Olayan explains his decision as follows:

Having an Arabic tattoo is risky in both the Middle-Eastern and Western parts of the world. Being recognized as a sign of sin in the Muslim world and a sign of terrorism here in the U.S., my tattoo represents the word "al-moomenoon," meaning "believers." It is a word that is frequently used in the Qur'an and, for me, it is a word that goes beyond "believing," or having faith in an aspect of religion. "To believe" means having faith in both the world and humanity as a whole. The term will have different meanings to different people and, because of that, every single person must discover that meaning within himself or herself. (Quoted in Udelson 2008: 100.)

The above quotation provides an example of the complexities that can be involved when assessing the reasons for tattoos and other forms of bodily decoration within specific cultural contexts. While most Muslim authorities have reacted to this practice with the preconception that it is against Islamic law, it is nonetheless evident that throughout history, and for a variety of reasons, lay Muslim populations have considered tattoos and other types of indelible bodily decoration to be legitimate forms of cultural and/or personal expression.

18 On the importance of this institution, see Chehabi 2002.

19 On the popularity of tattoos among women in Iran, see, for example, Mottahedeh 2006: 36–7.

Turning once again to an historical perspective, Victor Turner's article in the *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, 'Bodily Marks', provides a *possible* reminder of the inevitable gap between theory (in this case a prohibition) and practice (what people actually do) (Turner 1987: 271).²⁰ In his article, Turner attempts to establish that both Christians and Muslims 'bore tattoos as evidence of having made pilgrimages to the sacred places', especially during the time of the Crusades. He notes that by marking their bodies in this way, such persons were testifying to the fact that they had performed an obligatory visit to a holy place (for example, Jerusalem).²¹ While interesting, Turner's claims must here be presented with the following caveat: I (and apparently others) have thus far been unable to locate even one Arabic or 'Muslim' text that confirms his contentions; nor, to my knowledge, has anyone been able to locate a reference to pilgrimage tattoos in classic non-Muslim academic studies of either Mecca or the *hajj* ritual (see, e.g., Snouck Hurgronje 1970 or Peters 1994). Despite this apparent absence of direct references, A. T. Sinclair and Maarten Hesselt van Dinter contend that they have discovered an indirect link between tattoos and the *hajj* in the Turkish language: that is to say, the Turkish word for tattoo is believed to be *haji*, the very name given to those that have undertaken a pilgrimage to Mecca (Sinclair 1908: 363 and van Dinter 2005: 179). Unfortunately, as with Turner's claim, no one to my knowledge has been able to find lexical support for the contention that *haji* means tattoo: the common Turkish words for tattoo are *döğme*, *dövme* or *dövün*; and in the eastern

20 C. P. Jones quotes, for example, the seventeenth-century traveller Jean de Thévenot, who writes: 'We passed the whole of Monday, the 29th of April, having our arms marked, as all the pilgrims usually do: the operation is performed by Christians of Bethlehem belonging to the Latin rite. They have several wooden moulds, among which you choose those you like the best. Next they fill them with charcoal powder. Then they apply them to you in such a way as to leave the mark of what is engraved on them. After that they take your arm by their left hand, stretching the skin tight; in their right hand they have a little stick with two needles, and they dip it from time to time in ink mixed with ox-gall, and prick you with it along the lines made by the wooden mould; that is presumably harmful, and as a rule there ensues a slight fever which lasts a very short time, and the arm remains swollen to three times its normal size for two or three days.' (Quoted in Jones 1987: 141.) For example, tattoos are associated with Satanism and a destructive youthful life; see 'Satanism in the Eyes of Shari'ah', http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?pagename=IslamOnline-English-Ask_Scholar/FatwaE/FatwaE&cid=1171897372251 (accessed on 15 May 2007).

21 Similar data is found in Sinclair 1908.

and south eastern parts of Anatolia, the word is either *deq* or *daq*.²² Thus it appears that when subjected to critical scrutiny neither of the above claims holds up. When it comes to *Christian* pilgrimages, on the other hand, numerous textual sources lend support to Turner's view.²³

III

Although the question of tattoos and tattooing touches upon a large number of issues that are central to Islamic theology and Muslim cultures, the vigorous debate on this subject among contemporary Muslim theologians appears to have escaped the notice of the Islamic Studies and History of Religion researchers.²⁴ One reason for this concerns the influence of earlier anthropologists and ethnographers who concluded that tattooing was a vanishing art form in cultures dominated by Islamic and Muslim traditions. The recent unexpected rise of tattooing as a popular art form among the cultures and the peoples of the Muslim world has once again drawn Islamic theologians to this issue and proved the opinions these earlier Western scholars to have been premature (see, e.g. Smeaton 1937: 53). Today, over and above the standard citations in classical dictionaries such as the *Lisān al-Arab* (s.v. 'w-sh-m'), the matter of tattoos and tattooing is being addressed by official Islamic agencies such as the *Diyanet* (already discussed above), as well as a variety of contemporary Muslim authorities, including the influential Egyptian born Yūsuf al-Qaraḏāwī, who is counted as one of the most important authorities for Sunnī Muslims today.²⁵

Al-Qaraḏāwī, who addresses the subject of tattooing (*washm*) in his book *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam* (2001), argues on the basis of the Qurʾān, and more explicitly on the basis of the ḥadīth-literature, that individual beautification is vain and that all attempts to alter the physical creation of God are acts of disobedience caused by Satan. Like most Islamic theologians

22 I would like to express my gratitude to professor Éva Á. Csató Johanson at Uppsala University, Sweden, for discussing the Turkish vocabulary of tattooing with me. See also Birkalan-Gedik 2006: 46.

23 In addition to earlier references in this article, see van Dinter 2005: 36–40.

24 An early example is, however, found in Herber 1921, and there are some indirect references to this debate in Schönig 2002. A poor attempt to analyse Islamic opinions about tattooing is also found in Ibric 2010.

25 Background information and a discussion on Yūsuf al-Qaraḏāwī's theology and his use of new information and communication technologies are given in Mariani 2006. See also Skovgaard-Petersen 2004; Skovgaard-Petersen & Gräf 2008.

who have addressed this matter, al-Qaraḏāwī relies upon an indirect reading of the same Quranic verse which was quoted at the beginning of this article, and is here quoted once again:

[Satan] will command them (his devotees) to change what Allah has created (Q4:119).

In keeping with this passage, both al-Bukhārī and Muslim report that the Prophet Muhammad cursed 'the women who tattoo and the women who are tattooed'. For his part, al-Qaraḏāwī emphasizes that the application of tattoos to the body causes pain and suffering (2001: 85–6, Arabic text p. 80).

Since Yūsuf al-Qaraḏāwī's opinions concerning tattoos and tattooing have been expressed with complete assurance, it should come as no surprise that the (Egyptian/Qatari) homepage *IslamOnline.net* also have contained discussions about Islam and tattoos. Since this homepage has gone through major changes, my findings are based on material retrieved in winter/spring 2010.²⁶ In addition to al-Qaraḏāwī's publications, media appearances and involvement with the European Council for Fatwa and Research, *IslamOnline.net* has been a primary platform for 'calling people to Islam.'²⁷ It should thus come as no surprise that the other theologians hold similar opinions regarding tattoos and tattooing, but also ones that contain noteworthy exceptions. For example, Sheikh Ahmad Kutty, a senior lecturer and Islamic scholar at the Islamic Institute of Toronto, Ontario, Canada, notes that the prohibition against tattoos is an important reminder of the glorious nature of the Qur'ān. This is illustrated, he claims, by the fact that certain infectious, and even deadly, contemporary diseases (e.g., HIV and hepatitis) can be contracted during the process of tattooing; although these diseases were previously unknown to mankind, the fact that God prohibited Muslims from decorating their bodies with tattoos proves to Sheikh Ahmad Kutty that He must have known about

26 Ahmad Kutty: 'Islam's Stance on Tattooing', http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?pagename=IslamOnline-English-Ask_Scholar/FatwaE/FatwaE&cid=1119503549748 (accessed on 29 May 2005); A group of Islamic researchers: 'What Islam Says on Tattoos', http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?pagename=IslamOnline-English-Ask_Scholar/FatwaE/FatwaE&cid=1119503544192 (accessed on 22 September 2003); and Muzammil Siddiqi, http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?pagename=IslamOnline-English-Ask_Scholar/FatwaE/FatwaE&cid=1119503543310 (accessed on 18 January 2004).

27 On the importance of this homepage, see, for example, Gräf 2008.

them at the time of the revelation.²⁸ This form of argument is an example of a so-called scientific reading of the Qurʾān—that is, argumentation that stipulates that most (if not all) modern advances and scientific discoveries have been known to the Qurʾān.

Another opinion that slightly diverges from al-Qaraḏāwī's is found in Dr Muzammil Siddiqi's response to a request by a resident of the United States that he issue a *fatwa* regarding converts who were tattooed prior to becoming Muslims.²⁹ In his answer, Siddiqi, a former president of the Islamic Society of North America, stresses that although Islam prohibits tattoos, if they were created before conversion, the believer is forgiven ('Islam takes away the sins done before it').³⁰ The questioner also expressed concern that his tattoos might cause problems when entering Mecca during the *hajj*. In response, Siddiqi calms his fears as follows:

When Hajj becomes obligatory on you, you should perform it and do not neglect it because of tattoos on your body. No one should stop you from going to Hajj because of tattoos. I have seen hundreds of pilgrims, men and women, who come from some countries and they have all kinds of tattoos on their faces and bodies. It is forbidden in Islam, but among some tribes in Africa, unfortunately, it is still practised, even among Muslims. (Muzammil Siddiqi, see footnote 26.)

A similar question was raised on the website *Ask-the-Imam* by a twenty-four-year-old practising Muslim woman who had acquired an arm tattoo at the age of sixteen. *Ask-the-Imam* is an online South African *fatwa* service which advances the Deobandi interpretation of Islam. The service is headed by Muhammed Zakariyya Desai, who answered the young lady as follows:

28 Kutty, see footnote 26. A similar argument is used by the *Diyanet* (see earlier reference).

29 This concern is also shared by a Muslim convert who posted a video in which he shows his tattoos on youtube.com, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=05EunQRqGqI> (accessed on 17 June 2007).

30 A similar argument is found in Mufti Ebrahim Desai's *fatwa* on 'persons that have received tattoos before they became Muslims'. See, Mufti Ebrahim Desai, 'I know that it is haraam to get a tattoo. But what should a person do if he received it before becoming Muslim?' <http://www.islam.tc/ask-imam/view.php?q=8113>.

If it is possible to remove the tattoo, you should do so. However, if it is difficult and painful to remove it, you could try and use some camouflage to cover it in some way. You will be excused if it cannot be removed.³¹

IV

In conclusion, it is clear that all of the Muslim authorities discussed in this brief overview strongly disapprove of tattoos and tattooing. According to the followers of the *shāfiʿī* school of law there are three reasons that tattoos are unlawful (*ḥarām*):

1. The needle that penetrates the skin causes unnecessary infliction of pain.
2. By the mixing of the dye with the blood that exits after the needle's penetration tattoos are affected by filth.
3. Tattoos alter Allāh's creation without necessity. (Rasheed 2007.)

Despite the prohibitive declarations of the *'ulamā'*, it is clear that a number of Muslim groups and tribes have, for various reasons, acknowledged tattooing as an accepted social practice. While tattooing at one time seemed to be a vanishing practice among so-called traditional groups in the Middle East, Muslims and others throughout the world have again become interested in tattoos.³² Especially in Western societies, bodily decorations such as tattoos, piercing and scarification have developed into a widely accepted art form (cf. van Dinter 2005: 19–20). And because modern information, transportation and communication technologies enable such trends to spread quite rapidly, Muslim communities are today more exposed to—and tempted by—these forms of expression than they were in previous times (see, e.g., Udelson 2008). This development is indicated, for example, by Joshua Partlow's report that after the arrival of tattooed American and Western troops, tattoos gained a new popularity among Iraqis in post-Saddam Iraq (Partlow 2006).³³ While the sight of tattooed Westerners may have indeed *inspired* certain Iraqis to also wear tattoos, it is evident that tattoos can be used to provoke Muslim

31 Muhammad Sakariyya Desai, 'Sallam I am a 24 yr practising sister stupidly at 16 I had a tattoo on my arm,' <http://www.islam.tc/ask-imam/view.php?q=18087>.

32 See, for example, Al-Zoubi 2009 for contemporary examples from Syria.

33 This development in Iraq becomes even more complicated since Saddam Hussein used tattoos and amputation as an efficient form of punishment, see van Dinter 2005: 183.

resentment as well. This is said to have been the case with James Stevens, an American soldier who, in an environment peopled by so-called Islamic extremists, tattooed the Arabic word *kāfir* (infidel) on his body so as to proclaim his atheistic worldview and provoke believing Muslims (Udelson 2008: 98–9). It should come as no surprise then that to curb the manifold influences of Western pop-culture, various Muslim theologians have eagerly issued legal answers that ban tattooing, labelling the practice as un-Islamic.

While this overview has primarily focused on the arguments of Muslim theologians, the academic study of Islam and tattoos will require the outlining of other potential fields of inquiry and the further formulation of fruitful questions. In terms of the first of these requirements, I suggest that future research in this field would do well to focus on tattoo artists and/or studios in the Middle East, Europe and the United States; moreover, when it is observed that individuals with a Muslim cultural background are attempting to acquire a tattoo, researchers would do well to examine the reasons that underlie this decision. As to the second requirement, the following questions come to mind: is it possible to identify specifically ‘Muslim’ or ‘Islamic’ motives for obtaining a tattoo—that is, motives that the studied individuals specifically associate with Islamic or Muslim traditions? Has the Muslim debate about tattoos changed over the past decade? Are there significant differences between the debate in countries dominated by Islamic and Muslim traditions on the one hand and the debate in Europe and the United States on the other? With regard to the issue of Islam and tattoos, is there a gap between theory (the fact that many Islamic scholars officially consider tattoos un-Islamic) and practice (the fact that certain Muslims *de facto* accept tattoos as an integral part of contemporary Islam)? This is the case, for example, among the followers of the Five Percenters in the United States—a sectarian group influenced by Islamic traditions that is not considered authentically Muslim by either *sunnī* or *shī‘a* Muslims, nor by a Yemeni tattooist who was interviewed in Hanne Schönig’s book *Schminken, Dürfe und Räucherwerk der Jemenitinnen. Lexikon der Substanzen, Utensilien und Techniken* (2002).³⁴ For academic scholars of Islam, the debate about tattoos provides a good example of how Islamic theology is debated and applied; thus it is important to document Muslim arguments both for and against the notion that one can wear a tattoo and still be a ‘good’ Muslim. The answering of this question and the further development of this analysis will require additional field studies, interviews

34 On the Five Percenters see Knight 2008. See also Schönig 2002, especially Abbildungen no. 124.

and textual analyses of both historical and contemporary Muslim discourses on tattoos and tattooing.

References

Abu-Lughod, Lila

1986 *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Ambros, Ambros A. (with Stephen Procházka)

2004 *A Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic*. Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag.

Beskow, Per

1979 Branding in the mysteries of Mithras? In: Ugo Bianchi (ed.), *Mysteria Mithrae: Atti del Seminario Internazionale su 'La specificità storico-religiosa dei Misteri di Mitra, con particolare riferimento alle fonti documentarie di Roma e Ostia'*, Roma e Ostia 28–31 Marzo 1978; pp. 487–501. Leiden: Brill.

Birkalan-Gedik, H.

2006 Body: Female (Turkey, Central Asia, and the Caucasus). In: Suad Joseph (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Women & Islamic Culture*, Vol. III; pp. 43–7. Leiden: Brill.

Bukhārī

1997 *The Translation of the Meanings of Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī, Arabic–English*, Vols I–IX. Translated by Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan. Riyadh: Darussalam.

Carswell, John

1965 A Professional Tattooer in Beirut. *Man: A Record of Anthropological Science* 65 (March–April): 40–3.

Chehabi, H. E.

2002 Zūrkhāna. In: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. XI; pp. 572–4. Leiden: Brill.

Dinter, Maarten Hesselt van

2005 *The World of Tattoo: An Illustrated History*. Amsterdam: KIT.

Doorn-Harder, Pieterella van

2005 Copts: Fully Egyptian, but for a Tattoo? In: May Shatzmiller (ed.), *Nationalism and Minority Identities in Islamic Societies*; pp. 22–57. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Ghazanfar, S. A.

1995 *Wasm*: a traditional method of healing by cauterisation. *Journal of Ethnopharmacology* 27: 125–8.

Gräf, Bettina

2008 IslamOnline.net: independent, interactive, popular. *Arab Media and Society*, January (2008). <http://www.arabmediasociety.com/?article=576>.

Herber, J.

- 1921 *Tatouages Marocains – Tatouage et religion. Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 83: 69–83.

Ibn al-Naqīb Al-Miṣri, Aḥmad Ibn Lulu

- 1997 *Reliance of the Traveller: A Classical Manual of Islamic Sacred Law*. English translation by Noah Ha Mim Keller. Beltsville: Amana Publications.

Ibn Sa'd, Muḥammad

- 1904 *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt (Biographien Muhammeds, seiner Gefährten und der späteren Träger des Islams bis zum 230 der Flucht* herausgegeben von Eduard Sachau), Vol. 8. Leiden: Brill.

Ibrić, Almir

- 2010 *Bilder und Tätowierungen im Islam. Eine Einführung in die Ethik und Ästhetik des Polytheismusverbots*. Wien & Berling: LIT Verlag.

Izutsu, Toshihiko

- 2002 *Ethico Religious Concepts in the Qur'an*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Jones, C. P.

- 1987 *Stigma: Tattooing and branding in Graeco-Roman antiquity. The Journal of Roman Studies* 77: 139–55.

Knight, Michael Muhammad

- 2008 *Five Percenters Islam, Hip-hop and the Gods of New York*. Oxford: OneWorld.

Kossiakov, Nadia

- 1966 *Un répertoire-modèle de tatouage égyptien. Objects et mondes: la revue du Musée de l'homme* 6: 263–78.

Lancaster, Fidelity

- 2002 'Al-Washm. In: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. XI; p. 160. Leiden: Brill.

Lane, Edward William

- 1973 *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*. New York: East-West Publications. (First published in 1836.)

Mariani, Ermete

- 2006 *The Role of States and Markets in the Production of Islamic Knowledge On-line: the Example of Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Amru Khaled*. In: Göran Larsson (ed.), *Religious Communities on the Internet: Proceedings from a Conference*; pp. 131–49. Uppsala: Swedish Science Press.

May, H. G.

- 1989 *Tattoo*. In: *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 4; p. 520. Nashville: Abingdon.

Maxwell, Gavin

- 2003 *A Reed Shaken by the Wind: Travels among the Marsh Arabs of Iraq*. London. Eland. (First published in 1957.)

Molesworth Sykes, P.

- 1909 *Notes on Tattooing in Persia. Man* 9: 177–8.

Mottahedeh, N.

2006 Body: Female (Iran). In: Suad Joseph (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Women & Islamic Culture*, Vol. III; pp. 36–7. Leiden: Brill.

Newbold, F. R. S.

1856 The Gypsies of Egypt. *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 16: 292.

Oberling, Pierre

1962 A Note on Tattooing and Branding among the Aghāch Eris of Southwestern Iran. *Ethnos* 27: 126–8.

Önce dövme sonra tövbe

2007 Önce dövme sonra tövbe. *Radikal* 2.5.2007.

Partlow, Joshua

2006 Operating Quietly: Tattoo Artists Make Their Mark in Iraq. *Washington Post* 25.7.2006.

Peters, Francis Edwards

1994 *The Hajj: The Muslim Pilgrimage to Mecca and the Holy Places*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Al-Qaraḍāwī, Yūsuf

2001 *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam*. Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust.

Rasheed, Shaykh Amjad

2005 Why are tattoos filthy? How are they to be removed? http://qa.sunnipath.com/issue_view.asp?HD=3&ID=2906&CATE=406 (accessed on 21 February 2010).

2007 Modern tattoo methods. http://qa.sunnipath.com/issue_view.asp?HD=3&ID=13513&CATE=365 (accessed on 3 March 2010).

Reinhart, Kevin A.

2001 Contamination. In: Jane Dammen McAuliffe (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*; pp. 410–12. Leiden & Boston: Brill.

Schönig, Hanne

2002 *Schminken, Dürfe und Räucherwerk der Jemenitinnen. Lexikon der Substanzen, Utensilien und Techniken*. Würzburg: Ergon Verlag.

Sinclair, A. T.

1908 Tattooing – Oriental and Gypsy. *American Anthropologist* 10 (3): 361–86.

Skovgaard-Petersen, Jakob

2004 The Global Mufti. In: Birgit Schaebler & Leif Stenberg (eds), *Globalization and the Muslim World: Culture, Religion, and Modernity*; pp. 153–65. New York: Syracuse University Press.

Skovgaard-Petersen, Jakob & Bettina Gräf (eds)

2008 *The Global Mufti: The Phenomenon of Yusuf Al-Qaradawi*. London: Hurst.

Smeaton, Winifred

1937 Tattooing among the Arabs of Iraq. *American Anthropologist* 39 (1): 53–61.

Snouck Hurgronje, Christiaan

1970 *Mekka in the latter part of the 19th century: daily life, customs and learning*.

the Moslims of the East-Indian-archipelago. Leiden: Brill. (First published in 1931.)

al-Ṭabarī, Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr

1993 *The history of al-Ṭabarī: The Challenges to the Empires*, Vol. XI. English translation by Khalid Yahya Blankinship. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

1997 *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī: Tārīkh al-umam wa'l-mulūk*. Beirut: Dar al-Kutūb al-'Ilmiyya.

Tanner, Norman P. (ed.)

1990 *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*. London & Washington: Sheed and Ward.

Tattoo

1971 Tattoo. In: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Vol. 15; p. 832. Jerusalem: Decennial Books.

Turner, Victor

1987 Bodily marks. In: Mircea Eliade (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. 2; pp. 269–75. New York: MacMillan.

Udelson, Jon

2008 *Arabic Tattoos*. New York: Mark Batty Publisher.

Wehr, Hans

1979 *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*. Wiesbaden: Spoken Language Services Inc.

Wensinck, A. J.

1927 *A Handbook of Early Muhammadan Tradition*. Leiden: Brill.

Westermarck, Edward

1918 *Sex år i Marocko: Reseskildringar*. Stockholm: Bonnier.

Al-Zoubi, Layla

2009 Body Art. *Syria Today*, October. <http://www.syria-today.com/index.php/october-2009/440-focus/3405-body-art>.

MICHELLE LELWICA

The Religion of Thinness

I. Introduction

I come from a country where many people, especially women, pursue the goal of a thinner body with religious-like devotion. This paper examines this devotion and some of the questions it raises about 'religion,' 'the body,' and 'culture,' and the relationships between them. I analyze the quest for a slender body as a 'cultural religion,'¹ which I call the 'Religion of Thinness.'² My analysis revolves around four observations.

The first is that for many women in the US today, the quest for a slender body serves what has historically been a 'religious' *function*: providing a sense of purpose that orients and gives meaning to their lives, especially in times of suffering and uncertainty.

Second, this quest has many *features* in common with traditional religions, including beliefs, myths, rituals, moral codes, and sacred images—all of which encourage women to find 'salvation' (i.e., happiness and well-being) through the pursuit of a 'better' (i.e., thinner) body. Thus I use categories from the field of Religious Studies to examine this quest.

My third observation is that this secular faith draws so many adherents in large part because it appeals to and addresses what might be referred to as *spiritual needs*—including the need for a sense of purpose, inspiration, security, virtue, love, and well-being—even though it shortchanges these needs, and, in the long run, fails to deliver the salvation it promises.

1 Catherine Albanese uses this term to describe religious-like phenomena that do not neatly fit in to the boundaries of institutional religion. See Albanese 1992: 493–500. In his analysis of the 'cultural religion' of popular music in the US, Robyn Sylvan (2002: 79–80) uses the work of Charles Long to elucidate this concept. Long shifts away from Geertz's notion of religion as 'establishing powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting modes and motivations' to an emphasis on '*modes of experience*' and '*the qualitative meaning of the nature of experience*'.

2 Many of the ideas and analyses in this paper draw on and expand work that I did in my previous books. See Lelwica 1999 and 2009.

Fourth, a number of traditional religious *ideas, paradigms* and *motifs* tacitly inform and support the Religion of Thinness. More specifically, its soteriology resurrects and recycles the misogynist, anti-body, other-worldly, and exclusivist aspects of patriarchal religion.

Ultimately, my analysis is not only critical of the Religion of Thinness; it also raises suspicions about any clear-cut divisions between 'religion', 'culture', and 'the body'. In fact, examining the functions, features, and ideologies embedded in this secular devotion gives us insight into the *constitutive role of the body in the production and apprehension of religious and cultural meanings*. This epistemic insight is invaluable because it reminds us that the seemingly transcendent truths of religion are, in the end, *human constructs*, variously created and developed through somatic, psychic, and social processes in response to the mystery, the suffering, the transience, and the beauty of life.

II. The quasi-religious function of the pursuit of thinness: confusing the boundaries between 'sacred' and 'secular' behavior

I realize that the 'Religion of Thinness' isn't exactly a religion. But this raises the question: what *is* a 'religion'?

In his classic definition, Clifford Geertz describes religion as 'a cultural system' that humans create in their search for ultimate meaning. To illustrate the distinction between 'sacred' and 'secular' systems of meaning, Geertz notes the contrast between religious fasting and dieting. This distinction, Geertz argues, is based in these practices' diverging ends and the varying frames of meaning and dispositions they foster. Whereas culturally-inspired weight-reduction aims to achieve a 'finite' or 'conditioned' goal (presumably health or beauty), religious fasting seeks to attain an 'unconditioned end', like nirvana. Whereas dieting is tied to 'worldly' values, ascetic fasting derives its meaning and motivation in reference to transcendent truths, as well as a picture of 'a general order of existence', of 'the way things in sheer actuality are.' (Geertz 1973: 89, 98.)

At first glance, Geertz's distinction makes a lot of sense. You need only watch a TV commercial for a weight-loss product, read a popular women's magazine, join a diet club, listen to a schoolgirl insist she's 'too fat', or a doctor telling you to 'watch what you eat' to observe the *this-worldly* quality of the quest for thinness. Yet a closer look at the popular, professional, and experiential discourses on weight control suggests that something more is being negotiated in this pursuit, especially among its female participants. The more

one probes this ‘something more’, the more the distinction between what is ‘cultural’ and ‘religious’ begins to blur, and the more one sees that for many women, creating a slender body *is* a matter of all-pervading significance, an end whose achievement seems tantamount to ultimate salvation. In the words of an anorexic woman:

The more weight I lost, the more I became convinced that I was on the right way. I wanted to know what was beyond ordinary living . . . Abstinence was just in preparation for some special revelations; it was like the things the saints and mystics had done. I wanted to be praised for being special . . . to be held in awe for what I was doing. (Bruch 1988: 131, 136, 175.)

Over 40 years ago, Mary Douglas recognized the fluidity of the distinction between ‘sacred’ and ‘secular’ motivations and behaviour. In *Purity and Danger* (1966), Douglas argued that ‘rituals of purity and impurity’, such as dietary restrictions, are central to religious behaviour. At the same time, she noted, ‘very little of our ritual behaviour is enacted in the context of religion’. Instead, ordinary practices of purification (such as refusing to eat certain foods) are the activities through which we generate a larger sense of value and purpose. Purely secular explanations of these practices (such as medical hygiene or aesthetics) reduce their symbolic meanings and functions by ignoring their multiple layers of significance, including their capacity to generate a picture of the ideal social and cosmic order and to unify individual experience within that grand scheme. (Douglas 1991: 2–3, 78–82.)

If Douglas’s insights blur the distinction between ‘sacred’ and ‘secular’, Catherine Bell’s work shows how the socialized body participates in creating this distinction. In *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, Bell uses the concept of ‘ritualization’ to highlight how meanings are *produced* in ritual activity (1992: 8, 67, 74).³ The significance of ritual practices rests not in their *inherent* difference from other ways of acting, but in their capacity to *constitute* themselves as distinct from—and holier than—more mundane ways of acting. Such practices are rooted in what Bell calls ‘the ritualized body’, which is a body that has been socialized to look, feel, and act in culturally mandated ways. Religious meanings are thus ritually produced *through the body* in relation to prevailing

3 Bell’s theory highlights how rituals make meanings, rather than have or reflect meanings. Ritual practices do not dramatize the symbols they reference; rather they generate their meanings for practical purposes.

social norms and in reference to ‘realities thought to transcend the powers of human actors.’⁴

Bell’s work offers a way of thinking about the pursuit of thinness as a quasi-religious quest through which a woman’s body is distinguished and sacralized, her fears and dreams are negotiated, and the prevailing social order is reproduced. As part of a cultural network of beliefs, images, and moral codes, weight-loss rituals don’t simply create an ‘ideal’ body; they also generate a worldview, an embodied strategy for self-definition, and a precarious way of coping with the problems and possibilities of life at this historical moment. These multiple levels of meaning are evident in Sallie Tisdale’s depiction of her life as a chronic dieter:

After a time, the number on the scale became my totem, more important than my experience—it was layered, metaphorical, metaphysical, and it had bewitching power. I thought if I could change that number I could change my life. . . I would weigh myself with foreboding, and my weight would determine how went the rest of my day, my week, my life. (Tisdale 1994: 17.)⁵

The pro-Ana movement: anorexia as a religious quest

The fuzzy line between ‘religious’ and ‘cultural’ motivations and meanings is evident in an Internet subculture known as ‘pro-Ana.’ ‘Ana,’ which is short for ‘anorexia,’ is the imaginary goddess of this movement. Everyday, untold

4 In *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (1992), Bell draws on the insights of Antonio Gramsci, Pierre Bourdieu, and Michel Foucault. From Gramsci, she uses the concept of ‘hegemony’ to highlight ‘the dominance and subordination that exist within people’s practical and un-self-conscious awareness of the world’ and their sense of ‘identity’ and ‘reality’ therein (pp. 82–3). Bell’s notion of the ‘ritualized body’ is close to Bourdieu’s concept of the ‘socially informed body,’ the body that has incorporated the moral, aesthetic, and scientific codes of its society into its everyday habits of being (p. 80). From Foucault, Bell picks up the idea that the body is basic to all socio-political relations of power (p. 202).

5 The multilayered significance of weight and body-size among many women calls into question the distinction Charles Taylor (2007) makes between a ‘secular’ (i.e. modern, disenchanting) worldview, and one that is ‘religious’ (i.e., pre-modern, enchanting). On the one hand, contemporary women who pursue a thinner body with religious-like fervour are chasing after a kind of Cartesian fantasy in which the ‘mind’ is separate from and in charge of ‘the body.’ On the other hand, the thinking of many women involved in this pursuit is highly enchanted in that external realities—including those as tangible as food and as empirical as a number on the scale—are imbued with profound meaning and have, in Tisdale’s words, ‘bewitching power.’

numbers of girls and women log on to pro-Ana websites in search of support for their weight-loss efforts. The pro-Ana worldview is captured in the 'Ana Creed':

I believe in Control, the only force mighty enough to bring order to the chaos that is my world.

I believe that I am the most vile, worthless and useless person ever to have existed on the planet, and that I am totally unworthy of anyone's time and attention.

I believe that other people who tell me differently are idiots. If they could see how I really am, then they would hate me almost as much as I do.

I believe in perfection and strive to attain it.

I believe in salvation through trying just a bit harder than I did yesterday.

I believe in bathroom scales as an indicator of my daily successes and failures.

I believe in hell, because I sometimes think that I am living in it.

I believe in a wholly black and white world, the losing of weight, recrimination for sins, abnegation of the body and a life ever fasting.

In addition to this creed, the pro-Ana subculture includes Ana prayers, Ana psalms, moonlight rituals, Ana Commandments, and 'Thinspirational' images (i.e., images of emaciated models; see Figure 1) that are used motivate Ana's disciples. Pro-Anas are dedicated to the 'higher purpose' of the fat-free body and support each others' tireless efforts to 'bring order out of chaos' by making their bodies disappear.⁶

However bizarre and troubling this subculture may seem, it's not altogether surprising. For the pro-Ana movement is nothing but the extreme

6 My discussion of pro-Ana draws on Lynell 2002, Barcum 2005, and Irvine 2005. For some examples of 'thinspirational images', see Ruud nd. A quick Google search for 'Pro-Ana' yields numerous other images and web pages devoted to both promoting and exposing the subculture.



Figure 1.

end of a broader *continuum* of troubled eating and body image in the US, where many girls and women who do not have eating disorders identify with the attitudes and activities of those who do. Studies show that as many as 80 percent of ten-year-old girls in the US have dieted, and the same percentage of women in their mid-fifties say they want to be thinner. More than three-quarters of healthy-weight adult women believe they are 'too fat', and nearly two-thirds of high school girls are on diets (compared to 16 percent of boys).⁷

Thus while only a fraction of the female population in the US are avidly pro-Ana, the majority wholeheartedly believe that they would be happier if they

were thinner. In the end, the perspectives and practices of Ana's disciples—including their religious overtones and characteristics—differ in degree, not in kind, from the thinking and habits of many 'normal' girls and women, who regularly monitor what they eat in the hopes of becoming noticeably slim.

The sociohistorical context of the religion of thinness

To understand any religious movement—whether 'cultural' or 'traditional' (to use a rather ambiguous distinction)—one must examine the *sociohistorical context* in which it takes root. In the US, a growing appreciation for the slim physique emerged in the early 1900s, when, according to historian Hillel Schwartz, the slender body became a sign of white, middle-class, Protestant,

7 The percentage for fourth-grade girls is based on a study conducted in the Chicago and San Francisco areas cited in Brumberg 1988: 32. The percentage for women in their fifties appears in McLaren & Kuh 2004: 35–55. See also Garner 1997: 30. Figures for healthy-weight adult women and high school girls are from Kilbourne 1999: 125, 134, and Bordo 2003.

Anglo-Saxon privilege, and the plump body was increasingly associated with poor, working-class, and/or ethnic immigrants (especially Jewish and Catholic women) from eastern and southern European countries. Whereas in the nineteenth century, the thin body was a sickly body, signifying poverty and social vulnerability, by the end of World War I, slenderness was increasingly associated with economic, ethnic, and even religious privilege. (Schwartz 1986: 142–3.)⁸

By the latter decades of the twentieth century, a variety of *social institutions* and *ideologies* converged to strengthen this association. While the federal government warned Americans that overeating represented ‘as critical a public-health concern as any before us,’ the fashion industry began featuring models who made their predecessors look downright pudgy. When Twiggy appeared in magazines in the late 1960s, she was 5/7” and weighed 91 pounds. Seeking to profit from this trend, entrepreneurs catered to women’s growing anxiety about body size by offering an array of products to help them lose weight. Meanwhile, evangelical Christians wrote books—such as Charlie Shedd’s 1977 title, *Help Lord! The Devil Wants Me Fat!*—that revived the deadly sin of gluttony, demonized obesity, and insisted that God prefers us slim.⁹

Rooted in these sociohistorical trends, the Religion of Thinness today is also shaped by *economic interests* that promote a schizophrenic attitude towards eating. On the one hand, Americans are encouraged to ‘supersize’ their meals. On the McDonald’s website, the copy next to an image of the calorie-laden ‘Angus Third Pounder’ says: ‘Bigger is Better’ and ‘Satisfy Your Cravings’. On the other hand, we are encouraged to restrict our appetites and consume low-fat, low-calorie, or diet foods. The schizoid messages—*restrict* and *indulge*—are seen on the covers of some women’s magazines, like the May issue of *Women’s World*, which promotes the ‘Water Cure’ diet right next to a feature called ‘cupcake bliss’.

These mixed messages feed off each other, giving rise to a situation where two-thirds of the adult population in the US is overweight, even as the vast majority wish they were thinner. The \$60 billion-a-year market for weight-loss products cashes in on this contradiction, while sales for highly processed foods—i.e., foods loaded with the sugar-fat-salt combination that

8 On the ‘Americanization’ of ethnic minority and working-class cultures through monitoring body size and eating habits, see Schwartz 1986: 248–9, Seid 1989: 91, 226 and Levenstein 1988: 104.

9 See Seid 1989: 85–7, 148, 191, 201, 237–8, 107, 105–6.



Figure 2.

pushes our evolutionary buttons and makes us want to eat more—are increasing.¹⁰ No doubt, this increase contributes to the obesity epidemic in the US, which is the flip side of the Religion of Thinness. The economic interests that fuel both trends are evident in companies like Nestle, which market delicious chocolate with one hand, and weight loss programs with the other (Nestle bought Jenny Craig, one of the most popular and most profitable weight-loss programs in the US, with franchises in Canada, England, France and Australia, in 2006 for \$600 million).

(Gender) indoctrination and the legacy of Eve

That females are the primary targets of companies that subsidize the Religion of Thinness is evident in a magazine ad for Dannon Yogurt (see Figure 2), whose copy reads: ‘100 calories. 0% fat. Proof that there is God and she is a woman watching her figure.’ This ad not only assumes that women are more

10 This is the topic of David Kessler’s book *The End of Overeating: Taking Control of the Insatiable American Appetite* (2009). Kessler was Commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in the US from 1990–7. In her book, *Bodies* (2009), Susie Orbach observes the nexus beneath the apparent contradiction between the ‘obesity epidemic’ and the cultural obsession with thinness: ‘We need to insist on the links between the rise of obesity and the intensification of visual images of thin people; the introduction of long shelf-life foods saturated with fats, soy and corn syrup; the extraordinary growth of the diet industry; and the segmentation practiced by the food industry, who take out fat from one food, such as milk, and sell it back to us in another. These four events parallel the rise of obesity. You could produce a graph showing the rise in the sale of low-fat milk and another that showed rising obesity numbers and they would fit perfectly. Similarly, a graph of the growth of the diet industry would fit with one showing the rising numbers of larger people.’ (Orbach 2009: 126.)

likely than men to be worried about their figures; but it also implies that this anxiety has theological roots: if God ‘herself’ is counting calories, surely women should be doing the same.

A brief look at some of the images in *Nickelodeon Jr.*, a magazine designed for young children that circulates for free in US preschool and day care centres, reveals the different kinds of relationships to the body that are encouraged among boys and girls (see Figure 3). An ad for an ADHD medication shows a boy wearing jeans, a sweatshirt, and a baseball cap; he is holding a glove and looks like he is ready to play. The message is that for boys, the body is for being active. In the same magazine, an ad for a sugar-substitute features a girl dressed in a fairy princess outfit. She is laying on her back with a foot in the air, eating a treat that apparently has been made with this low-calorie sweetener. The message about the body here is equally clear: for girls, the emphasis is on appearance. Though the girl’s dress indicates she may be a ballet dancer, the fact that she is eating a treat made with an artificial sweetener underscores the importance of staying ‘feminine’, ‘pretty’, and ‘slim’. Ads for toys in this same magazine reinforce this gender/body socialization: those for boys (i.e., Batman and Star Wars characters) encourage physical action and adventure, while those for girls (i.e., Barbie and other kinds of dolls) promote a preoccupation with the body’s contours and surface. For boys, the body is a vehicle for activity; for girls, the body is a text—an image for others to see.



Figure 3.



Figure 4.

As a feminist scholar of religion, I can't help but notice the connection between commercial culture's directives for girls to define themselves by perfecting their bodies and long-standing religious ideologies that see women as representing the corporeal side of existence. The archaic notion that women are more physical, more carnal, more sexual than men, which is present in various religious traditions, is alive and well in the *objectification of female bodies* that is so common in the media today. This is another reason why women are the primary participants in the Religion of Thinness: they have been indoctrinated by a cultural/religious optic to see

themselves primarily as bodies. An ad for *Advertising Weekly* (see Figure 4), which features the close-up of a woman's cleavage, illustrates the extent to which some marketers go in reducing women to their bodies. Unashamedly, it endorses the common practice of using female flesh to sell things. The copy between the plump breasts reads: 'Advertising. We All Do it.'

Ads that promote the association between women and physicality are part of a long-standing history that I call the 'legacy of Eve'. Remember the Jewish/Christian creation myth about how sin enters the world? It is through the act of a woman eating—through Eve's disobedient appetite. For centuries church leaders returned to this story to find evidence that women are more driven by their physical urges than men, that their unruly bodies cannot be trusted and therefore require more supervision and are in greater need of salvation. The Religion of Thinness perpetuates the 'legacy of Eve' by casting female appetite as a disruptive, shameful force that needs to be supervised, regulated, and redeemed. Of course, the story of the Fall was not *intended* to send a message that women need to contain their appetites and be thin in order to be 'good'. Nonetheless, the *symbolism* of the story—particularly the association

between female appetite, shame, temptation, and sin—continues to have resonance for many women today.

The morality of thinness

The idea that women’s appetites are untrustworthy and that eating is giving in to temptation is embedded in the ‘morality’ of the Religion of Thinness. This value system is reflected in ads that use moral discourse and/or religious characters to encourage consumers to buy their products. A magazine ad for Jello depicts a nun, licking her lips, as if she has just committed some transgression by giving in to the pleasure of eating (see Figure 5). The image represents appetite as a kind of sinful urge, and eating as a kind of guilty pleasure—a temptation we should try not to give in to (though the look on the nun’s face also suggests that perhaps we cannot—and should not—help ourselves). A moralizing vocabulary is also prominent on the covers of *People* magazine, where celebrities’ weight-loss efforts are characterized as *moral* victories or failures: ‘Diet winners & sinners of the year’ (January 1994), and ‘Diet wars: who’s winning, who’s sinning’ (January 1993).

Battling and conquering the body’s appetites is a traditional religious motif that implicitly supports the moral codes of the Religion of Thinness. Historically, mastering one’s physical urges has been central to the Christian



Figure 5.

life, for example, not because flesh and spirit are separate in classic Christian theology, but precisely because they are hierarchically *linked*. Thus one's physical body can be used to improve the state of one's soul. Medieval women who starved themselves were not simply trying to regulate their wayward appetites; they were also seeking to cultivate an *inner* state of holiness.¹¹ This state was visibly communicated by their frail and shriveled up figures, which were unseemly in the eyes of potential male suitors, but beautiful (or so they believed) in the eyes of Christ.¹² Similarly today, the presumed 'beauty' and 'goodness' of a woman's tight and trim figure is linked to the perception that slenderness manifests an interior state of discipline and virtue.

The fuzzy line between 'religious' and 'cultural' motivations and meanings is evident in the discourses of anorexic and bulimic women. A former anorexic explains:

When I was hungry, I felt like I was living right. I felt better when I would eat only fruits and vegetables, even when I was hungry. Pretty soon I was able to convince my mind and my body that such feelings of purity were much better than any fattening food. I was on my way to becoming the invulnerable perfection that I really craved. . . I believed that the kind of food that went into my body had the power to absolve or disgrace me, and I would feel these feelings deeply depending on what I had ingested. (Manlowe 1994: 93.)

The popular cultural belief that the 'good body' is a *controlled* body—a body that reverses the sin of Eve—is tacitly linked to another Christian idea, namely, that suffering and sacrifice are salvific. Rooted in late medieval theology, this 'atonement theory' has been especially applied to women, for whom selflessness and self-denial are supposedly natural virtues. Though most women today do not describe their weight-loss efforts as 'redemptive', many experi-

11 See Carolyn Walker Bynum's classic study on medieval Christian women's fasting: *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food for Medieval Women* (1987). In *The Burden of the Flesh: Fasting and Sexuality in Early Christianity* (1998), Theresa Shaw notes the perceived correlations between the fasting female body's exterior appearance and its interior virtue in early Christianity. See especially pp. 22, 32–3, 135, 236, 243–4, 250.

12 Susie Orbach (2009: 171) makes a similar observation about the connection between physical appearance and internal moral states: 'Almost without exception, how individuals think and feel about their bodies has come to play an ever larger part in their notion of what is right or wrong. They believe that their bodies are a physical enunciation of their true state of being.'

ence the pain of hunger or the burn of a workout as evidence that they are on the 'right' path. Or they feel 'bad' for eating the 'wrong' food, or eating 'too much', and they may 'atone' for such 'sins' by purifying/purging themselves with laxatives, vomiting, starving, and/or exercising excessively.

A number of ads for low-fat or diet foods use explicitly moral language to associate thinness with virtue. For example, 'French Twists' pastries, advertised in *Weight Watcher's Magazine*, are described as a 'Sinful Treat'. Similarly, the 'Protein Plus Protein Bar' promises to be 'Sinfully Delicious', and the 'Meso-Tech' energy bar is described as 'Guilt-Free Chocolate'.

However silly, this moral rhetoric is also seductive because it fosters a sense of virtue, purity, and self-worth without requiring one to delve into the deeper issues of what it means to act ethically in our complicated world. Instead, a woman can deem herself 'good' if she eats foods that are 'good'—which of course means foods that help her be thin. In the face of larger decisions that have no neat and tidy answers, this dogmatic, clear-cut morality system not only helps a woman to feel in control, it also allows her to feel as though she is acting responsibly, even if her sphere of influence is reduced to the size of her body. The tragic upshot of this 'morality' is that it distracts attention away from the most pressing ethical challenges of our time—of which there are plenty.

Rituals of thinness

The moral codes of the Religion of Thinness are deeply etched in the *rituals* women perform in their efforts to downsize their bodies. Counting calories, carbohydrates, and fat grams, separating the 'good' foods from the 'forbidden', stepping on the scale every morning, running on the treadmill to 'burn off' dessert—these are just some of the rites through which the 'truth' of thinness is planted deep within women's bodies and psyches, where it starts to feel natural and thus beyond question.

Like rituals of traditional religion, weight-loss rituals work by turning mundane, everyday activities into movements with transcendent meaning. Activities as ordinary as walking or biking become opportunities to connect with a higher purpose: the 'ultimate value' being skinny. Some surveys suggest that the majority of American women who exercise do so to lose weight.¹³ My point here is not that exercise is bad. On the contrary, I have argued else-

13 For example, in a survey conducted by *Essence* magazine on issues related to troubled eating and body hatred, 74.5 per cent of respondents said that they exercise to burn calories. See Villarosa 1994: 19.

where that exercise can be good for both ‘body’ and ‘spirit’. The problem with exercise in the Religion of Thinness is that its primary aim is not fitness but weight-loss. A growing body of research indicates that the thinness and fitness are not automatically linked and that good health is possible at a variety of sizes.¹⁴

What’s more, exercise that’s motivated primarily by weight-loss perpetuates an ironically disembodied, future-oriented soteriology. Like the otherworldly orientation of certain forms of traditional religion, this forward-looking mindset encourages women to envision their fulfillment as a distant dream. ‘When I die and go to heaven’ becomes ‘When I finally lose enough weight’—perhaps by going on *Shape* magazine’s ‘Happy Diet’ (Figure 6). In this soteriology, the happiness for which humans long is something you have to look forward to—something that could happen ‘in just one month’, when (as the title of another *Shape* article suggests) you ‘Get back into your skinny jeans’—rather than something you can experience *here and now*. ‘Happiness’ is the ‘Bikini Body’ you can achieve—in ‘just 4 weeks!’ The assumption is that the body you presently have is *not* okay.

Industries that sponsor the Religion of Thinness simultaneously promote and prey on this assumption by proffering an abundance of products designed to supplement women’s ritualizing efforts to eradicate the shame of Eve. Some of these products are rather creative, like the ‘Cellulite Solution’ or the ‘Chews to Lose’ weight-loss gum. Some are kind of amusing, like the ‘Think Like A

14 I have written about the spiritual benefits of exercise on my blogs with *Psychology Today* and the *Huffington Post*. See <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/bloggers/michelle-lelwica> or <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michelle-lelwica>. Much of this research is cited by Linda Bacon in *Health at Every Size: The Surprising Truth about Your Weight* (2008). See also Gaesser 2002 and essays in Rothblum & Solovay 2009. The *Health at Every Size Journal* (now out of print, but formerly published by Gürze Books) was a helpful resource for this perspective. See also Campos 2004, Oliver 2005, Alley & Chang 2007, Campos *et al.* 2006, Saguy & Riley 2005, and Hellmich 2005. In *Bodies*, Susie Orbach makes an interesting observation about the cultural influence on widespread assumptions about the dangers of obesity: ‘There is . . . clear evidence that the most protective weight for health purposes is a BMI of 27.5 (if one accepts the BMI at all)—a figure that is presently in the recently designated overweight category. Interestingly, overweight people who exercise now have a lower mortality rate than thin people who do the same. So one is led to wonder why thin has erroneously become the gold standard for health. Could it be that even though the evidence does not support the idea of thinness as healthy and good, the overwhelming power of today’s visual aesthetic has affected even doctors and medical researchers? The social phenomenon of fads and scares has been well explored. The so-called obesity epidemic is one of them.’ (Orbach 2009: 127.)

Thin Person Tape Series' (also available in Spanish). And some are an insult to our intelligence if we take time to think about them—like weight-loss supplements that promise we can 'Lose Weight Naturally' by taking a pill.

Implicitly, the logic of commercial weight-loss rhetoric draws on classic Christian concepts like 'sin' and 'redemption' to create a hierarchical ordering of bodies. As post-colonial theologian Sharon Betcher points out, the Augustinian binary of 'brokenness/wholeness' is embedded in the dominant commercial culture optic that constructs 'disabled' or 'defective' bodies in contrast to those it deems 'normal' or 'whole' (Betcher 2007: 3–11, 65, 109). The ritual pursuit of the 'flawless' body is encouraged by a consumer-driven, media-saturated culture that renders the 'less-than-ideal' (or 'fallen') female body in need of constant improvement/redemption.

Ads that peddle weight-loss products would be amusing were it not for the destructive attitude towards the body they foster. This attitude is reflected (and promoted) in the violent language that's frequently used to sell weight-loss products. Beneath the image of a fragmented, bikini-clad female body, the small print on an ad for 'Fat Burner' instructs you to 'Show those pesky fat cells no mercy.' It sounds like a line from the Medieval Inquisition! A number of ads and images encourage us to 'blast' or 'burn' the fat from our bodies—as if it were an enemy that needs to be exterminated, a heresy to be burned at the stake. There's even an Internet fat-burners support group—called 'Inner Circle'—so you don't have to fight this demon alone.

Given the symbolic nature of such ritual discourse and the behaviour it encourages, we might ask: *Why is fat so scary? What does it represent?* Within the Religion of Thinness, fat symbolizes the chaos or messiness of our lives: the problems, the uncertainties, the disappointments, in short, everything that eludes our control. In essence, fighting this 'enemy'—'burning it off'—fosters a sense of power that many women feel is missing in their lives.



Figure 6.

The discourses of women who have suffered from body image and eating problems reveal that many do in fact see weight-loss as a means of empowerment. 'I was a goddess in my own little world,' a former anorexic-bulimic woman recalls, 'meting out punishment and rewards for evil and virtuous behaviour' (Kahler 1993: 229–30). Another former anorexic describes the sense of dominion she derived from her self-denial:

. . . checking in at ninety-one pounds, I thrived on hunger, uneasy when I was not satiated with my one-hundred calorie meal. I felt weightless, hollow, as if I could pass through tangible objects like a ghost. I was supernatural; removed from the cruel world, untouched by reality. I had conquered reality. (Sender 1993: 29–30.)

Notice how, for this woman, regulating the body generates a sense of a 'higher power', and this is *a sense that she feels in her body* (it is not just a mental construct). Notice, too, that the *sense of power* she generates by refusing to eat poses no threat to the world around her; in fact, it depends on her obedience to the status quo she seeks to transcend.¹⁵ Yet even bulimic women, who appear to be 'out-of-control', say their purging rituals give them the *feeling*—the psycho-somatic-emotional *sensation*—of being in charge. One woman said that vomiting after eating gave her a sense of 'accomplishment' and 'relief'; after flushing the toilet, she would look in the mirror and tell herself: 'Everything is under control' (Browne 1993: 87).

The idea that you can take charge of your life by controlling your body is not-so-subtly promoted in the before-and-after pictures that often accompany ads for weight-loss products. Through cliché conventions (i.e., women in the 'before' pictures are typically slouching and look unhappy) such images beckon with the promise of being 'born again' through a thinner body.

Seeing this promise requires a kind of 'religious' imagination (implicitly, for those who are drawn to the possibility of such transformation; and explicitly, for the scholar who analyzes it). For it is the religious imagination that—through symbols, rituals, myths, moral codes, and soteriological aspirations—envisions *an alternative way of being*, the possibility of becoming a 'new creation' (to use Paul's terms) amid the pains and problems

15 Several feminist philosophers who incorporate the insights of Michel Foucault (particularly his understanding of 'disciplinary power') have observed how the 'empowerment' women seek and experience through their weight-loss efforts depends on their obedience to (and disempowerment by) dominant cultural norms. See especially Barky 1990. See also Bordo 1993, Haug 1987 and 1992.

of life as it is. In the Religion of Thinness, many women pursue this 'born-again' potential with the evangelical fervour and literal mindset of a religious fundamentalist. One recovering anorexic woman described her steadfast commitment to dieting as 'a replacement religion . . . with its own set of commandments and rituals.' 'I was so devoted,' she explained, 'that I was practically ready to give up my life for it' (Kelly 2008: 9).

It's not just radical transformation—the possibility of being 'born again'—that women seek through weight-loss rituals. There is also a yearning for basic security and order embedded in the pursuit of thinness.

I found the image in Figure 7 many years ago when I was doing 'research' (i.e., reading women's magazines) for an article I was writing. For a long time, I didn't understand what a big beefy man closing a heavy vaulted door had to do with feminine products. Then one day I was reading an essay by Anne Spalding entitled 'The Place of Human Bodiliness in Theology'. In it, she quotes Augustine's reference to menstruation as symbolizing 'flood of chaos' (Spalding 1999: 72). I suddenly understood the meaning of the image. Surely this door would contain such a disaster.

The supposed need to get women's unpredictable, chaos-prone bodies 'under control' is not confined to the Religion of Thinness. Women are constantly reminded of the need to ritually erase all traces of their physical evolution. Instead of appreciating the increasing gravity of our bodies as we age, we are encouraged to defy, contain, cover, transcend and/or conquer the corporeal aspect of our existence.

Rituals are the most embodied aspect of religion. By enlisting our senses through somatic activities—eating, drinking, touching, moving, smelling, singing, bowing, breathing—rituals bring our 'bodies' and 'minds' together,



Figure 7.



Figure 8.

creating a kind of *muscle memory* of the truths they aim to foster. Through their formulaic, repetitious, embodied nature, rituals plant the socio-symbolic meanings they produce under our skin, beyond our conscious awareness, so that through our daily choices and actions we participate in—and occasionally resist—the reproduction of the world we inhabit.

Iconography of the Religion of Thinness

The ritual crusade for a thinner body would have little power to get under women's skins without images to inspire the pursuit of the ideal. These images are *everywhere* in the US today—at the news-stand, on billboards, in grocery stores, on the Internet, in waiting rooms and in living rooms. This omnipresence ensures the hegemony of the myth that 'you would be happier

if you were thinner'. For many viewers, these images function as modern-day icons, revealing the 'truth' about what it means to be a beautiful, good, successful woman. Celebrity models and actresses are the female 'saints' of this post-modern cultural devotion, though, compared to historical Christians, most of their worshipers are not very conscious of the power these icons have to shape their self-understanding and motivate behaviour (Miles 1985: 7–9, 128).

Indeed, most Americans do not pay much attention to the lessons these images offer; they view them merely as 'entertainment'. In November 2009, however, the ad in Figure 8 caught the attention of many because the woman's body has been photoshopped to the point of being surreal, if not grotesque. There was some outcry against Ralph Lauren, and the model herself (who was later fired for being 'too big') publicly admitted that she did not recognize herself in the image.

One doesn't need a PhD to recognize that images like this are artificially produced through airbrushing, photoshopping, and other digitally 'correc-

tive' measures. But this recognition is often not enough to protect women from the desire to look like the ideal. This is partly because there are so few alternative visions of womanhood circulating in mass culture today.¹⁶ But it's also because the images seduce through *nonverbal* instruction: the pictures do not just *tell* us—they *show* us—the importance of being slender. By engaging women's somatic senses (in this case, visual pleasure), this instruction produces a kind of 'knowledge' that can override linguistic reasoning.

In effect, the iconography of the Religion of Thinness and the myths it perpetuates appeal to women on a more-than-cerebral level. On an *existential* level, they hook women by capturing their imaginations, providing a model of who they might become and suggesting a purpose that gives their lives meaning. On an embodied level, these images stimulate women's aesthetic and somatic sensibilities, giving them a way to see, cultivate, feel, and dwell in the 'beauty' and 'truth' of the story they tell. The mythical 'perfection' of the models' bodies speaks to women's yearnings for self-definition in the face of life's irresolvable mysteries, possibilities, and problems, as well as their desires for recognition and respect in a society that measures their worth through their bodies.

Producers of these images are aware of the way 'supermodels' function as *role models* in the eyes of many of their viewers. Magazines frequently run articles about celebrity models that foster intrigue and devotion, especially among young women. An issue of *Young and Modern* tells readers what model agents look for, how the top ten 'supermodels' made it, what a typical day in the life of a model is like, and whether they could be 'the next Cindy, Kristy, or Kate' (Fellingham 1993). That magazine makers understand the awe and reverence these celebrity icons elicit is evident in a column *Elle* magazine ran in the mid-1990s called 'The Lives of Supermodels'—a parody on *The Lives of Saints*. Focused on the supermodel Niki Taylor, the copy of one column reads:

The thirteenth child of a fisherman in a small village near Cadiz. Left school when discovered by God in a restaurant; at seventeen, donned the sacred vestments of her order; devoted life to illuminating the holy books, though open to the right movie role (Fellingham 1993).

16 In many ways, these images bear the 'stamp of sameness' that Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno identify as a tool in the creation of a totalitarian regime. See 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception', excerpted in *During* 1993: 31–41.

Taylor's 'miracles' include: 'Stop[ping] traffic at 14th and Broadway' and 'Liv[ing] on water'.

However amusing, this example of secular 'hagiography' underscores the important role celebrity icons play in contemporary women's search for something transcendent in a disenchanted world. In many ways, the quest for the holy grail of Thinness can be seen as a 'secular strategy for re-enchantment' (Landy & Saler 2009: 1), one that combines the rationalizing, measured, and formulaic modes of modern life with a lingering popular yearning for connection with sacred and saving powers—powers that transcend the tangible world and fill a void in the human heart.¹⁷ Idealized images of bodies without bulges appeal to modern women's competing needs for a sense of agency, self-determination, and mastery (on the one hand), and inspiration, awe, and beauty (on the other).

Although thinness is primarily a Euro-American ideal, the past few decades have seen a growing presence of 'models' of colour in this iconographic tradition. One may be tempted to see this trend as an affirmation of cultural diversity. However, a lot of the 'diverse' images reinforce racist/patriarchal stereotypes, such as coloured women's supposed proximity to nature and/or their sexual availability. The effect of these images, then, is not to raise consciousness about issues of race and culture but rather to increase profits by appealing to a more heterogenous group of consumers. Cultural critic bell hooks refers to this marketing strategy as the 'commodification of otherness': one of patriarchal capitalism's techniques for spicing up 'the dull dish that is mainstream white culture' in order to preserve its hegemony' (hooks 1992: 72).

Even when racist/sexist ideologies are not invoked to promote the Religion of Thinness, a white-Western norm for female body size is automatically assumed. In many African countries, the woman in the 'before' photo in Figure 9 would be considered more beautiful than the same woman in the 'after' shot. This reminds us that slenderness is *a culturally specific ideal masquerading as a universal norm*.¹⁸

17 In her memoir of her struggle with anorexia and bulimia, Marya Hornbacher (1999: 118) reflects on the inner emptiness that she and others like her experienced: '... we were hungry and lost and scared and young and we needed religion, salvation, something to fill the anxious hollow in our chests. Many of us sought it in food and thinness.'

18 The tightly contoured female body delineates an elite white-Western vision of womanhood, produced and circulated by the popular media and employed for commercial purposes. This ideal of femininity is, to borrow an insight from postcolonial

Fueled by an increasingly globalized economy, mass cultural images export the narrow white-Western ideal to the far corners of the earth, spreading the desire to be skinny to cultures that have historically allowed for a variety of body shapes and sizes. Studies show that exposure to images of thin Euro-American models of femininity fosters anxiety about body size among women in non-Western contexts. In some of the countries where the emaciated white-Western ideal now circulates, a sizable portion of the population has difficulty finding enough to eat.¹⁹

The Indian version of *Elle*, a women's fashion magazine based in New York City, features models who are uniformly stick-thin. Though preoccupation with this body-size norm is not *verbally* prominent on its covers, the importance of slenderness is *visually* unambiguous in India's *Elle*. And the magazine's covers feature articles promoting weight-consciousness, such as 'Are You a Fat-Skinny?' 'Under the Skin of Cellulite,' 'Lose 5 Pounds in 5 Days,' and 'Drop a



Figure 9.

feminist Medya Yegenoglu, 'a particular masquerading as a universal,' enabling 'one culture's coding of [female] bodies [to become] . . . the template through which all [women's] bodies are conjured.' See Yegenoglu 2002: 87, 93.

- 19 See Becker *et al.* 2002 and Shuriquie 1999. In *Culture and Weight Consciousness* (1997), psychiatrist Merbat Nasser says eating and body-image problems are becoming increasingly common in the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and South America, especially among women in these contexts who identify with Western cultural norms circulated through the media. The following studies validate Nasser's study: Akan & Grilo 1995, Cogan *et al.* 1996, Lee *et al.* 1996, Gunewardene, Huon & Zheng 2001, Al-Subaie 2000, Wang *et al.* 1999, and Ung, Lee & Kua 1997. For a review of the literature on eating problems from cross-cultural perspectives, see Soh, Touyz & Surgenor 2006. This review discusses mixed findings about the similarities and differences of women's eating problems and their causes in diverse cultures.

Dress Size Fast'. In the South African version of *Shape* magazine, preoccupation with body size is explicitly promoted through both rhetoric and pictures that differ very little from those on the covers of the US version of this text.

The missionary exportation of white-Western norms for female body size to women in the two-thirds world resembles the spread of European Christianity during the colonial period. In both cases, a white-Western superiority complex converts a specific cultural/religious norm into a universal ideal, which then serves as a tool for commercial expansion. In both cases, the oppressive effects of such imperialism are camouflaged and sugar-coated as aspects of a 'higher' mission (whether saving souls or perfecting bodies). And in both cases, a network of beliefs, rituals, images, and moral codes are deployed to help converts *internalize* the ideal and thereby perpetuate their own colonization.²⁰ In both cases, a one-size-fits-all ideology creates the myth that there is only one path to salvation.

Critiquing the 'ultimate' value of thinness

To challenge this paradigm and the tunnel vision it perpetuates in the Religion of Thinness, we need to ask a few critical questions: Why is the 'ultimate body' necessarily slender? Who authorizes this narrow doctrine of 'perfection'? Who benefits when we adopt it as dogma? Is there really only one slender path to the health, happiness, and beauty we seek? Why not appreciate our physical diversity, rather than see it as a problem that needs correction?

These critical questions open the door to some even 'bigger' issues: To what should we be devoted? What is (or ought to be) our 'ultimate' purpose? Which values should we seek to foster? Which truths affirm? What kinds of rituals give us the stability we need to transform pain and cope with uncertainty? Where can we find beauty and inspiration? What role models, symbols, and stories deserve our attention? What insights, experiences, and/or activities make us feel sane, healthy, happy, and whole amid life's constant and often messy permutations?

As these questions suggest, my deconstruction of the religion/culture binary in my analysis of the Religion of Thinness does not negate the value of re-

20 I draw on a number of post-colonial feminist insights to make the comparisons in this paragraph, particularly those from the following essays and books: Donaldson 2002: esp. 45–8; Kwok Pui-lan 2005 and 2002: esp. 63, Betcher 2007 and Fiorenza 2007.

religious questioning and meaning making. In fact, my critique of the Religion of Thinness engages in this very process insofar as it suggests that some purposes are more ‘ultimate’ than others—not because they are intrinsically holier or higher, not because they transcend the ‘truths’ of the tangible world, but because, on a very practical and embodied level, they promote human and planetary well being, while providing a means for interrogating the ‘truths’ of all religious and cultural scripts.

The image in Figure 10 returns us to the question—What exactly is a ‘religion’?—which, you may have noticed, I have not answered definitively. Let’s have a closer look at this image.

Notice its quasi-religious motifs: 1) the mystical, shadowy, blue-hazy light; 2) the triptych, or altar-like frame that the three images form; 3) the woman’s pose, which, while not exactly a crucifixion posture, seems to be reaching for something transcendent.

In the copy in the corner, these allusions to religion become explicit:

This is not about guilt. It’s about joy. Strength. The revival of the spirit. I come here seeking redemption in sweat. And it is here I am forgiven my sinful calories. Others may never understand my dedication. But for me, fitness training is something much more powerful than exercise. It is what keeps my body healthy. It is what keeps my mind clear. And it is where I learn the one true lesson. To believe in myself. Avia



Figure 10.

The ad implies that this 'new religion' is a welcome substitute for its traditional counterparts, which presumably promote more guilt than joy, and which denigrate rather than celebrate the body. Yet the emphasis on *sinful calories* and *redemptive sweat* suggests that this 'new religion' hasn't really moved on much from its patriarchal predecessors. Perhaps the important question, then, is not *whether* the pursuit of physical perfection is 'a New Religion', but *what kind* of 'religion' it turns out to be.

Ultimately, by exposing the line between 'culture' and 'religion' to be fluid rather than fixed, my analysis implies that there is no essential 'religious' substance and that religious truths do not come from on high. Rather, they are *produced from below*—through the somatic-psychic-social processes whereby humans generate and experience a sense of what is most important in life. Precisely this insight equips us to recognize that some 'ultimate purposes' are simply too thin to be worthy of our devotion, and that we would do well to invest our religious/meaning-making energies in the creation of myths, images, rituals, moral codes and soteriologies that help us appreciate both the body's creative potential and the diversity of truth and beauty it produces and perceives.

Bibliography

Akan, Gloria E. & Carlos Grilo

1995 Socio-cultural Influences on Eating Attitudes and Behaviours, Body Image and Psychological Functioning: A Comparison of African-American, Asian-American, and Caucasian College Women. *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 18: 181–7.

Albanese, Catherine

1992 *America: Religions and Religion*. 2nd edn. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Alley, D. E. & V. W. Chang

2007 The Changing Relationship of Obesity and Disability, 1988–2004. *Journal of the American Medical Association* 298 (17:7, Nov.): 2020–7.

Al-Subaie, Abdullah S.

2000 Some Correlates of Dieting Behavior in Saudi Schoolgirls. *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 28: 242–6.

Bacon, Linda

2008 *Health at Every Size: The Surprising Truth about Your Weight*. Dallas, TX: Benbella Books.

Barcum, Jill

2005 The Struggle with 'Ana'. *Minneapolis Star Tribune* May 1, 2005.

Barky, Sandra

1990 Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power. In: Sandra Barky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*; pp. 63–82. New York: Routledge.

Becker, Anne, Rebecca Burwell, David Herzog, Paul Hamburg & Stephen Gilman

2002 Eating Behaviours and Attitudes Following Prolonged Exposure to Television among Ethnic Fijian Adolescent Girls. *British Journal of Psychiatry* 180: 509–14.

Bell, Catherine

1992 *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Betcher, Sharon V.

2007 *Spirit and the Politics of Disablement*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress.

Bordo, Susan

1993 *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

2003 The Empire of Images in Our World of Bodies. *Chronicle of Higher Education* 50 (December 19, 2003): B6–10.

Browne, Maya

1993 Dying to Be Thin. *Essence* (June): 86–7.

Bruch, Hilda

1988 *Conversations with Anorexics*. Edited by Danita Czyzewski and Melanie Suhr. New York: Basic Books.

Brumberg, Joan Jacobs

1988 *Fasting Girls: The History of Anorexia Nervosa*. New York: Random House.

Bynum, Carolyn Walker

1987 *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food for Medieval Women*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Campos, Paul

2004 *The Obesity Myth*. New York: Gotham Books.

Campos, Paul, Abigail Saguy, Paul Oliver & Glen Gaesser

2006 The Epidemiology of Overweight and Obesity: Public Health Crisis or Moral Panic? *International Journal of Epidemiology* 35: 55–60.

Cogan, Jeanine, Satish Bhalla, Araba Sefa-Dedeh & Esther Rothblum

1996 A Comparison of United States and African Students on Perceptions of Obesity and Thinness. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 27: 98–113.

Donaldson, Laura

2002 The Breasts of Columbus: A Political Anatomy of Postcolonialism in Feminist Religious Discourse. In: Laura Donaldson & Kwok Pui-lan (eds), *Postcolonialism, Feminism, and Religious Discourse*; pp. 41–61. New York: Routledge.

Douglas, Mary

1991 *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. New York: Routledge. (First published in 1966.)

MICHELLE LELWICA

During, Simon (ed.)

1993 *The Cultural Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge.

Fellingham, Christine

1993 'The Secret Life of Models. *Young and Modern* (Oct.): 52–60.

Fiorenza, Elizabeth Schüssler

2007 *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress.

Gaesser, Glenn A.

2002 *Big Fat Lies: The Truth about Your Weight and Your Health*. Carlsbad, CA: Gurze.

Garner, David

1997 'The Body Image Survey Results. *Psychology Today* 30: 30–44.

Geertz, Clifford

1973 *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Gunewardene, Anoushka, Gail Huon & Richang Zheng

2001 Exposure to Westernization and Dieting: A Cross-cultural Study. *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 29 (April): 289–93.

Haug, Frigga

1987 *Female Sexualization: A Collective Work of Memory*. London: Verso.

1992 *Beyond Female Masochism: Memory-Work and Politics*. London: Verso.

Hellmich, Nancy

2005 Chewing Over the Past Year. *USA Today*, December 27, 2005.

hooks, bell

1992 *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Boston: South End Press.

Hornbacher, Marya

1999 *Wasted: A Memoir of Anorexia and Bulimia*. New York: Harper Perennial.

Irvine, Martha

2005 Worshipping 'Ana': Eating Disorders Take on a Life of Their Own for Sufferers. *Brainerd [Minnesota] Daily Dispatch*, May 31, 2005.

Kahler, Deone Lynn

1993 No Simple Feast. In: Leslea Newman (ed.), *Eating Our Hearts Out: Personal Accounts of Women's Relationship to Food*; pp. 227–31. Freedom, CA: Crossing Press.

Kelly, Maura

2008 Hunger Striking. In: Kate Taylor (ed.), *Going Hungry: Writers on Desire, Self-Denial, and Overcoming Anorexia*; pp. 3–29. New York: Anchor.

Kessler, David

2009 *The End of Overeating: Taking Control of the Insatiable American Appetite*. New York: Rodale.

Kilbourne, Jean

1999 *Deadly Persuasion: Why Women and Girls Must Fight the Addictive Power of Advertising*. New York: The Free Press.

Kwok Pui-lan

- 2002 Unbinding Our Feet: Saving Brown Women and Feminist Religious Discourse. In: Laura Donaldson & Kwok Pui-lan (eds), *Postcolonialism, Feminism, and Religious Discourse*; pp. 61–81. New York: Routledge.
- 2005 *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.

Landy, Joshua & Michael Saler

- 2009 Introduction: The Varieties of Modern Enchantment. In: J. Landy & M. Saler (eds), *The Re-Enchantment of the World: Secular Magic in a Rational Age*; pp. 1–14. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.

Lee, Sing, Antoinette Lee, Tony Leung, Hong Yu & C. M. Leung

- 1996 Body Dissatisfaction among Chinese Undergraduates and Its Implications for Eating Disorders in Hong Kong. *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 20: 77–84.

Lelwica, Michelle

- 1999 *Starving for Salvation: The Spiritual Dimensions of Eating Problems among American Girls and Women*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- 2009 *The Religion of Thinness: Satisfying the Spiritual Hungers behind Women's Obsession with Food and Weight*. Carlsbad, CA: Gurze Books.

Levenstein, Harvey

- 1988 *Revolution at the Table: The Transformation of the American Diet*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Lynell, George

- 2002 Nurturing an Anorexia Obsession: 'Pro-Ana' Web Sites Tout the Eating Disorder as a Choice, Not an Illness, to the Horror of Experts. *Los Angeles Times*, February 12, 2002.

Manlowe, Jennifer

- 1994 Seduced by Faith: Sexual Traumas and Their Embodied Effects. *Critical Matrix* 8 (2): 85–99.

McLaren, Lindsay & Diana Kuh

- 2004 Body Dissatisfaction in Midlife Women. *Journal of Women and Aging* 16: 35–55.

Miles, Margaret R.

- 1985 *Image as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Nasser, Merbat

- 1997 *Culture and Weight Consciousness*. New York: Routledge.

Oliver, J. Eric

- 2005 *Fat Politics: The Real Story Behind America's Obesity Epidemic*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Orbach, Susie

- 2009 *Bodies*. New York: Picador.

Rothblum, Esther & Sondra Solovay (eds)

2009 *The Fat Studies Reader*. New York: New York University Press.

Ruud, Maddie

nd Pro-Anorexia: The New Online Predator. HubPages, <http://hubpages.com/hub/Pro-Anorexia> (accessed on July 2007).

Saguy, Abigail & Kevin Riley

2005 Weighing Both Sides: Morality, Mortality, and Framing Contests over Obesity. *Journal of Health, Politics, Policy, and Law* 30: 869–921.

Schwartz, Hillel

1986 *Never Satisfied: A Cultural History of Diets, Fantasies, and Fat*. New York: Free Press.

Seid, Roberta Pollack

1989 *Never Too Thin: Why Women Are at War with Their Bodies*. New York: Prentice Hall.

Sender, Kimberly

1993 My Hero Myself. In: Leslea Newman (ed.), *Eating Our Hearts Out: Personal Accounts of Women's Relationship to Food*; pp. 26–31. Freedom, CA: Crossing Press.

Shaw, Theresa

1998 *The Burden of the Flesh: Fasting and Sexuality in Early Christianity*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress.

Shuriquie, Nasser

1999 Eating Disorders: A Transcultural Perspective. *Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal* 5: 354–60.

Soh, Nerissa, Stephen Touyz & Lois Surgenor

2006 Eating and Body Image Disturbances across Cultures: A Review. *European Eating Disorders Review* 14: 54–65.

Spalding, Anne

1999 The Place of Human Bodiliness in Theology. *Feminist Theology* 20: 71–86.

Sylvan, Robyn

2002 *Traces of the Spirit: The Religious Dimensions of Popular Music*. New York: New York University Press.

Taylor, Charles

2007 *The Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Tisdale, Sallie

1994 A Weight That Women Carry: The Compulsion to Diet in a Starved Culture. In: Patricia Foster (ed.), *Minding the Body: Women Writers on Body and Soul*; pp. 15–31. New York: Doubleday.

Ung, Eng Khean, Sing Lee & Ken Ee-Heok Kua

1997 Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia—A Singapore Perspective. *Singapore Medical Journal* 38: 323–35.

Villarosa, Linda

1994 Dangerous Eating. *Essence* (Jan. 1994): 19.

Wang, May-Choo, Ting Fei Ho, Jeremy N. Anderson & Zak I. Sabry

1999 Preference for Thinness in Singapore: A Newly Industrialized Society. *Singapore Medical Journal* 40: 502–7.

Yegenoglu, Meyda

2002 Sartorial Fabric-ations: Enlightenment and Western Feminism. In: Laura Donaldson & Kwok Pui-lan (eds), *Postcolonialism, Feminism, and Religious Discourse*; pp. 82–99. New York: Routledge.

MIKAEL LINDFELT

The body, religion and sports

Through the lenses of postmodern religiosity

Introduction: the body as postmodern communication of identity

Let me start by quoting a fairly recent song by Robbie Williams. In his song *Bodies* (2009) the lyrics go like this:

God gave me the sunshine,
Then showed me my lifeline
I was told it was all mine,
Then I got laid on a ley line
What a day, what a day,
And your Jesus really died for me
Then Jesus really tried for me

UK and entropy,
I feel like its ****in' me
Wanna feed off the energy,
Love living like a deity
What a day, one day,
And your Jesus really died for me
I guess Jesus really tried for me

Bodies in the Bodhi tree,
Bodies making chemistry
Bodies on my family,
Bodies in the way of me
Bodies in the cemetery,
And that's the way it's gonna be

All we've ever wanted
Is to look good naked

Hope that someone can take it
God save me rejection
From my reflection,
I want perfection

Praying for the rapture,
'Cause it's stranger getting stranger
And everything's contagious
It's the modern middle ages
All day every day
And if Jesus really died for me
Then Jesus really tried for me

Bodies in the Bodhi tree,
Bodies making chemistry.

The song is very rhythmic in a restrained way, and performed in a tight, upbeat tempo. The singing is mixed close-up, as if the singer's almost touching the listener with his voice. Although a lot could be said about the lyrics, saturated in the music's overall setting, my interest in this song for writing an essay on the theme 'body, sport and religion' is mostly focused on the chorus of the song, where Williams in a very intense way talks about a feature in modern living which is concentrated on the body, saying:

All we ever wanted
is to look good naked,
hope that someone can take it.
God save me rejection,
from my reflection,
I want perfection.

Echoing some of the insights presented by the Norwegian theologian, Paul-Otto Brunstad, I am inclined to interpret Robbie Williams's song as a good description of many young western people's way of picturing what's important in their lives, especially focusing on their own body as the most important way of communicating their identity. Being young is almost by definition a time when one is trying to build up a certain identity, but living in a so called postmodern society, where most of the traditional life-guiding ideological stories are broken down to more or less free-floating fragments, the content

of one's own narration of oneself is left to the individual to bring together. By referring to Anthony Giddens's notion of the concept of 'lifestyle',¹ Brunstad goes on to identify the body-focus as something very important today in young people's self-conception.

Brunstad's conceptual contrast is articulated between a 'view of life' and 'lifestyle'. If by a view of life we are trying to identify a person's inner convictions as his or her ground for thoughts, feelings, attitudes, values and ways of acting, we could in line with this talk about 'lifestyle' as something more or less vaguely connected to a view of life, but at the same time seen as a person's external, symbol-oriented way of communication one's inner convictions or view of life related identity. Brunstad emphasises that the postmodern condition not only lays the actual need to build one's identity on the individual, but also stresses and makes it urgent to communicate this more or less fragmented identity. This view of life-based external communication is seen by Brunstad as important as actual reflection on one's own identity. And in this lies, according to him, the urgent need to focus on the individual's body:

When most of the other frames for views of life are taken away, the body appears to be the last option when it comes to finding a frame for articulating one's view of life. The body is seen as an independent 'house', a singular cosmos in a world, which for many people appears to be a total chaos. The individual body is not representative of anything else but oneself, and is seen as free in disposition when it comes to shaping oneself, one's image and identity. The more divorced from tradition we become, the more important the body will be for the individual's way of building his or her identity and individuality. (Brunstad 1998: 23, my translation.)

The body is thus seen as an important aspect in giving 'material form to a particular narrative of self-identity' (Giddens 1997: 81). The body is ripped off from most of the old conventions regarding the body as a tool for some working processes, and instead put into a totally new setting of self communication. And not just any natural body, but a fit, well-trained body according to the social ideals of the slim, tight, well adjusted body of today. Or in Robbie

1 'A lifestyle can be defined as a more or less integrated set of practices which an individual embraces, not only because such practices fulfil utilitarian needs, but because they give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity' (Giddens 1997: 81). See also Brunstad 1998: 22.

Williams's words: 'all we ever wanted is to look good naked, hope that someone can take it . . . ?'

In this way one can at least communicate the power of will and determination over the body, right in the face of so much abundance of everything, and in spite of so many opportunities for eating without any need to starve. This more or less ascetic, or at least disciplined attitude towards one's body grants, according to Brunstad, a certain sense of security: one can, at least, have control over one's own life and communicate this with and through the body. Brunstad states:

Security is connected to an idea of a timeless, slim and well-trained body. With a slim body you can have success, not only in connecting to a life-partner, but also in your social life, among friends and at work. The media and the world of advertising are constantly sending out images of the body as finding its happiness through satisfaction of the bodily needs. And through it all, an image of a new sense of certainty and security is brought about, both on individual as well as on social levels. (Brunstad 1998: 25, my translation.)

With this kind of focus on the individual body as a transmitter and communicator of postmodern, fragmented identities, self-images and built-up narratives, one is forced to call upon the body as a place of ongoing ideological construction. With all the images of perfect bodies reflecting the happy life floating around, constantly reminding oneself of the body-project, it is so easy to be dissatisfied, yet restlessly striving for the image of perfection. The ongoing situation is echoed in the last part of Robbie Williams's paradoxical chorus lines: 'save me rejection, from my reflection, I want perfection'. The body, viewed through the horizon of perfection is always afraid of rejection, the body as vulnerability and fragility, the body always under construction, but at the same time a reminder of my identity, of my need to tell everybody about my identity-based narrative.

From body-centeredness to sports

The lyrics in Williams's song, interpreted through the lenses of Brunstad's notions about the body as the final fluid certainty of keeping control in a chaotic world, is my link to a discussion about sports and its ideological aspects.

If the body is, as pictured in Brunstad's notion of the postmodern landscape of views of life, all about striving for the perfect—or at least acceptable—well-trained body, and if life is so centered around health and well-being, then sports comes very naturally to mind as one of the most obvious sources of the leading ideological narratives of our time. Actually it is quite hard to talk about elite sports as promoting health and a sound lifestyle anymore, since what is needed in most of the elite sports today is often way beyond any idea of normal health or sound, balanced lifestyles. In elite sports one is more or less supposed to constantly stretch the limits of one's health in order to perform at one's best. But one can turn the argument around, and say that health and a sound lifestyle are absolutely needed as a precondition for someone being able to perform as an elite sportsman or sportswoman. In that sense, sportsmen and sportswomen often have what it takes of external markers of communicating success, happiness and even social competence. Their well-trained, disciplined bodies can thus be seen as desirable images for what's good in life.

But how far can this image of the perfect body be stretched in making a difference in what's really important in life? Can sports be seen as a view of life? Or even as a religion, honouring the human capacity for overtaking obstacles in order to celebrate some kind of achievable holiness in a world where we can create our own identity-based narratives?

The notion of secularity as a perspective on sports and religion

In order to better understand the relation of sports and religion, my suggestion is that one has to start with an introductory discussion about secularism and the secularities of our time. Let me start by quoting the following text:

One understanding of secularity then is in terms of public spaces. These have been allegedly emptied of God, or of any reference to ultimate reality. Or taken from another side, as we function within various spheres of activity—economic, political, cultural, educational, professional, recreational—the norms and principles we follow, the deliberations we engage in, generally don't refer us to God or to any religious beliefs; the considerations we act on are internal to the 'rationality' of each sphere—maximum gain within the economy, the greatest benefit to the greatest number in the political area, and so on. This is a striking contrast to earlier periods, . . . But whether we see this in terms of prescriptions, or in terms of ritual

or ceremonial presence, this emptying of religion from autonomous social spheres is, of course, compatible with the vast majority of people still believing in God, and practising their religion vigorously. (Taylor 2007: 2.)

Charles Taylor, in his by now fairly famous and widely read book *A Secular Age* (2007), is actually not as interested in talking about secularity as religion emptied from more or less public spaces, as he is in the shift of the whole background framework, or 'framework of the taken for granted' in which 'one believes or refuses to believe in God' and the conditions for 'different kinds of *lived experiences* involved in understanding your life in one way or the other, on what it's like to *live* as a believer or an unbeliever' (Taylor 2007: 5, 13, my emphasis). For my starting point this quotation is, for time being, enough. Secularity can thus be taken to mean; 1) that there is a specific sphere of aspects in regard to things we usually call religion or religious, and 2) that this sphere is less and less interesting or necessary to the society, people in general, or individuals.

One way of talking about post-secularity, at least as something opposed to the well-known theories of secularization, is to start noticing how the picture of well organized autonomous spheres is breaking down. Religion, or more precisely, religious practice and people acting out of their religious convictions refuse in so many ways to be formed only in a religious, and private, sphere of modern life. I will now look more closely at this phenomenon with special regard to modern sports practices. Taylor's notion of a rationality internal to various autonomous spheres is challenged in different ways in modern sports practices, at least at the level of elite sports. One very illuminating example of this can be seen at top-level football. The following example comes from the last World Cup in South-Africa 2010, an example I personally find very illustrative. The former head coach for Sweden, Lars Lagerbäck and his staff, were in charge of the Nigerian national team in the World Cup finals. As the Swedish national team did not make their way to the finals, the national broadcasting company, Swedish television (SVT), focused therefore on teams with Swedish coaches, Lagerbäck as one of the two (Sven-Göran Ericsson was the other, head coach for Ivory Coast at that time). When SVT visited the training ground for the Nigerian national team in their preparations for the finals, the TV-team were met by a situation, where the whole team, including the coaches and the assisting staff, were standing in a circle in the middle of the pitch, holding each other's hands with closed eyes. From my knowledge of the Nigerian players I knew that most of them were religious, both Christians and Muslims, interestingly *per se*. For these Nigerian players it was perfectly

natural to pray together before a match, and even before starting their training session together. As Nigeria is a country that is divided into two regions with different religions, this praying together as Christians and Muslims was, of course, very interesting in uniting both the country and the team.

The most striking part for me was the actual reactions of the TV-commentators while watching this moment of religious prayer. It was very obvious that they were both bothered and confused. The way this Nigerian team was making its preparations for the World Cup finals, and even more so by watching their own former head coach taking part in this prayer was both surprising and stunning. The most striking part was the very lack of words for expressing what they saw happening on the pitch. For them, commentating on football did not include religious moments. In their view it was probably okay that individual players were religious, but based on their reactions and total lack of language to explain what was going on, it was clear that they at best thought of religion as something very personal and private, located outside the game of football.

In a normal setting the commentators usually go on talking about the team, players, tactics, chances to beat the next opponents and so on, but now they just sat there without saying anything. And after some moments of silence, one of the commentators started to lighten up the situation, and now, in his probably normal, secularized way of confronting something religious, he tried to make a psychological explanation of how important mental preparations are in sports, and that this standing out there on the pitch and holding hands, surely must be one part of the Nigerian national team's way of mental training. But as a spectator I was left with a certain feeling of uneasiness in the voice of the commentator. He did not actually have words that would fit the situation, nor a language that he could use with his normal voice of confidence as an expert guiding the spectators to a better understanding of the session of training.

Without any knowledge of the condition of religious practice in Nigeria, it is, of course, very hard to see the moment of prayer as a particular manifestation of inter-religiosity taking place, but without any sense of religiosity at all, there was nothing but a speechless silence in the commentators' reaction. Psychological approaches were the best that could be offered by the commentators at that moment, but still with a feeling of uneasiness.

My reason for picking up this example is, of course, that it is a good illustration of both what a religious practice may look like in an expected unreligious surrounding, in this case in sports and the world of football, and what a typical secularized reaction towards religious practices outside expected reli-

gious spheres may look like. Both of these aspects underline how well the idea of religion and religiosity as something happening in a sphere of its own, a particular religious sphere, have become the normal way of picturing religion in modern society. Sport cannot, in this view, be seen as an arena for religious practice. Or can it?

For a religious scholar like Danièle Hervieu-Léger, religions of today cannot be seen as being as isolated as the theories of secularization have taught us. In her opposite view, religions are not dwelling in specific spheres that can be called religious:

Nevertheless, beyond the obviousness of this disintegration of the religious in modern societies, one is forced to admit that religion still speaks . . . But it doesn't speak in those areas where one might expect. One discovers its presence, diffuse, implicit or invisible, in economics, politics, esthetics, in the scientific, in the ethical and in the symbolic. Instead of focusing one's interest on the relationship between the diminishing domain of the religious (that is, its institutions and that of the 'historical' religions) and other social domains (the political, the therapeutic, the esthetic, etc.), one is here led to an investigation of the diverse, surreptitious manifestations of religion in all profane and reputedly non-religious zones of human activity. (Hervieu-Léger 1999: 76.)

In this perspective one should not be that surprised to find religious practice even in the field of sports. This tendency of finding different kinds of manifestations of religious contents and symbolisms in other spheres of life outside the traditional religious spheres is seen as 'dedifferentiation', a concept outlined by Paul Heelas (1998: 2–3). This new religious dedifferentiation often occurs as 'a willingness to combine symbols from disparate codes and frameworks of meaning, even at the cost of disjunctions and eclecticism' (Beckford 1992: 19). Religion is thus not taken as a whole package, but more as a set of existential sources, which can be used in a more eclectic way.

There are many examples of sportsmen and women practising their religious views in sports, but most of these religious expressions can be seen as private convictions occurring in different places, all in line with Taylor's notion that emptying religion from social spheres is still 'compatible with the vast majority of people still believing in God, and practising their religion vigorously' (Taylor 2007: 2), even on sports fields. But the key supposition in the standard view of secularization is still that sports should be seen as a specific sphere of life, whereas religion should be treated as another similar

sphere, and these should not be mixed-up in any way. Seeing Nigerian football players praying is therefore not sport as religion, but religious sportsmen. This distinction is, on the other hand, not as innocent as it seems at first sight, especially when viewed from a standard secular perspective. There are voices, both historical and contemporary, arguing that the split between sport and religion is not necessarily the only possible way of picturing sports.

Sports as religion—different voices

If we go way back in the history of sports, the picture that comes out is not that secularized. Looking at the ancient Greek Olympics that were held in 776 BC–392 AD we actually can't find this kind of divided picture. Quite the contrary, the ancient Olympic Games were seen as one part of religious festivals honouring the gods of ancient Greece. Some historians even state that the religious cult at that time was the actual root for the organized sports games. The first sports arenas were, for instance, located in the temple area, and the sports activities were seen as acts of devotion to the gods, picturing the gods as the real spectators of the games. One could say that the sports events were a ritualized way of honouring the gods, and bringing the transcendent sphere of gods among the people while the people attended the sports games as religious festivals (see e.g. Koski *et al.* 2004: 31–2).

Sports and religion were thus intertwined in a way that is quite hard to understand from our modern point of view. This may even be a more or less idealized conception of the ancient Olympic Games, over-emphasizing the role religion actually played. And we can, as Shirl J. Hoffman points out, quite early on in the history also notice a certain kind of secularization in this respect:

Over time, however, sport became warped by converging forces of specialization, rationalization, bureaucratization and quantification, so warped in fact, that contemporary societies find it difficult even to imagine any substantive commonalities between it and the practice of religion (Hoffman 1992a: 153).

Hoffman's way of underlining the perspective of contemporary societies looks much more familiar, and a lot of sports scholars seem to be keen to emphasize this idea of religion as something very different from sports. It is of vital interest for Hoffman that we should welcome the separation between religion

and sports. In his perspective both religion and sports lose something very important of their inner characteristics if they are comprehended in too close a relation. He says:

To suggest, however, that sports possess salvational power or that they embody anything other than a dimly reflected glory runs the risk of humanizing the sacred, gutting it of its autonomy, and reducing it to merely a projection of human aspirations. Not only this, it threatens to burden a fascinating human experience—made the more fascinating for the freedom and the lightness of spirit it entails—with some weighty cosmic baggage. (Hoffman 1992a: 158.)

In other words: 'Why do we mix religion with sport' (Hoffman 1992b: 133)? The question arises, according to Hoffman, from the fact that there is continually a temptation to picture some sports achievements, records, games, matches as being so extraordinary that you feel a need to use a more powerful, symbolically saturated language to express your experience. From that kind of feeling it is easy to start talking about sports achievements in religious language.

Robert J. Higgs is another scholar who warns about the mix-up of sports and religion. In his view sports and play are to be seen primarily from an aesthetic perspective, whereas religion is all about experiencing the holy, the sublime and the transcendent. From his perspective it is very troublesome to mix these categories: 'The most play can do is to make the world bearable; the most that sport can do is to make it beautiful. When claims are made for them beyond these roles, they too become part of the problem.' (Higgs 1992: 101.)

The Danish scholar Hans Bonde has, in what may be called a mediating position, a more nuanced, and, in my view, more realistic and up-to-date view of how lots of modern sports consumers tend to approach the meaning of sports in their life. Bonde has no need to make a strong separation between sports and religion, although he feels a need to make a distinction. After quoting the legendary football coach Bill Shankley's famous statement that football is far more important than life itself, Bonde goes on saying:

Does this mean that sport is a religion? No, sport is sport and religion is religion. In order for sport to become a religion it needs to make room for a myth of creation, and until now there has not been any talk of such myth. But on the other hand, it can be said that modern sport can entail a religious aspect. As the Christian church has become more and more

outdated and superfluous, sport has taken over more and more of the functions of religion, more precisely the need for fellowship, security, orderliness, identity and ecstasy. In short glimpses sport and religion are touching each other, especially when an individual overcomes himself and could be pictured as floating in the ocean of masses. . . .
(Bonde 1993: 47, my translation; see also p. 9.)

What Bonde actually is pointing to is a different way of looking at the distinction between sports and religion. Instead of talking about what sports or religion is, or should be, by distinction, Bonde is focusing on what could have a religious function in or through sports. This particular angle looks at religion from the perspective of secularization, and aims at the question that if there is religious potential in sports, in its highlights as representing something religious.

All the presented views on the distinction between sports and religion seem to start their arguments from a certain substantial picture of religion as always anchored in transcendent spheres, and therefore as something very different from the sphere of sports. But if one could change the perspective to a more functional kind of question, one could instead be looking for what kinds of experiences function as, or are treated as religious experiences in people's lives today. From this perspective, sports practices look quite different. It is time to line up some thoughts on postmodern religiosity and sport experiences.

Postmodern religiosity and sport experiences

Secularization is here not only seen as a way of refusing references to God in different spheres of life, but also as a statement of individualistic authority, of what can and could be of religious importance to a certain individual. Many scholars regard this shift as a shift towards postmodern religiosity, especially when emphasizing the personal religious choice instead of inherited religious traditions or churches as religious authorities. From such an angle, religion and religious belief are seen as something centered entirely around individuals and their personal accomplishments. It is a religion that is more or less characterized by the primacy accorded to personal experience, which guides everyone according to their own way.

From a postmodern and a more fragmented perspective, a religious person is not actually surrendering to religious claims of truth that come from

the religious tradition. It is, therefore, not a matter of discovering and committing oneself to a truth outside the self. Instead it is, one could say, more a matter of experimentation—everyone finding their own truth for themselves. In spiritual or religious matters, no authority defines and imposes any external norms upon the individual. This more individualistic and self-authorized approach, which can be seen in this fragmented religious vision, is not so interested in bringing some sort of salvational power from a transcendent religious sphere into people's lives. The objective pursued is, as Hervieu-Léger (2003: 164, see also 2000: 33–3) puts it, the perfection of the self, a perfection which is not concerned with the moral accomplishments of the individual, but with access to a higher state of being.

What Hervieu-Léger points at actually has many similarities with the secularized religion that Abraham Maslow calls upon in his talks about peak-experiences. Already in the 1960s, Maslow suggested that religions need to be seen from the perspective of the individuals' inner experience, experiences open to all. In his book *Religions, Values and Peak-experiences* (1964) he underlines his perception of religions that really matter to people in the following way:

From the point of view of the peak-experiences, each person has his own private religion, which he develops out of his own private revelations, in which are revealed to him his own private myths and symbols, rituals and ceremonials, which may be of the profoundest meaning to him personally and yet completely idiosyncratic, i.e. of no meaning to anyone else. But to say it more simply, each 'peaker' discovers, develops, and retains his own religion. (Maslow 1964: 28.)

From this understanding of religion, it is quite easy to draw the conclusion that for some people sport can be of profound religious experience, and can even function as a religious horizon. No myth of creation is needed or looked for, no external salvation is sought. The only interesting thing that is asked for is if the experience of something, in this case sports, can have a profound meaning for the individual personally, on a view of life at a kind of profound level. From this point of departure, sport has a great religious potential. Or as sports scholar Charles Prebish, who himself gladly talks about sport as a religion, makes his point. In sports settings there are lots of possibilities for different participants to experience something extraordinary:

Just who is it that gets religious experience in sport? Curiously, these experiences seem not to be specific to the athlete-participant, the specialist. Similar responses can be evoked from coaches, officials, and, not so surprisingly, spectators (present or otherwise). After all, each of the above advocates does participate in his or her own way. This latter point is particularly important, I think, because it indicates that no special athletic talent is required in the quest for salvation in sport . . . Consequently, religious experience in sport is no more confined to the participants on the playing field than is traditional experience confined to the priest, minister, or rabbi. (Prebish 1992: 51–2.)

One could still, if one accepts the interpretation that sport experiences can be seen from religious perspectives, need to ask if it actually is the sport experience in itself that is or could be religious, or are the religious experiences more likely to stem from the social and existential environments in which different sports are embedded. If one grants the possibility that religious experiences can indeed occur, and that reports of these occurrences during sport activity are valid, there remains, as Shirl J. Hoffman underlines, the need, the task of determining, if there really is something inherent in sporting activities capable of evoking religious experiences. Does the human experience of sport *per se* induce subjective states that meet criteria for religious experience, or is the experience of sport merely accidental to their occurrence? (Hoffman 1992b: 70–1.)

The question put forward by Hoffman has its taken-for-granted position in that religious experiences are singled out as particular experiences that can be characterized as religious experiences, no matter where they occur. There should be something religiously distinguished in these experiences for them to be seen as authentic experiences.

From the postmodern perspective the need to phrase the question in this way is actually not needed. If religion for a postmodern individual is not a question turning into a place of devotion to a God, or to look for religious truths, but on the contrary is seen as a need to look for what kinds of peak-experiences can help him or her have access to a higher state of being, then these kinds of questions do not arise. When Hervieu-Léger is talking about the ‘shared sacred’ in sports, it is something that ‘corresponds directly to the capacity for big occasions in competitive sport to rally huge crowds, unite them in their support and bring them to fever pitch, carried beyond themselves in the shared emotions of victory and defeat’ (Hervieu-Léger 2000: 55).

But, it is of the greatest importance to notice that this way of talking about the shared sacred in the postmodern religious landscape involves a certain assumption that should not be forgotten. For Hervieu-Léger all talk about sacredness is not necessarily a matter of religion. For her ‘this “secular sacred” is at the source of a secular religion, which presents itself as a functional equivalent of those traditional religions in a cultural arena where the question of salvation has lost its pertinence’ (2000: 103). From this she goes on to say:

What ritual occasions in sport display in their very immediacy is in fact the dissociation, characteristic of modern societies, between sacredness (as a collective experience of the presence of a force transcending individual consciousness and hence producing meaning) and religion (as ritualized remembering of a core lineage, in relation to which present experience constructs meaning). Given this line of argument, one can put forward the notion that the significance of spectator sports in modern society is that they offer in small pieces (and in company with other manifestations—rock concerts, demos, telethons, etc.) access to an experience of the sacred (an immediate, emotional realization of meaning) which *en masse* no longer functions in the religious mode. Certainly, there is nothing metaphorical about the relationship between sport and religion, given that the production is central of both. (Hervieu-Léger 2000: 103–4.)

In her view postmodern religiosity is in most cases understandable only when seen from the secularized perspective. That is, when religion is both free-floating, syphoned off from religious tradition, individualized, atomized and cut off from all kinds of questions of religious authority. From this perspective we can, as she underlines, talk about the sacred, but it has a special, value-loaded meaning. The objective pursued above all is the perfection of the self:

The salvation sought through this work of self-perfection is exclusively concerned with life here below. It is a question of attaining, in as complete a manner as possible, the goals which modern society offers as something attainable by all: health, well-being, vitality, and beauty. This conception of a strictly ‘this-worldly’ salvation is set within a monistic understanding of the world: it rejects all dualisms. (Hervieu-Léger 2003: 164.)²

2 See also Hervieu-Léger 2000: 33–4.

With these short passages on postmodern religiosity with its focus on religious experience as something sacred and reachable for all, I now want to turn to how sports can be thought of from within the sport culture. As sport is mainly a practice of physical activity, it is not that easy to find philosophically sophisticated reflections on sports as a practice, and how one can understand and look at the purpose of sports. One source of highest interest is still possible, and I therefore turn to the thinking of Pierre de Coubertin (1863–1937), the ‘founder’ and promoter of the modern Olympic movement, and especially to his ideas of Olympism, the philosophy behind the modern Olympic movement. His thinking on sports ideology is very revealing as his main interest is introducing sport as a new social phenomenon in western societies in late nineteenth century and early twentieth century.

Sports ideology as Olympism—the secular religion

The modern Olympic movement has a kind of philosophical codex called the Olympic Charter. In the first two principles of the Olympic Charter it is stated that:

Olympism is a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy of effort, the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles. The goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of man, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity. (Olympic Charter: Fundamental Principles of Olympism § 1–2.)

What is in my interest is to focus on the formulation that ‘olympism is a philosophy of life.’ This is quite a recent formulation of the ideas behind the Olympic movement. It echoes the thinking of de Coubertin, but at the same time it is neutralized in order to be more relevant for the modern, globalized sports movement. The contrast for the tendency to neutralize the core message of the Olympic movement can be noticed, for instance, in a speech the IOC’s former president, Avery Brundage, gave ahead of the Olympics in Tokyo in 1964. In his words the Olympic movement can be seen as a kind of meta-religion, combining all the important values from other religions: ‘[d]ie olympische Bewegung ist eine Religion des 20. Jahrhunderts, eine Religion

mit universalem Anspruch, die in sich alle grundwerte anderer Religionen vereinigt, attraktiv für die Jugend, und wir vom Internationalen Olympischen Komitee sind ihre Jünger' (quoted in Jakobi 1984: 84).

De Coubertin's original perspective on Olympism is much more eurocentric and romantic, but also religiously naïve, as is Brundage's, but for different reasons. In a speech that de Coubertin gave on 6 March 1929 he states, in the same manner as Brundage did 35 years later, that '[l]ike ancient athletics, modern athletics is a *religion*, a *belief*, a *passionate movement of the spirit*' (de Coubertin 2000: 578, italics in original). In order to understand what de Coubertin actually has in mind, not only when talking about athletics as a religion, but in maintaining that it is a religion, we need to look more closely at his overall ideas on Olympism.

De Coubertin's vision lies heavily on his ideas of developing man and mankind through physical exercise. The goal is to develop a harmonious man, balancing the body with mind and character. In some other passages he talks about balance between the 'human body, mind and spirit, sense and will, instinct and conscience', which in a polemic stance he calls upon as 'the true paganism' (de Coubertin 2000: 566). In his view a person's moral character is best developed through the body, not through mind, but in the end these aspects of being a person should interact in harmony (p. 548). This goal of harmony or balance is in his vision called eurythmy. As he is not only interested in sports *per se*, but wants to develop the idea that western society should be seen as a society in constant progress, sports is the ideal arena for picturing this new society. Through mirroring the society, elite sports should be seen as a blending mix of power and effort on one hand, and beauty and moral character on the other:

Olympism is a state of mind that derives from the twofold doctrine: that of effort, and that of eurythmy. Notice how much the association of these two elements, the taste for excess and the taste for due measure, is in keeping with human nature. Though apparently contradictory, they are the basis for any total virility. Is there any man, in his full strength, limiting his initiatives, and who takes no pleasure whatsoever in going beyond what is expected of him? At the same time, however, is there any man in the full sense of the word who is displeased at seeing his intense zeal crowned with joyful tranquillity and self-control, surrounded by order, balance, and harmony?

Neither the tendency toward effort, nor the habit of eurythmy develops spontaneously in us. They require apprenticeship and training. . .

These virtues become part of our nature, taking root in us through practice. That is what makes organized athletic activity superior, the fact that it imposes both measure and excess on anyone engaging in it.
(de Coubertin 2000: 548.)

In de Coubertin's explanation as to why he actually wanted to call for the ancient Olympic Games to be restored in his own time, he makes the following declaration in the year 1908, the same year when the Olympics were held in London:

Thus, on all sides individual efforts are ready to converge towards an ideal of general harmony. . . . The work must be lasting, to exercise over the sports of the future that necessary and beneficent influence for which I look—an influence which shall make them the means of bringing to perfection the strong and hopeful youth of our white race, thus contributing to the perfection of all human society. (de Coubertin 2000: 546.)

One may be lulled by de Coubertin's explicit words, by his accentuate combination of 'youth, beauty and strength', and even more by stating that the Olympic vision tries to bring 'to perfection the strong and hopeful youth of our white race'. But in the light of rising Nazism in early 1930s Germany and the fact that the Olympic Games were to be held in Berlin in 1936, de Coubertin's Olympic vision looks even more alarming, not only in terms of trying to develop a sports culture and give opportunities to individual athletes to develop and demonstrate their athletic skills, but especially when drawing on connections from individual elite sportsmen to perfection of all human society. (de Coubertin 2000: 567.)

At this time in history, sports were not entertainment in the sense of how we talk of them as entertainment today, but an ideological tool for developing societies. This Olympism as a state of mind, as an order of balance and harmony is, according to de Coubertin, both celebrated and demonstrated in the Olympic Games every fourth year. These games were in his vision a religious, cyclical festival 'par excellence, celebrations of youth, beauty and strength' (de Coubertin 2000: 597). In a speech de Coubertin gave in August 1935, that is just about a year before the Olympics were held in Berlin in 1936, he presents his view of the symbolism used for the Olympic Games. In the speech called 'The Philosophical Foundation of Modern Olympism' he maintains the line from the top individual athlete as inspiration for developing the whole society:

The Olympic Games must be held on a strictly astronomical rhythm, because they are the quadrennial celebration of human springtime, honouring the successive arrival of human generations. . . The human springtime is expressed in the *young adult male* who can be compared to a superb machine in which all the gears have been set in place, ready for full operation. That is the person in whose honour the Olympic Games must be celebrated and their rhythm organized and maintained, because it is to him that the near future depends, as well as the harmonious passage from the past to the future. . . From what I have just said, one must conclude that the true Olympic hero is, in my view, the *individual adult male*.
(de Coubertin 2000: 582–2, italics in original.)

But, one has to ask, if this way of honouring the human springtime by displaying the individual adult male is religious in any specific way? Why bring in religion in describing the Olympics? But, keeping in mind his talk about sports practice as 'true paganism' one cannot stop only at noticing his view of man as being both androcentric and sexist. One has to see further ahead to understand that de Coubertin actually sees his vision as religious in character. It is not religious in a transcendent sense, but he calls it a religion, a secular religion that lacks gods, but instead focuses on human potential. As a matter of fact, in the speech from 1935 he starts his exposition of his view of Olympism with a comparison to religion. He states:

The primary, fundamental characteristic of ancient Olympism, and of modern Olympism as well, is that it is a *religion*. By chiseling his body through exercise as a sculptor does a statue, the ancient athlete 'honoured the gods'. In doing likewise, the modern athlete honours his country, his race and his flag. Therefore, I believe that I was right to restore, from the very beginning of modern Olympism, as a religious sentiment transformed and expanded by internationalism and democracy that are distinguishing features of our day. . . It is not just internationalism and democracy, the foundations of the new human society now being constructed in civilized nations, but science as well that is involved in this sentiment. Through its constant progress, science has given man new ways to cultivate his body, to guide and strengthen nature, and to snatch the body from the constraints of unbridled passions to which it had become subject in the name of individual freedom. (de Coubertin 2000: 580.)

De Coubertin's reference to ancient Olympism is in fact revealing. If the athletes in ancient Olympics honoured the gods, this is no longer needed. What is needed is to visualize the breakthrough of the new age, where honouring the country, the race and the flag as well as stabilizing the new world order of internationalism and democracy is of religious importance. That this is a transformation of religious focus is totally a conscious choice for de Coubertin, but, as he had stated some centuries earlier, this need of transformation, or modernization, as he preferred to call it in 1910, 'is so obviously appropriate that there is no need to dwell on the matter' (de Coubertin 2000: 597).

In order to restore the most important aspects of the heritage of ancient Greece one has to look closer at the essence of that culture. According to de Coubertin, the gods of ancient Greece were not the key to understanding their culture. The most important point was to realize that the whole culture was a culture of humanism. Celebrating sports was then a natural part of celebrating this humanism, or the true paganism, as de Coubertin likes to call it. Hellenism is, he states, 'the cult of humanity in its present life and in its state of equilibrium' (de Coubertin 2000: 566), and goes on proclaiming the real humanistic heritage worthy of restoration in modern times:

This, then, was paganism, with its highly-desirable and fleeting companion, eurythmy. Our simplistic habit of cataloguing things leads us to define paganism as the adoration of idols, as if any religion, even the most materialistic, did not have its spiritual adherents and as though any religion, even the most mystical, did not have its adorers and of idols, even if they merely adored the golden calf, stronger and more highly praised now than ever before. There is also the true paganism that humanity will never be rid of and which, to utter a blasphemy, it is good that humanity cannot rid itself of entirely. That paganism is the religion of the human body, mind and spirit, sense and will, instinct and conscience. The flesh, the senses, and the instinct have the upper hand at times, the will and the conscience at other times. There are the two despots fighting for the primacy in us, a conflict that often tears us apart savagely. We must achieve balance. We do manage to do so, but we cannot hang on to it. The pendulum reaches the golden mean only when it is half-way between the two extremes between which it swings. Likewise, humanity—the individual or society—cannot stay midway in its race from one excess to another. When we do manage to restore the balance of an individual or a group, quite often the only way to achieve it is to aim for the opposite form of excess. (de Coubertin 2000: 566.)

De Coubertin belongs to the category of visionaries of the late nineteenth century that looked at traditional religion as something one needed to overcome in order to establish a more humanized religion based on progress, strength, power and ability in a new world order of internationalism. One can, for instance, think of August Comte, who in his most famous book *Cours de philosophie positive* (1830–42), portrays the development of humankind through different stages, from the metaphysical to the scientific positive stage—a transformation that includes abandoning all outdated religious ideas by welcoming the true humanity, a life in service for humanity and in admiration of the realized harmonious humanity (*le Grand Être*) (Ahlberg 1951: 165–71).

Or one can think of Ludwig Feuerbach in his outburst at traditional Christianity in the book *Das Wesen des Christenthums* (1841), where he states that the true Christianity is all about the human. All ideas of some transcendent God are, according to Feuerbach, only human projections and wishful imaginative pictures. Christianity can, therefore, only be of any serious interest if all its theological and metaphysical remainders are exchanged to a true understanding of what it means to be truly human. (Ahlberg 1951: 172–7.)

De Coubertin's creation, the modern Olympic movement, is basically and by choice a secular religion of humanity, all in line with the ideas of Comte and Feuerbach. His vision of full manhood and societies in progress as something that at best would grow in the tension of belonging to a nation and being engaged in international co-operation, all in order to visualize the ability of the most talented young adult men's and race's performances in the sporting fields, was for de Coubertin the only way of both understanding and developing a sense of holiness:

To achieve these goals in our secular age, only one religion was open to us. The national flag, the symbol of modern patriotism being raised on the pole of victory to honour the winning athlete—that was what would keep the faith alive at the newly rekindled hearth. (de Coubertin 2000: 573.)

It is important to notice that the religious aspect that is entailed in de Coubertin's vision of Olympism never gets any substance from metaphysical or transcendental horizons. The only religious experience possible is immanent, and it is articulating the true humanity, the human individual and its view of accompanying society of natural fullness and harmonious balance (see also Krüger 1981: 185–9).

Some conclusions

My main argument in this article states, in short, that one needs to look more closely at the newly developed understanding of religion and secularization in the new fluid role it has for many people today, and that religion is seen as part of a need to build up an individual, identity-based narrative. From this perspective it is interesting to note that both the characteristics of postmodern religiosity and the ideology of the modern sports movement point in the same direction: sport can function as a religious sentiment. Both have a seriousness that can be classified as religious, at least in a functional way, towards health, well-being, self-perfection, strength, vitality and beauty—goals which modern society offers as something attainable by all.

In the midst of this secularized, this-worldly, immanent and attainable religion stands the notion of the perfect body, the symbol for both control and beauty, for well-being and power of will. The struggle for bodily perfection is, no doubt, an adventurism in itself. While striving at perfection the awareness of imperfection is constantly at hand. But the driving force—‘I can make it’—is totally in line with the sense of responsibility for building up one’s own identity-based view of life, reflected in one’s need for a conscious lifestyle communicating one’s own struggle for certainty in a fluid, more or less chaotic world. In a postmodern situation, people, where they feel that religious sentiments can be used in a different way, in spite of what the traditional religious authorities says, surely do not need religious authorities to tell them about deficiencies of human life. What they need, according to Zygmunt Bauman (1999: 243), is assurances that they *can make* and ideas for *how to make* it. And for this, even religious resources are of interest, but with a new authority: oneself, guided by the individual strive for well-being and perfection.

From this fluid postmodern sentiment, the Olympism of Pierre de Coubertin is more than well-suited to the postmodern individualist, mostly as an inspirational resource for human creativity. And it is easy to understand why the sports culture, especially at the elite level, is one of the most prominent driving forces, both in visualizing the idea of human perfection, achievements, the power of will, determination and similar things, and making images of the successful personality with lots of potential in commercial marketing. Not only is well-being and striving for it appreciated as a core value of today, it is also potentially lucrative, business-wise, which is clearly reflected in elite sports culture in our western world.

The most important change in mentality from the days of de Coubertin is that when he suggested that a sportsman, 'by chiseling his body through exercise as a sculptor does a statue, . . . the modern athlete honours his country, his race and his flag' (de Coubertin 2000: 580), this seems to be quite a long way out of date. The slogan of today would be more truthful if it were to state that by chiseling his body through exercise as a sculptor does a statue, the modern individual honours—himself. But, one can still, with the notions made by Hervieu-Léger, maintain that her distinction between 'secular sacred' and 'religion' is plausible. The body as religion may still be seen as a doubtful path to salvation. At least in its very individualistic, atomistic setting, one can argue that it has very little to do with religions that emphasize life in a community-orientated and relational manner is at the heart of a religious life.

References

Ahlberg, Alf

1951 *Humanismen. Historiska perspektiv och aktuella synpunkter*. Stockholm: Sveriges kyrkliga studie-förlag.

Bauman, Zygmunt

1999 Postmodern Religion. In: Zygmunt Bauman, *Vi vantrivs i det postmoderna*. Uddevalla: Daidalos förlag. (Swedish translation from *Postmodernity and Its Discontents*, 1997.)

Beckford, James A.

1992 Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity. In: B. R. Wilson (ed.), *Religion: Contemporary Issues*. London.

Bonde, Hans

1993 *Sport – en moderne kult*. Haslev: Hovedland.

Brunstad, Paul Otto

1998 *Ungdom og livstolkning. En studie av unge menneskers tro og framtidssforventninger*. Trondheim: Tapir.

Coubertin, Pierre de

2000 *Olympism. Selected Writings*. Editing director Norbert Müller. Lausanne: IOC.

Giddens, Anthony

1997 *Modernitet och självidentitet. Självet och samhället i den senmoderna epoken*. Göteborg: Daidalos. (Swedish translation of *Modernity and Self-identity. Self and Society in Late Modern Age*, 1991.)

Heelas, Paul

1998 Introduction: On Differentiation and Dedifferentiation. In: Paul Heelas with David Martin & Paul Morris, *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Hervieu-Léger, Danièle

- 1999 Religion as Memory: Reference to Tradition and the Constitution of a Heritage of Belief in Modern Societies. In: Jan G. Platvoet & Arie L. Molendijk (eds), *The Pragmatics of Defining Religion: Contexts, Concepts & Contests*. Leiden: Brill.
- 2000 *Religion as a Chain of Memory*. Cambridge: Polity Press. (English translation of *La religion pour mémoire*, 1993.)
- 2003 Individualism, the Validation of Faith, and the Social nature of Religion in Modernity. In: Richard K. Fenn (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Sociology of Religion*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Hoffman, Shirl J.

- 1992a Recovering the Sense of the Sacred in Sport. In: Shirl J. Hoffman (ed.), *Sport and Religion*. Champaign, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- 1992b Religion in Sport. In: Shirl J. Hoffman (ed.), *Sport and Religion*. Champaign, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Higgs, Robert J.

- 1992 Muscular Christianity, Holy Play, and Spiritual Exercises: Confusion About Christ in Sports and Religion. In: Shirl J. Hoffman (ed.), *Sport and Religion*. Champaign, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Jakobi, Paul

- 1984 Sport und Religion. In: Dieter Kürten, Heinz-Egon Rösch & Paul Jakobi, *Sport. '... Training für Fairneß, Großzügigkeit, Gemeinschaft'*. Mainz.

Koski, Sami, Mika Rissanen & Juha Tahvanainen

- 2004 *Antiikin urheilu. Olympian kentiltä Rooman areenoille*. Jyväskylä: Atena.

Krüger, Arndt

- 1981 Ursprung und Bedeutung von Coubertins Religio Athletae. In: *Proceedings of the IX International HISPA Congress*. Lisboa.

Maslow, Abraham H.

- 1964 *Religions, Values, and Peak-experiences*. Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press.

Olympic Charter

Fundamental Principles of Olympism. www.olympic.org/uk/organisation/missions/charter_uk.asp.

Prebish, Charles

- 1992 'Heavenly Father, Divine Goalie': Sport and Religion. In: Shirl J. Hoffman (ed.), *Sport and Religion*. Champaign, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Taylor, Charles

- 2007 *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard University Press.

MIRA NICULESCU

Women with shaved heads: Western Buddhist nuns and Haredi Jewish wives

Polysemy, universalism and misinterpretations of hair symbolism in pluralistic societies

But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her (St Paul in 1 Cor. 11:14).

A beautiful woman is walking along the street

I would be ready to bet that almost every reader, male or female, has just imagined her with long hair. And here comes the power, and the sociological interest of clichés. Clichés are not merely ‘vulgar’, and they are certainly not to be despised: on the contrary, they are very precious as stereotypes, which is to say, as archetypes, to identify the representations relative to a given cultural area: they give direct access to its symbols. And when it comes to hair, long hair seems to be a universal sign of femininity.¹ But femininity itself can be seen as the mask that sublimates and symbolises—just as it is hiding—its ends: the reproductive function of women. This is why a classical attractiveness criteria for a woman (breasts and hips) are linked to fertility. This process, from the social function to the concept of beauty, which is a mask for the message it conveys, can be summarized as follows:

Social message (fertility) → symbol (breasts) → sublimation of the symbol (aesthetic attractiveness)

Yet hair, along with nails, have a hybrid bodily status: a genuine part of one’s body, they nevertheless can be painlessly removed—and in the case of hair, completely so, as if it was an accessory, a natural ‘hat’. Then why this centrality

1 Apart from certain zones where hair can hardly grow, such as in Africa, and thus is not a beauty criterion.

of hair as bearer of an aesthetic message of femininity, that is to say a hidden advertisement for the reproductive feminine function, when it appears like a 'relative limb' that does not serve the reproductive function? I will argue here that the symbolic charge of hair is such that its status does not require the related function. Hair is in perspective a 'pure symbol', a symbol *per se*, the efficiency of which will be examined through the case study of the rite of female headshaving within two specific religious groups.

This argument will be developed through the gender comparison of the absence of hair: the cutting, or the complete removal of hair, seem to affect the message of femininity, whereas it does not affect that of masculinity. In contemporary Western societies, it has become common—if not fashionable—to see men with shaved heads. But the situation seems very different for women: a female shorn head seems to stick in the craw for most observers. The negative representations it provokes have evolved throughout the twentieth century: right after World War II, its main evocation was that of concentration camps and the punishment of the collaborators; around the 1980s it would evoke social rebellion, through the punk or skinhead movements. Nowadays the main image associated with a female shaved head is disease, especially cancer. This is not the case for men, who may shave their heads when they become naturally bald, so that this 'look' is completely normalized—if not fashionable when worn by movie or sports stars.

This article will focus on female hair, or rather the absence of hair: it will compare the symbols attached to shaved heads for Western Buddhist nuns and for Jewish married women from various *Haredi* or 'ultra-orthodox' groups,² and the (mainly negative) representations of these in the external, secular society. The idea for this comparison came from a fieldwork research I was undertaking about the 'Jewish-Buddhist' phenomenon: as I was interviewing Western nuns of Jewish origin, it appeared that their shaved heads had been very difficult to cope with for their families, to whom it was a reminder of the Holocaust. It immediately struck me how the same body treatment could

2 *Haredis* (from the word 'to tremble', referring to 'those who shake before God'), are a particularly strict trend within Judaism that started in the eighteenth century as a reaction to the modernist reform of Judaism. They define themselves in opposition to modernity and to the *goyim* (the non-Jews). Several *Haredi* groups have adopted the custom of having their married women's heads shaved: the Satmar sect, founded in the town of Satmar, Hungary, by Rabbi Teitlebaum, which has been mainly established around New York city since the end of World War II; and several groups founded by Rabbi Aharon Roth (also from the town of Satmar), such as the Toldot Aharon ('the descendents of Aharon'), the Toldot Avraham Yitzchak, or the Shomrei Emunim ('the keeper of the faith').

represent, on one side, bliss (for the Buddhist nun for whom it is a symbol of liberation and spiritual engagement), and on the other side, horror (for her family and sometimes, out of a Buddhist context, society). And in the case of those Jewish women, the polysemy of this body treatment is made even more complex by the fact that in their own tradition, some women shave their heads under the hair covering. So the same body treatment could be used to express celibacy for the Buddhist nun, or marriage for the Haredi, or ultra-orthodox woman. Therefore the meaning of head shaving seemed to be fluctuating and contextual: it could mean either religious commitment, or punishment, or disease. This relativity of body symbolism is illustrated through the advertising campaign of an international bank: it shows the three pictures of the back of a shaved head, with three possible interpretations: 'style', 'soldier', 'survivor'. And one cannot tell if the head is that of a man or a woman.

Two questions emerged: How extreme were the head shaving representations when it specifically came to women, if according to context it could mean 'glory' or 'shame'?³ And considering the variety of (mis)representations of female shaved heads, did we inevitably have to come to the conclusion of a symbolic relativity and contextuality of this body treatment, or could there be an underlying, permanent meaning to it?

Over the past fifty years, anthropologists have been trying to identify the symbolism of hair, to find its definition and universal criteria: what did long, cut, or shaved hair stand for?

In his desire to distinguish the work of the anthropologist from that of the psychoanalyst, which he considered too intuitive to be relevant—even when based on anthropological evidence, Edmund Leach (1958) proposed to discern between public and private symbols (his discipline focusing only on the first).⁴ Hence, against the theory of Charles Berg (1951) who assimilated hair to genital organs and their cutting to symbolic castration, he proposed, based on data taken from Hindu and Buddhist societies in India and Ceylon, a typology according to which it would refer not to sexual organs (which would belong to private symbolism), but to sexual activity (as a public message): the degree of sexual freedom would be function of the length of hair, so that:

- 3 To use the expression of Anthony Synnott in the title of his article, 'Shame and Glory' (1987), in reference to St Paul's saying quoted at the beginning of this article.
- 4 Yet intuition is the tool for interpretation. Putting that article in context, one may see it as an attempt to place anthropology on a 'scientific' ground, in order to guarantee its credibility.



An illustration of the polysemy of a shaved head through this advertisement for the HSBC bank.

- Long hair = unrestrained sexuality
- Short hair = restricted sexuality
- Shaved hair = celibacy

A decade later, Richard Hallpike (1969), using examples from the Bible and from contemporary Western society, made a point of demonstrating that this theory was irrelevant: indeed, monks were, unlike shaved soldiers, celibate. The alternative equation he suggested was therefore to leave aside the link between hair and sexuality, focusing instead on social control: the length of hair would be conversely proportional to the degree of integration in society, so that:

- Cut hair = social control
- Long hair = being outside society

But this theory leaves aside, as Hallpike writes: 'anchorites, witches, intellectuals, hippies and women', who 'all have long hair'. Yet he doesn't see common traits to explain that coincidence, if not that 'there is however one character-

istic which is often associated with being outside society. . . this is animality'. (Hallpike 1969: 261.) This argument of seeing a common trace of animality in women, witches and intellectuals, doesn't seem like a very convincing argument.

Almost twenty years after those two typologies, Richard Synnott wrote an extensive review of hair treatment in contemporary Western societies. In such a pluralistic context, and with new options of border blurring (gender bending), or of expressions of social contestation (skinheads, punks), he considers the binary alternative proposed by the previous authors as not relevant anymore: to him, a polarization between cut and uncut associated with only one meaning was, in this new pluralistic context, to be replaced by a focus on deviance, since meaning could only come in context (Synnott 1987: 407). Yet he himself also proposes three stable binary propositions (p. 382):

Opposite sexes have opposite hair.
 Head hair and body hair are opposite.
 Opposite ideologies have opposite hair.

But this last proposition doesn't seem convincing, since as Synnott pointed out himself, a soldier and a punk are both shaved of head, while they embody opposite ideologies (1987: 403).

In this article I would like to focus on the meaning of shaved heads for women. I contend that the symbol is gender differentiated: a shaved head is not necessarily a symbolic gender castration for a man, but it is for a woman.

Through the comparative case study of Western Buddhist nuns and Haredi Jewish wives within a larger secular society, I will focus on identifying this common meaning behind the apparently contrary symbolism of female head shaving according to the context, and on finding the criteria for its semantic variation. The first argument that I will be trying to develop is that symbols are not either exclusively universal (as univocal) nor exclusively polysemic (relative to the context), but that they are complex: they can be both.

My first argument is that behind the apparent polysemy of this body technology lies a common symbol: for all women, shaving the head means the loss of their femininity. My second argument is that there can be a split between femininity and reproduction, as is shown in the case of Haredi women: their shaved heads do not symbolize the amputation of their reproductive function, but of the femininity that, in less strictly religious societies, stands for the symbolic aesthetical advertisement for this final function. Cutting through the roundabout of attractiveness (and avoiding its social conflictual poten-

tial), the compulsory institution of marriage guarantees the social reproductive function of individuals while sparing the troubles of seduction. Moreover, this 'loss' of femininity may be positive if it is chosen—in such an instance it is not lost but given away, renounced—or negative, especially if undergone in contexts of war or disease.

The conclusions G. Obeyesekere draws from his study of the hair of mystic women in Sri Lanka are closer to this work. For him, a shorn head has three levels of meaning (1981: 34):

Primary psychological meaning = castration
Further cultural meaning = chastity
Extended personal message = renunciation

However, first of all, Obeyesekere does not draw conclusions from his field-work with women to build a separate gender theory of hair, as is the case here. One cannot build a general theory of hair applicable to both men and women, because the meanings are dramatically different for each of them. Also, where he sees castration, chastity or renunciation, depending on the level of the meaning: psychological, cultural or personal, I do not distinguish them. I argue, on the contrary, that even if there is such a thing as a personal interpretation of symbols, the symbol itself is a monolith: it is a public message borne by the individual. If it was to take on different meanings according to whether it would be placed on a psychological, cultural or personal level, it would lose its efficiency as a message. Or as a message, a symbol needs to be coherent, and transmitted with the same intention as it is received.

The argument I will try to develop in this article is that those three different levels of meaning that can coexist in a female shorn head: castration, celibacy or renunciation, are relative to the context and not to the personal or public degree of the symbol. And that the criterion is choice. Hence, for instance, the shaved head does symbolize celibacy and renunciation for the Buddhist nun, but not castration, as it is freely chosen for a greater liberation. The degree of choice, and therefore of possible castration symbolism, for Haredi women, is harder to determine, as the shaven head is a rule they have to abide by, as their birth determination and personal fate. Moreover, the difficulties that Buddhist nuns and Haredi women are facing are different: this body technique seems to place the Haredi women in a situation of cognitive dissonance, in between the the expectation of modesty and that of having to remain attractive to their husbands. Whereas for the Buddhist nun, the main challenge their embodied choice confronts them with, is external social misunderstanding.

Here lies the main intended contribution of this article: in pluralistic societies, when different meaning systems and therefore symbol definitions co-exist, misunderstandings can occur: hence a Buddhist nun may be seen as a patient undergoing chemotherapy, as it appears from many interviews (June 2010).⁵

Drawing, for the Buddhist part of the analysis, on interviews with Western Buddhist nuns (or former nuns) from several countries (France, the United States and Israel), and for the Haredi part,⁶ on the very extensive fieldwork offered by Sima Zalberg (2007) in Jerusalem,⁷ this article will try to explicate those issues. The use of tables will help the comparative work to be heuristic by enabling the reader to ‘visualize’ in a summarized way the key points of each issue.

Shaving heads: embodying religious commitment for Haredi women and Buddhist nuns

The dualist principle that Émile Durkheim drew from religion to establish sociology, and that the anthropologists have been using in their definitions of hair symbolism, also appears as the stable criterion to define gender. Even the contestations of gender duality (through gay, transvestite and transsexual cultures) show, by the very fact of their claim of crossing borders, the structural power of the latter. Indeed, the ‘columns of opposites’ that Pierre Bourdieu (1980: 348–9) saw as the structuring principle of every cultural system (such as sacred/profane, pure/impure, hot/cold, dark/light etc.) still seem to work as a fundamental structuring pattern—even if they tend to be contested in secular and pluralist societies. And that pattern would be drawn from the ultimate pairing of the masculine/feminine. This is true especially for Judaism

- 5 In such a polysemic context, body symbolism, which was meant to stand in *lieu* of language (for instance, someone wearing a wedding ring does not need to say they are married), cannot avoid language anymore: the symbol does not ‘talk’ anymore; it has to be verbally explicated.
- 6 In her article (2007), Sima Zalberg equates the Todot Aharon and the Satmar Hassids. But there seems to be a confusion: as we saw in note 2, even if they both originate from the same town, the Satmar Hassids, who are now mainly in America, are an older and larger group; the Toldot Aharon, are a small group mainly established in the neighbourhood of Mea Shearim (the hundred doors) in Jerusalem, where Zalberg conducted her research.
- 7 I consider here the Israeli society as a Western society, because of the European origin of most of its population, and its cultural references, that are mainly Western.

and Hinduism, hence the importance of the purity laws (related to food, sexuality and women) in these religions (but not for Buddhism, which emerged as a reaction to this duality principle, the Buddha wanting to abolish all frontiers in a non dualist system). This explains why, as we shall see, religious Judaism enhances the gender separation, whereas Buddhism, at least in the physical appearance of its monks, abolishes it.

With feminist movements, women have been able to co-opt all men's garments: pants, shoes, short hair, and so forth. But it is not reciprocal for men, who cannot borrow bras or high heels without seriously transgressing their gender definition. Yet this conquest on the part of women has not made them less feminine. On the contrary, it has considerably extended the scope of their femininity. However, even in what I call a 'post feminist' context,⁸ the definition seems to remain just that: a woman is a woman in the sense that she does not look like a man. A central attribute of her femininity is hair, the limit being not the length, but the presence or absence of hair: baldness embodies symbolic castration, not of genitals nor sexuality, but of femininity.

Hair technology being also central in the definition of a religious person, as opposed to a lay person (e.g. the turban for the Sikhs, the shaved head for the Buddhist monks and the tonsure for Christian monks, the beard for orthodox Jews and Muslims, the veil for Muslim, Hindu and Sikh women, and Christian nuns, the head covering for Jewish women), hair becomes a privileged means of examining how religious involvement can affect femininity, by opposing it.

Hair defining women as opposed to men

The first pairing in the 'theory of opposites' proposed by Anthony Synnott was that 'opposite sexes have opposite hair' (1987: 282). Even if this argument leaves aside some cultures such as Native Americans, Sikhs, Kanaks and others, one can say that the classical pattern is that:

Men = short hair / Women = long hair

Therefore, in the symbolic associations, as many researchers have pointed out (Clayson & Maughan 1986, Rich & Cash 1993, cited in Weitz 2001: 672):

8 This context is one in which not only the battle for equality seems to have been mainly won, but also where women seem to have been able to accumulate their own power and that of men, whereas men have only been able to borrow from the classical women's territory (mainly in the field of cosmetics and care) a very small part.

Short hair = masculinity / Long hair = femininity

But why such symbolic pairs? One could say that feminine attributes (such as breasts and a bottom) are 'full of matter', to compensate the absence of phallus—which, from a Freudian perspective is the essence of the definition of a woman. So the principle of fullness to make up for emptiness would explain the curves as an archetype of feminine seduction: the interplay between full and hollow. But another more simple explanation is that most of the time, theory comes from nature: as Synnott observed, the identification of women with their hair is due in large part to a biological fact: they simply do not naturally lose it. Hence, he stresses how the loss of hair due to illness can be corrosive to the sense of one's own femininity: 'When you lose your hair you feel like you have nothing to live for,' said a patient undergoing chemotherapy (*New York Times* 18.9.1983, cited in Synnott 1987: 383).

The fact that long hair stands for the feminine gender is attested by some customs, in India and in China, of not cutting the hair of young boys, so that they will look like girls: then the demons of illness and death won't be tempted to take them, because 'girls have no worth'. In Orthodox Judaism, by contrast, this equivalence between long hair and gender can also be seen through the first haircutting ceremony for boys: the hair of infant boys is left untouched until the age of three, and then is ritualistically cut for the first time, as a rite of passage showing their entrance into the world of children, as the physical fusion with the mother comes to an end. For Yoram Bilu (2003, cited in Yafeh 2007), this haircut also symbolizes the separation with the feminine world through cutting long hair and designing a father-like hairstyle (with the sidelocks).

Table 1 illustrates what has been previously said, through showing the difference of hair fashions between men and women, according to whether they are religious or not, in order to see how those social statuses (gender being considered a social status) are being physically symbolized through hair. It appears from this table that men and women are canonically defined in opposition, even in a Western contemporary secular context, where borders can be blurred on both sides (men too can choose their hair style and wear cosmetics and more adjusted clothes). In those cultures, looks have become a matter of aesthetic choice more than conformity or rebellious claim (as it was for the punks or feminists of the 1970s–80s), and there is a much wider range of options for being feminine and masculine. This is why these options can be called post-militant as well as post-feminist individualistic strategies. But even if these self-definitions have been refined and have become more

| | Hair in Buddhism | | Hair in Judaism | |
|---------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| | Men | Women | Men | Women |
| Lay/secular | Head: short | Head: traditionally long | Head: both Archetype: short | Head: both Archetype: long |
| | Face: shaved | | Face: both | |
| Monastic/religious | Body: unshaved | Body: shaved | Body: both | Body: both |
| | Head: shaved | Head: shaved | Head: short | Head: short |
| | Face: shaved | | Face: long | |
| | Body: unshaved | Body: unshaved | Body: unshaved | Body: unshaved |

Table 1. Gender comparison of hair fashion between secular and religious people.

subjective, the ideal-typical image of a short-haired man and of a long-haired woman, defined as opposites, remains.

Interestingly, that state of duality between men and women according to the secular or religious spheres, is being reversed between Buddhism and Judaism. This can be summarized in Table 2: it appears that in traditional Buddhist societies, lay men and women look different, but become exactly ‘similar’ in appearance when entering Buddhist monasticism. While Jewish secular people can play with the codes and borrow those of the other gender, religion firmly sets those boundaries back in place. The gender opposition is therefore being enhanced in religious Judaism and annihilated in Buddhism. The reason for this in Judaism is the central command of reproduction in Judaism, since:

Opposition = complementarity = possibility for reproductive sexuality

Such a pattern of functional gender definition and role repartition is completely foreign to monastic Buddhism, which is built on a renunciation of worldly roles and therefore on celibacy.

After having compared the styles of the secular and religious contexts, Table 3 summarizes the link between hair, looks and sexuality in each. The

| | Secular sphere | Religious sphere |
|------------------------------|----------------|------------------|
| Men/women in Buddhism | Different | Alike |
| Men/women in Judaism | ‘Alike’ | Different |

Table 2. Gender relation between Jewish and Buddhist secular and religious spheres.

| | Buddhist monastics | | Jewish Haredi individuals | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------|---|---|
| | Nun | Monk | Wife | Husband |
| Look | | | | |
| Hair style | Shaved | Shaved (hair/face) | Shaved (head covered, tight kerchief or hat) | Head: short hair Face: sidelocks/beard (head covered, kipa or hat) |
| Clothes | Buddhist robe | Buddhist robe | Long dress | Black suit / White shirt |
| Lifestyle | | | | |
| Marital status | Celibate | Celibate | Married | Married |
| Sex life | Renunciation | Renunciation | Destiny (procreation) | Mitzvah (duty) Marriage, procreation |
| Social life | Community: monastery | | Family: household, community | |
| Conclusion | Men and women alike: degenderisation | | Men and women as opposites; modesty: desexualization in the public sphere | |

Table 3. Men’s and women’s style and lifestyle in Buddhist and Jewish religious contexts.

stress on gender differentiation in Orthodox Judaism appears in the hairstyle, as well as the very marked clothing differences between men and women. On the other hand Buddhist monastics, who renounce their sexuality, wear the same robes and shaved heads, regardless of their sex. But where do these practices of shaving the heads of women come from?

From covering to shaving the hair of women in Judaism: men’s zealous application of modesty

From a functional point of view, aesthetics is a message: beauty being pleasant, it renders an object attractive; attraction is necessary for intercourse, which enables reproduction, which is vital for societies. Hence the dramatic social *function* of femininity, that has been evoked in the introduction. From this perspective, femininity is not a ‘neutral’ attribute. Because it attracts men, it is both necessary and therefore ‘dangerous’ if not controlled, as presented in the figure of Eve the temptress in the Bible. This is why men and religions have considered the hair of woman as a symbol of sexuality, as many authors have stressed: ‘The hair on a woman’s head is considered a symbol of sexuality, feminine sensuality and instinctual drive’ (Schwartz 1995, cited in Zalcborg 2007: 17). This consideration would come directly from the Talmud, according to which ‘a woman’s hair is a sexual incitement’ (Bab Talmud, Brachot 24 a.). This quote has become the foundation for men’s requirement for their

spouses to cover their hair (see Yafeh 2007: 530): hair was a site that had to be supervised and controlled. This has become common to the following Abrahamic religions: indeed, according to J. Duncan and M. Derrer (1973: 100), the real reason for the obligation for women in Christianity to cover or shave their heads when acting religiously⁹ 'is not submission to God. . . but for women, sexual attractiveness'. The Rabbi Aharon Roth from Satmar, Hungary (hence the name of the group), founder in the 1920s of an ultra-orthodox sect now mainly established in Jerusalem, has extended this rule to shaving in addition to covering. As states the Rule 3 of his regulation:

They must cut off all their hair completely. . . every woman must be extremely careful not to have any hair, God forbid, not even a single one. . . I therefore request that no woman make the slightest extenuation of this rule, or wear a wig or even a hairpiece. (Ratteh 1994, cited in Zalberg 2007: 16.)

This rule is an extended interpretation of the rabbinical prohibition for married women to show their hair to any other man than their husband. There are several ways of explaining this: a common interpretation is to say that even a knot in the hair can nullify the purity of the ritual immersion or *mikveh*¹⁰ that women undertake to purify their bodies before being proper for sexual intercourse with their husbands. Another interpretation, widespread in the Jewish community, says that the custom of shaving women's hair started to spare men from seeing their daughters taken to be raped during the pogroms. This founding narrative also seems to confirm the hypothesis that hair equals femininity, since total removal of hair was meant to annihilate feminine attractiveness.

In any case, this custom, which does not originate from Judaism's sacred texts, but seems to contradict the obligation of being attractive to one's husband, has become, for the women of this group themselves, one of the most central commandments they abide by.

The fact that these women are shaved, but still have a feminine function—or even that they are shaved *because of* this function (the shaving being the pre-marriage *rite de passage*) highlights the distinction between femininity and reproduction: one can consider that the femininity of Haredi married

9 'Women have to be veiled or shaved during prophecy or prayer' (1 Cor. 2:2–16).

10 A ritual bath where women immerse themselves especially after a period of *nida*-impurity (such as menstruation).

women has been cut away with the hair, to leave only, *in abstracto*, the function of the reproductive body, which is their main role.¹¹ The social function is bringing enough to render attractiveness, which acknowledges the laws of seduction market, superfluous. Like in other holistic societies where marriage is less a free choice of union motivated by love than a social institution often arranged by families, this institution replaces both the freedom and randomness of the seduction market. But how, in this context, compensating for the commonsense lack of attractiveness caused by the absence of hair? One explanation would be that for the Haredi founder, attractiveness is superfluous, since reproduction is a religious command. This is why his rule can be seen as an extensive interpretation of the Talmudic saying that ‘Grace is deceitful and beauty is vain’ (Prov. 31:30). Virtue here comes before aesthetics. But such zeal was also that of the whole rabbinical culture of the first centuries of this era, which was very ambivalent ‘considering sexuality and desire in general, . . . and foreign to the biblical sources’, when ruling for a ‘control of passions, even within a married couple’ (Biale 1997, in Nizard 2006: 281).

Shaved women in Buddhism: the choice of celibacy and gender neutrality

The tradition of shaving the head in Buddhism differs in four ways from the Haredi women’s situation: 1) it refers back to the origins of Buddhism: the Buddha was the first to cut his royal locks in a gesture of worldly renunciation; 2) it is mandatory for both men and women who take monastic vows; 3) Whether the nun’s condition is apparently more strict than the situation of married Haredi women, it is more flexible: vows can be momentary, and for a lay ordination do not require head shaving (and in addition to that, now in America a western nun may choose to cut her hair very short instead of shaving her head, if the shaved head is too difficult to be accepted in her family or for her job); and 4) it is, at least for Western nuns, a personal choice.

The first woman to have started the tradition was Maha Pajapati herself, the aunt of the Buddha, who wanted to be one of his disciples, or Bikkshus. He is said to have refused three times—for reasons that have never been explicated, until she shaved herself and the women of her entourage and came to join him.¹² 2500 years later, the choice is even more subjective for a Western woman who decides to enter the Dharma, or the path of liberation from suf-

11 ‘. . . the declared central role of the woman in Toldot Aharon is bearing and raising children’ (Zalcborg 2007: 15).

12 The Buddha had also previously hesitated to teach at all in the first place. This episode is an interesting and rare example of women’s empowerment in religious commitment.

fering offered by the Buddha. This choice involves a conscious and accepted renunciation of worldly desires¹³ and the traditional feminine destiny of marriage and procreation—at least during the time of the vow, if temporary, or until the woman disrobes, which is perfectly admissible. But in the meantime, the shaved head, for both men and women, symbolizes this renunciation, whose core is—bringing us back to Leach's typology (1958)—celibacy. This example shows the limited validity of Hallpike's thesis (1969) that the shaved head equals social control: if by doing so the nuns and monks do enter a world of discipline, they do so by exiting the wider world and rejecting its rules. Their obedience is dissidence towards secular society.

Table 4 illustrates in a comparative way the various sources of those two religious *rites d'initiation*, and *sine qua non* prescriptive body treatments for women to be part of each group. But how do women experience the head shaving? Moreover, these groups being integrated into broader societies which are oftentimes ignorant of their values, how do people around them experience those body techniques?

The nun, the wife and the victim: polysemy of a body sign in pluralistic societies and ways of overcoming misinterpretations and cognitive dissonance

The fact that the general perception of head-shaven women in all secular societies remains negative, shows how prejudicial to femininity the symbol is. For Synnott (1987: 403) baldness in general has a poor image in society, as it symbolizes either exclusion (punishment or illness) or self exclusion (rebellious or religious), and it's even worse for women, who 'do not voluntarily choose baldness'. However, this statement may be contested: regarding men, perceptions have changed and are not negative at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and regarding women, the very example of Buddhist nuns shows an example of chosen baldness. But it remains the case that this body treatment is counter-intuitive for a woman especially: a shaved head is considered to be contrary to femininity,¹⁴ and therefore is challenging women more than men. Indeed for this novice American Buddhist nun:

13 Except for the one of helping others in Mahayana altruism and the main school of Buddhism.

14 As illustrates the title of this book: *Fabrice Virgili, La France « virile ». Des femmes tondues à la Libération* (Paris: Payot, 2000).

| | Buddhist context | Jewish context |
|----------------------------------|--|---|
| Origin | | |
| Religious written source | <i>Vinaya</i> : Monastic rule written after the Buddha's death | Extensive interpretation of the Talmud (<i>Guemara</i>) |
| Traditional source | Buddha's example, Mahapajapati, disciples | Tradition in ancient Palestine/Hungary/Poland |
| Meaning | | |
| Intiatory rite de passage | From girl to nun | From girl to wife and mother |
| Formal commitment | Enter religious submission | Pursue religious submission |

Table 4. Origins of the practices of shaving the head in Buddhism and Judaism.

The shaven head of the Buddhist monastic, in this time and North American culture is much more normal for men and much more radical for women . . . It is a greater renunciation for women, as women often spend so much more time with enhancing their appearance.

This counter-intuitivity of a female shaved head is illustrated by the fact that a shaved head can become erotic, but only in a subversive way, as has been shown in the cinema by Demi Moore, and more recently Natalie Portman:¹⁵ the latter plays a Haredi bride suddenly taking off her wig and uncovering her bald head to an Indian diamond dealer she was doing business with, and whose wife had left to become a Hindu nun. This interesting parallel of opposite religious commitments incarnated in the same ritual and meeting each other by coincidence is further ironically illustrated through a recent scandal in the Jewish community: some wigs bought by orthodox women had been declared *unkosher* (not permitted) by the Rabbinat, because they were made from the hair of Hindu women who were shaved for religious ceremonies (Heilman 2004). The hair was regarded as having served idolatry, which is a central prohibition in Judaism, and made it unsuitable for those religious Jewish women.

15 Respectively in *GI Jane* (Ridley Scott, 1997) and in *New York, I Love You* (multiple directors, 2009).

The symbolic meaning of shaved hair:

the symbolic renunciation of femininity as a sign of religious commitment

Two women with their heads shaved: one is a celibate nun, the other a married woman. The researcher would be tempted to draw conclusions about the polysemy of the symbol of female head shaving, engaging with Victor Turner's 'multi-vocality' of symbols (1967) or Raymond Firth's 'umbrella of meanings' attached to a symbol (1973, both in Synnott 1987: 407). Indeed, this case confirms Synnott's argument that one style can refer to different values, and *vice versa*. Therefore, if we consider the central symbol of those shaved heads in relation to feminine sexuality, we could not but conclude with Synnott that there are only contextual and relative meanings of a body treatment, since in this case study one has, and the other does not have, an active sexuality. However, I contend that the central meaning of this body treatment is femininity, which is not a function, like sexuality, but a symbol.

It seems indeed important to distinguish between the feminine 'sex', which is being defined by her genitals, and the feminine 'gender', which is, as many sociologists stressed, socially constructed, following Simone de Beauvoir's statement that 'one is not born a woman, but becomes one' (1953: 2). And I contend that her gender is being constructed with and through the opposition with the male figure, and that a central criterion is archetypically long hair. Therefore I argue that the absence of hair affects femininity, be it to replace it by a sole reproductive function, as in the case of Haredi women, or by the Buddhist promise of peace of mind through worldly renunciations.

Here, the reduction to the reproductive function, or the suppression of this function, are in the end equivalent: what is being retrieved with the hair is the femininity of the woman as a public message. And because these rituals are chosen (for the nun) or accepted (for the Haredi woman), I prefer talking of renunciation—even at the personal psychological level, rather than of symbolic castration, as stated by Gananath Obeyesekere (1981: 34, 45). Yet this analysis in terms of castration is relevant in cases of self-symbolic rebellious mutilation by borderline women, as is illustrated in the sudden self shaving of her head by the American pop singer Britney Spears in 2007 (Marikar nd).

Buddhist nuns stand in direct contrast to these extreme cases and their personal perception of this body treatment are much more positive than the external perceptions, since their shaved heads are visible. The situation is different for Haredi women, most people not knowing, and in any case not seeing, that they are shaved, since their heads are also covered by a kerchief. But for them, the head shaving, even if accepted, is not a 'choice': they were born with this destiny, and know they incur social exclusion if they refuse to follow it.

Justifying shaving by sublimating the loss and overcoming cognitive dissonance

Table 5 summarizes comparatively the way the shaving rule is being perceived and personally justified by the women who undergo it, respectively in the Haredi and in the Buddhist traditions. Two conclusions are to be drawn from this table: 1) the private meanings—renunciation for the nun (which involves modesty) and the religious value of modesty for the wife (which involves renunciation to seduction)—match the institutional aim. 2) The shaving rite is promoted and valued by women, at least in public speech. Indeed, Buddhist and Haredi women, rather than offering solely an *a posteriori* justification of the principle of the shaving, promote its effect, and at two levels: commodity and beauty. Indeed, in addition to the practical advantage of ‘not having to take care’ of one’s hair anymore, which is being advertised as a new acquisition of freedom on both sides, they also seem to have created a new beauty criterion, which would be no more based on aesthetic attractiveness as is commonplace, but on purity.

For Haredi women in particular, modesty becomes the new criterion of femininity. But the extensive interpretation of dressing modestly is being redoubled by an extensive interpretation of modesty as included in the domain of sexuality: ‘the value of modesty, characterized by abstinence and restraint, becomes the cornerstone of Haredi femininity’ (Yafeh 2007: 530).

In this belief system, hair is considered to be a symbolic nakedness (nakedness being here equated to immodesty, which is to say sexual appeal). Hence the bald head is actually a symbolic veil over this symbolic nudity, in a complete reversion between the metaphor and the matter. And the symbolic covering is being redoubled by an actual head covering; the feminine is hence hidden under several layers of physical and behavioural, symbolic and material, modesty. The symbolic transfiguration of baldness becomes a

| Feelings involved and a posteriori justifications | | |
|---|--------------------|--|
| | Buddhist nuns | Haredi wives |
| Feelings involved when undergone | Freedom/liberation | Joy of ‘becoming a woman’ / Pain of losing hair? |
| Practical: convenient | Easier | Easier |
| Hygiene | Cleaner | Cleaner |
| Aesthetics | Purity | Purity |

Table 5. A posteriori justifications of the practices.

way of symbolically covering the head, and therefore equating head covering with saving the reputation of the woman. This was already seen in the early centuries of this era, where a shaved head would, as for the Buddhist nuns today, inspire respect: 'in a custom related by Josephus' (Bell. Jud. 313:14), for a woman who had shaved her head for religious reasons or for a vow, this 'disfigurement' gave her 'importance and prestige' (Duncan & Derret 1973: 101-2), and she, with 'her head shaven or shorn *could* appear with her head uncovered in public, and no doubt she often did so with pride'.

Thus a woman could publicly appear without a head covering: 1) if she was shaved; 2) if she had done it for religious reasons.

And not only was this counter-intuitive body technique reserved, when taking a positive meaning, for pious women, therefore and for those reasons not dishonouring her; she could take pride in it. This anecdote seems to be another proof that head shaving is publicly seen as 'disfigurement', which is to say an annihilation of the femininity, and for that very reason the woman did not need to hide anything anymore (her hair, symbolizing seduction) because she did not have anything to hide.

Hence, the context of shaving hair is essential: a shame when undergone in a war or disease context, the absence of hair becomes a point of pride when chosen for religious reasons. This is why in the Haredi world, norms regarding femininity are reversed: baldness becomes the moral symbolic substitute for physical femininity. This psychological transfer process seems indispensable for Haredi wives, in order to overcome the cognitive dissonance in which the Rule places them, demanding them both to renounce to femininity and to remain attractive to their husbands. Many authors reproved or stressed the difficulties for women in submitting (or allowing their daughters to be submitted) to this practice,¹⁶ in spite of the heavy conditioning undergone since childhood, and that the use of a whole legitimizing and valourising rhetoric is indispensable. But should one conclude from the similar insistence of Buddhist nuns on promoting the aesthetic and practical effects of the shorn head that there might be, in some cases or sometimes, some counter-intuitivity and maybe cognitive dissonance to overcome too? Many of them insist on the fact that their femininity is not being eroded, whereas this seems to be the purpose of the shaving ritual: to abolish gender differences in the

16 'Shaving a woman's head goes far beyond the issue of modesty; it is an instrument for completely silencing the woman's voice as a spiritual human power in the culture' (Hirschfeld 2000: 53). M. Shiloh showed that many girls threatened to leave the group, to escape this ritual (2001, cited in Zalberg 2007: 18).

Sangha (Buddhist community). Regarding her sexuality, this American former nun explains that it was actually enhanced by her condition: 'Celibacy itself I experienced surprisingly, as being a very sexual definition of my life, as if saying "no" constantly emphasized the point of sexuality inwardly to me.' Would this statement represent a strategy of resistance of one's sexuality against being denied? Or the natural sublimatory effect of spirituality, or the erotic effect of what is forbidden being therefore subversive (as in the example of some female movie characters)? This would belong to the domain of the psychoanalyst, as Leach would say, but one could imagine that it could be all those reasons together. Notwithstanding, internal cognitive dissonance seems to remain a strong challenge specific to Haredi women, because shaving is not an option for them and because of their spouse conditions opposite requirements. But unlike Buddhist nuns, they hardly have to face the misunderstanding of the outer society, firstly because they stay enclosed in their community, where their practice is the rule, but also because nobody sees their baldness, therefore nobody is 'confronted' by it.

Buddhist women: confronting the misinterpretations of society

For Buddhist nuns, the situation seems reversed: because they have deliberately taken the vows, knowing and wanting what they imply, the head shaving hardly provokes any cognitive dissonance, nor any double bind, because in their case the shorn head equals celibacy. But in the West, when they are not on retreat or in a monastery, they live in the larger secular society (also because many of them have jobs). And their shaved heads, especially when they are not wearing their Buddhist robes, can be misinterpreted and misperceived. Their very lives embody a genuine clash of cultures and meaning systems within a pluralistic society. To illustrate this situation, Table 6 compares the inner and outer perceptions of female shorn heads. The criterion for positive representations seem to be choice. But this choice needs to be explicated to the outer society, which, in a polysemic symbolic context, sometimes ignores, but sometimes also does not understand such self-renunciation. This former Buddhist nun expresses the shock she experienced when coming back from Asia to America, where, not to mention being shown respect as a nun as in the East, she was not even perceived as a religious person, but as a problematic individual:

wearing lay clothes but with hair still not grown out . . . I could see very clearly by people's facial reactions of fear and pity that what I was being 'seen as' were values and messages that I was not expressing at all:

a convict, a chemotherapy patient, a violent neo-Nazi, or militant lesbian, denying ‘the feminine’, or someone who had been abused in some way.

This testimony summarizes the range of negative representations provoked by the view of a woman with a shorn head. But for Jewish Western women who become Buddhist nuns, the problem gains two additional levels of difficulty: firstly they come from a religious culture that ignores monasticism and where the highest *mitzvah*, as stated previously, is to procreate. But most of all, the vision of a shorn head brings the family and community directly back to representations of the Shoah, especially when the previous generations are direct survivors: ‘a shaved head in my family was associated with the Holocaust’, says an American Zen nun. ‘So it was very difficult for my family to see me with a shaved head. As my mother becomes older, it has become so scary for her that I have grown my hair. With Alzheimer’s she often cannot distinguish between the present and past. So seeing my shaved head would give her flashbacks and nightmares.’

But these associations are also, paradoxically, sometimes applied to the treatment Judaism itself imposes on its women: even in the broader Jewish community, such as this female American Renewal Rabbi, highly disapprove of these practices as bound to be only traumatic:

| Opposite representations of a female shaved head | |
|--|--|
| Secular West | Religious (Jewish/Buddhist) |
| Social exclusion | Worldly renunciation / Refusal of secular society |
| Undergone | Chosen/Willing |
| Sanction/Oppression: prison, collabos, concentration camps | Dedication to the practice |
| Disease (cancer, aids) | Hygiene/Purity |
| Rebellion (skinheads, punks) | Submission to the religious rule |
| Conclusion | |
| ‘Negative’ self exclusion social self exclusion / Belonging to a group: mainly depreciated | ‘Positive’ self exclusion separation from the secular world / Belonging to the religious group: mainly prompted |
| Negative representation | Positive representation |

Table 6. Polysemy of shaved heads in secular and religious contexts in the West.

confound and compound that experience with head-shaving that Holocaust victims . . . suffered, and I can only imagine the hidden patterns of trauma that are perpetuated within the culture.

Conclusion

In this article I have proposed that hair is central to the definition of a woman, since its absence seems to challenge feminine identity, both in the eyes of the woman and in the eyes of others. This inductive conclusion has been illustrated through the comparative case study of Western Buddhist nuns and Haredi Jewish wives. An important point I have been trying to make is that the femininity that is lost here is not sexual, since Haredi women are meant to procreate, but symbolic: it is the gender identity which is being lost with the totality of hair on a woman's head. And this loss can mean a renunciation of gender identity through celibacy for Buddhist nuns, or the replacement of the definition of femininity, from beauty to spiritual merit, for the Haredi wives. I have also tried to show that this common criterion parallels the polysemic dimension of such a body technique: in this case study, the very fact that one shaven-headed woman is a nun, and the other a wife shows the polysemic dimension of a shorn head; this polysemy is being further extended in secular contexts, while taking pejorative meanings, such as rebellion, punishment or illness. This contrast between positive meanings in religious contexts, and negative ones in secular ones, highlights the fact that, to use Durkheim's founding distinction, the religious or sacred sphere is being built in opposition to the profane: the subversive use of head shaving is here to redouble the fact that religious logic does not follow secular values.

The criterion determining the positive or negative connotation of a female shaved head is not necessarily the religious context, but choice (even if it is 'choosing' a rule one has to abide by in any case). But behind this semantic relativity, I have tried to show that a stable symbol underlies female hair shaving, namely the severance of one's femininity. But this argument is not incompatible with the previous analysis of hair symbolism as presented in the introduction: in this case the symbolic function of hair treatment means at the same time restricted sexuality (Leach) *and* social control (Hallpike). The only particularity of the notion of social control here is that those 'docile bodies' (Foucault 1975: 137–143) incarnate at the same time a *de facto* dissidence against the broader secular society. Indeed, shaving hair to women contradicts the 'common sense' of what a woman is and has to be. But it seems

from the interviews that it is also counter-intuitive for those concerned themselves—which has the positive effect of enhancing the dimension of will and of religious commitment, and reinforces cohesion with the group. In both cases, renunciation of hair/femininity, which is the initiatory rite symbolizing their entry into the community, is seen as a process of purification—but with a different end:

For Buddhist nuns:

Renunciation of sexuality: choice → purification-liberation

For Haredi wives:

Renunciation of seduction: submission → purification-conformity

But again, even if the nun's commitment seems to be more of an impoverishment, since they renounce sexuality, it is actually more flexible: the vows can be temporary, lay, or removed. Western Buddhist nuns and Haredi wives indeed embody two distinct paradigms of religious commitment: conversion for the first and religious heritage for the latter, for which the dimension of freedom in the obedience to the rule is nearly non-existent. However, one should not conclude that as opposed to the Jewish women's situation, the aesthetic choices of a secular women are totally 'free': even if in contemporary Western societies the body can be seen as an affirmation of the independence of the self against social pressure (see Turner 1984), even if the scope for expressing one's femininity and masculinity has extended, and that one has access to a broader set of aesthetic references, it is also a fact that simultaneously, one has never been so much alienated as by the fashion non-coercive *diktats*.

The main argument I have been trying to express is that in a pluralistic society, where different meaning-systems can be embodied through similar body treatments, the body symbol in itself is no more useful to carry its message: where body signs were meant to avoid using language, misinterpretations become common. For instance, a hat or a kerchief on a Jewish woman says she is married, but an outsider could think she just 'felt' like wearing this hat or kerchief today. As in their eyes the items would have no meaning, this would not be a symbol for a particular status, especially if they ignore the existence of such a symbol. Then it becomes *necessary* to verbally *explain* the body symbol, which previously stood for language, as if we were in a new Babel, where language stands as translation for those symbols which were meant to replace it 'universally'.

References

Interviews

E-mail exchanges between May 3 and June 9, 2010, with informants from the author's current PhD research: Buddhist nuns in France and the US (California), and a Californian female Rabbi from the Jewish Renewal movement. Anonymous interviews, private archives.

Literature

Beauvoir, Simone de

1953 *The Second Sex*. New York: Knopf.

Berg, Charles

1951 *The Unconscious Significance of Hair*. London: Allen & Unwin.

Biale, David

1997 *Eros juif*. Paris: Actes Sud (Coll. Hébraïca). (First published in 1992.)

Bilu, Yoram

2003 From *Milah* (Circumcision) to *Milah* (Word): Male Identity and Rituals of Childhood in the Jewish Ultraorthodox Community. *Ethos* 31 (2): 172–203.

Bourdieu, Pierre

1980 *Le sens pratique*. Paris: Seuil.

Clayson, Dennis E. & Micol R. C. Maughan

1986 Redheads and Blondes: Stereotypic Images. *Psychological Reports* 59: 811–16.

Duncan, J. & M. Derrerr

1973 Religious hair. *Man, New Series* 8 (1): 100–3.

Firth, Raymond

1973 *Symbols: Public and Private*. London: Allen & Unwin.

Foucault, Michel

1975 *Surveiller et punir, naissance de la prison*. Paris: Gallimard.

Hallpike, Richard

1969 Social Hair. *Man, New Series* 4 (2): 256–64. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2799572> (accessed on 1 June 2010).

Heilman, Uriel

2004 Israeli news service, JTA May 18. <http://www.yeshuaeklesia.com/shaven.html> (accessed on 20 September 2010).

Hirschfeld, A.

2000 *Reshimot al Makom*. Tel-Aviv: Alma and Am Oved Publishers.

Leach, E. R.

1958 Magical Hair. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 88 (2): 147–64. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2844249> (accessed 1 June 2010).

Marikar, Sheila

nd Bald and Broken: Inside Britney's Shaved Head. <http://abcnews.go.com/>

Entertainment/Health/story?id=2885048&page=1 (accessed on 30 November 2010).

Nizard, Sophie

2006 Judaïsme. In: Bernard Andrieu (ed.), *Le dictionnaire du corps en sciences humaines et sociales*; p. 280. Paris: CNRS Editions.

Obeyesekere, Gananath

1981 *Medusa's Hair: An essay on personal symbols and religious experience*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Ratteh, A.

1994 *The Book of Regulations and Guidance of the Shomray Emunim Society*. Jerusalem: Pe-ilay Ir HaKodesh Jerusalem.

Rich, Melissa K. & Thomas F. Cash

1993 The American Image of Beauty: Media Representations of Hair Color for Four Decades. *Sex Roles* 29: 113–24.

Schwartz, H. Eilberg

1995 Introduction: The spectacle of the female head. In: H. Eilberg Schwartz & W. Doniger (eds), *Off with Her Head! The Denial of Women's Identity in Myth, Religion, and Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Shiloh, M.

2001 *Princess or Prisoner? Women's Lives in Pre-state Jerusalem, 1840–1914*. Haifa: University of Haifa Press, Zmora-Bitan.

Synnott, Anthony

1987 Shame and Glory: A Sociology of Hair. *The British Journal of Sociology* 38 (3): 381–413. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/590695> (accessed on 31 May 2010).

Turner, Bryan

1984 *The Body and Society*. New York: Basil Blackwell.

Turner, Victor

1967 *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Weitz, Rose

2001 Women and Their Hair: Seeking Power through Resistance and Accommodation. *Gender and Society* 15 (5): 667–86. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3081969> (accessed on 1 June 2010).

Yafeh, Orit

2007 The Time in the Body: Cultural Construction of Femininity in Ultraorthodox Kindergartens for Girls. *Ethos* 35 (4): 516–53 <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.11525/eth.2007.35.4.516/pdf> (accessed on 4 December 2010).

Zalberg, Sima

2007 “Grace Is Deceitful and Beauty Is Vain”: How Hassidic Women Cope with the Requirement of Shaving One’s Head and Wearing a Black Kerchief. *Gend. Issues* (24): 13–34.

PETER NYNÄS

Multiple bodies in the spirituality of the gay porn star McCree

Reflections on corporeality and subjectivity

Introduction

Body modification practices have lately gained growing visibility in contemporary Western cultures. It is more like a trend or fashion ranging from, on the one hand, decorative tattoos and piercing, to branding, implants and surgery on the other. In most forms body modification occurs without any obvious religious, spiritual or ideological marks attached, but some forms involve discourses that explicitly address such aspirations. However, despite the fluidity and diversity of practices, it can be claimed that body modification represents specific or distinct ways of working with the body that differ from other forms of contemporary Western body cultures. Further, it needs to be considered as part of the broader body culture. Hence it draws our attention to the role of corporeality in contemporary Western culture.

Anthony Giddens (1991) wrote about the body-project and suggested that the ontological insecurity of late modernity fosters a growing concern with identity and body. David Lyon (2006) argues in a slightly similar way that there is mutual interdependence between the growing role of new media and contemporary body culture. The 'excarinate' nature of communication through new media, that is, its lack of corporeality has, according to Lyon, resulted in its opposite, 'hypercarinate' cultural expressions. From this perspective body modification could be regarded as a reaction to the nature of contemporary society, a way of compensating the lack of corporeal engagement in the world. Its former association with different subcultures might underpin this oppositional position. On the other hand, some scholars regard body-modification as nothing but part of the contemporary free floating carnival of signs, as mere mainstream supermarket signifiers, emptied of meaning and deprived of any external references (see Sweetman 1999).

In this article I will put emphasis on forms of body modification that more explicitly connote religion. From an empirical perspective I will explore one

example of body modification, the story about the spirituality of the gay porn star Logan McCree. This is a personal narrative about spirituality in which tattooing plays a central role. Still, despite being personal it is also part of McCree's public image. Further, it clearly highlights the extreme and contrasting possibilities for self-expression that contemporary Western society provides individuals with.

The focus in this article is not put on body modification and its spiritual form. With the help of both literature and the examples on body modification I refer to, I will explore the place of corporeality in the story of McCree. My aim is to shed some light on corporeality and in particular in relation to subjectivity.

The article develops in the following way. After some general and preliminary notes on contemporary body modification, I will outline more theoretical points of relevance for my discussion. Robert C. Fuller (2008) presents an interesting account of the relevance of the body for the study of religion. He draws partly on neurophysiological and evolutionary perspectives, but still without claiming a reduction of religiosity. In addition, critical theory and in particular feminism have lately challenged our understanding of corporeality from the perspectives of both psychoanalytical thinking and philosophy. In particular the writing of Elizabeth Grosz (1994) has been of value in contributing a clear overview of Western thinking on the body. Fuller and Grosz share a critique of the dualistic way of assuming a split between mind and body. From this perspective I will hopefully be able to discuss in more depth the story of Logan McCree and sum up the article with some general remarks and questions.

Body modification

The history of body-modifications seems to be as long as human civilization, and it will not be discussed here. Still, it might be relevant to acknowledge that these practices have fulfilled very different functions. They have indicated group affiliations such as belonging to a certain clan or tribe, or been used as signs of age or status within such groups. In a similar way they have also been used to mark out groups of individuals such as criminals and slaves. Further, body-modifications have been associated with attaining magical powers, or included as part of ritual events. Finally, they have also been used to alter self–other relations by making the visual appearance more attractive or frightening. (Camphausen 1997.) It is quite natural to assume that the

contemporary renaissance of body-modifications draws on these historical practices and there is no need to dismiss any of the many functions or roles of body-modification. However, the great variety in functions also indicates that body-modification needs to be interpreted with regard to its place and time, and not on a general level.

The contemporary world or culture of body modification is just as diverse as its history. It includes many different forms and practices. It might involve activities such as wearing specific clothing and cosmetics; tattooing and branding, piercing; ritualized body extension; surgical and technological alterations of the body, and body implants. Mike Featherstone (1999) also includes in the term body modification dieting, weight training, and cyborg imagery. The practice of tattooing and piercing has accelerated since the mid 1980s, becoming part of a mainstream consumer culture and an exotic fashion trend and has resulted in creating concepts such as modern primitives and neo-tribalism (Sweetman 1999).

As mentioned in the introduction, the question of how to understand this growing trend divides scholars, in particular on the issue of meaning. Paul Sweetman (1999) argues that body-modification in contrast to the ever-changing character of fashion accessories in general is associated with permanency. The association with permanency, he concludes, makes body modifications different from fashion and gives them a connotation of anti-fashion. From this perspective he emphasizes a connection to time and memory and stresses body-modifications as means of identity construction. He writes that contemporary body modifications 'can indeed be interpreted in these terms as attempts to anchor or stabilize one's sense of self-identity, in part through the establishment of a coherent personal narrative' (Sweetman 1999: 53).

In contrast to this, the idea of permanency as a central aspect of body-modification is questioned and nuanced by Stephanie Springgay (2003). She refers to Renata Salecl (2001) and states that we encounter a paradox between body modification as a process of individualization and its way of being a permanent alteration of the body as protests against the ideology that everything is changeable (Salecl 2001). Springgay writes:

Tattoos may be permanent (or not, given the possibility for laser removal these days) but many involved in extensive tattooing see it as an art form that is constantly under revision, extended, and modified. Designs merge into others, colours change, and symbols are introduced into the picture plane. It is the fantasy of potential transformations, the process of creation, that renders tattooing as incomplete and uncertain, and incises the fundamental impossibility of arrival. (Springgay 2003.)

Instead of underlining permanency, Springgay highlights the continuing transformative dimension of body-modifications.

A multifaceted corporeality

One theme seems to occur as a background to both the brief notes above on contemporary body-modification and my scholarly interest in body modification. This is the very problematic and challenging question of how to understand the role or place of human corporeality. As Springgay (2003) writes, body modifications are usually understood as practices for controlling and regulating the body, and for the expression of particular identities or interior true selves. Further, in most cases the explanations are embedded in a 'binary of oppression-resistance in which bodies are controlled, directed, and transcribed by the mind' (Springgay 2003). I will elaborate on this theme a bit further. It is a challenging quest. As Ann Oakley (2007: 33) states it is not until the intimate interconnectedness between mind and body is disrupted that we become aware of the problems with a dualistic epistemology.

Contesting a dualistic epistemology involves by necessity an investigation of the relationship between corporeality and subjectivity. Subjectivity has, however, occurred to me as a very common but also a very vague concept. It is seldom defined, and sometimes it seems to equate identity and function as a reminder that people are also reflexive subjects, with feelings and thoughts of their own that matter (cf. Smith 2010). However, I would argue that a more elaborated way of understanding subjectivity could primarily refer to the construction of the individual subject within culture, history and discourse and within particular relations of power. Secondly, implied in this is the need to stress that this construction is a diverse, fluid, incomplete and continuing process, characterized by a complex mix of both resonances and dissonances. Finally, this continuing process of construction brings into view and position specific sorts of subjects with particular capacities to act. Hence, subjectivity can be thought of as a shift in the understanding of subjects accounting for the making of an architecture within which particular identities and subjects are possible and rise—and others not. Body and corporeality form a central aspect of subjectivity (cf. Biel, Good & Kleinman 2007).

In his book *Spirituality in the Flesh* Robert C. Fuller (2008) provides insights into how a stronger focus on the role of the body in religion can provide new and critical categories for studying and understanding religion. He puts particular emphasis on the biological foundations of religious thought and

experience and how these biological foundations shape religious representations. As he puts it: 'Our bodies, then, provide metaphorical patterns for understanding ourselves and the world we live in' (Fuller 2008: 156). Hence, Fuller gives the body a privileged role for the subjective experiences of ourselves and of the world around us. Fuller inhabits a functional position in his way of comprehending the representational and imaginative functions embedded in the body. Religious thought, as Fuller declares, serves bodily activities (Fuller 2008: 157). According to him '[t]o note that religion arises as an embodied experience, then, is to realize that it serves the biological purpose of constructing models of the world conducive to our bodily needs and aspirations' (Fuller 2008: 157). The body provides a corporeality of innate and internalized techniques through which the body also can negotiate and adapt to its surroundings in novel ways. In his examination of pain in religious traditions Ariel Glucklich (2001) draws on a neuropsychological understanding of the self which proposes a similar perspective as Fuller. Glucklich argues that 'modulated pain . . . facilitates the emergence of a new identity' (2001: 207).

Even though Fuller's perspective is in part based on contemporary neurophysiological perspectives, he argues against the mainstream position of the cognitive study of religion. According to Fuller, the cognitive study of religion in general provides a wholly negative assessment of religion (Fuller 2008: 158). In contrast to this negative evaluation of religion, Fuller himself argues that the human body, in particular in its encounter with limit-experiences, where the sensory and rational approach to life does not provide vehicles enough for human adaptation, enters a quest for fulfillment and wholeness. From Fuller's perspective, the role of religion is to provide mental constructs that can work as hypotheses and provide an embodied hope and he proposes that working with and on the body is a way also to work on thought, emotion and perception.

With this analysis of the body as a biological site for religion, Fuller presents an effort to bridge the gap or split between the mind and the body that has been very common to Western thinking and that also has a trajectory in the Western dichotomy between materiality and meaning. Still, I would argue that he merely relocates the border which delineates a split with body and mind on the one side, and culture and society on the other. Fuller's perspective is very biological in the way it accounts for how we need to avail ourselves of 'what is known about our bodies, the neural structures of our brains, and the genetic basis of our perceptual and cognitive interactions with the world' (Fuller 2008: 163). Even though he acknowledges the role of culture in human experience, he leaves the quest to understand the intertwining of body and

culture open. This is where the work of Elizabeth Grosz (1994) contributes in a relevant way.

Grosz's (1994) aim is similar to Fuller's, in other words, to address the relevance of corporeality and the body in contrast to the dominant focus on mind and interiority and the mind-body dualism. Still, Grosz embarks on this quest from another perspective, with an emphasis on subjectivity.

Grosz's (1994) aim is to shed light on the body with regard to the complexity of subjectivity and from the background of feminist perspectives. In the introduction she outlines three categories of feminism (Grosz 1994: 15–19). The first group takes the position that biology must be changed, while the other puts emphasis on the necessity to change beliefs, attitudes and values. In contrast to these views that both maintain a strong mind-body dualism, Grosz's own position seems to come closest to the final group that she describes. This group is concerned with the lived body as a cultural, social and political subject/object *par excellence*: 'Far from being an inert, passive, non-cultural and ahistorical term, the body may be seen as the crucial term, the site of contestation, in a series of economic, political, sexual and intellectual struggles' (Grosz 1994: 19). One can read this as a statement about human corporeality as the main site of subjectivity. This is, however, not an easy position to elaborate in a definite way.

In her effort to challenge dualistic understandings, Grosz (1994) draws our attention to two separate streams in western thinking. She addresses two movements: the inside out movement and the outside in movement. In her discussion of the former she relies on psychoanalysis and phenomenology and, for instance, Freud, Lacan and Merleau-Ponty. For a discussion of the outside in movement she draws on Nietzsche, Foucault and Deleuze. It should be noted that both movements try to oppose or dissolve a dualism of mind-body, but in different ways.

The inside out movement is concerned with the psychological coding of bodies, that is, 'the ways in which the inside constitutes and accepts itself as an outside, how experience itself structures and gives meaning to the ways in which the body is occupied and lived' (Grosz 1994: 115). This is a process through which the body is experienced and rendered meaningful in various ways and constituted as marking the boundaries of subjectivity, its limits or edge. The psychological interiority makes the body its exteriority, but it is very crucial to acknowledge that this exteriority does not follow the physical limits of the body. At this point we encounter a view that is different from how Fuller comprehends the body.

Based on a psychoanalytical and phenomenological perspective, Grosz draws our attention to the concepts *body image* and *imaginary anatomy*. In making the body its exteriority the inside also stretches the body outside itself, or expels parts of the physical body. In this view we encounter a transformed, or modified corporeality. Body image (or imaginary anatomy) is a concept that describes this inside out movement, how subjectivity shapes a particular corporeality. Body image is a 'site of the intermingling of mind and culture' (Grosz 1994: 116) that provides 'a sense of its place in the world and in connection with others' (Grosz 1994: xii). Grosz cites Merleau-Ponty (1963: 5) who writes that, 'Our body is not in space like things; it inhabits or haunts space' (Grosz 1994: 90) and hence our corporeality is the condition and context through which we are able to have a relation to objects (Grosz 1994: 86). Consequently, body image as the 'real' corporeality sets the limits and possibilities for human agencies.

From the other perspective that Grosz presents, that is, the outside in movement, the reflection develops in a different way. In contrast to body image this movement can be conceptualized in terms of body writing. In this case the body becomes more or less a *tabula rasa*, a blank page, a surface onto which social, political and cultural inscriptions can take place. As Grosz writes '[t]he messages or texts produced by this body writing constructs bodies as networks of meaning and social significance, producing them as functional "subjects" within social ensembles' (Grosz 1994: 117). Pedagogical, juridical, medical, and economic texts, laws and practices are instruments for a body writing that carves out subjects which on the one hand are intelligible, rational and understandable in particular contexts and, on the other hand, eligible for particular identities, capabilities and agencies. Bodies are fictionalized by various discourses that provide them with a social seal.

The very radical edge in this thinking is clearly exemplified in the case of sexuality. Sexuality is traditionally referred to as a very spontaneous and natural force in its own right. With reference to Foucault, Grosz concludes that 'sexuality is deployed by power to enable it to gain a grip on life itself' (Grosz 1994: 152). Inner depth or a natural drive, such as a felt attraction or arousal, is nothing more than the corporeality invaded by discourses in society and culture. Judith Butler writes with reference to Foucault: 'There are no desires that are muted by repressive rules, but, rather, only an operation by which the self constitutes itself in discourse with the assistance of another's presence and speech' (Butler 2004: 163).

Here we can see how the central idea grounding the concept of a body image is contested in the outside in perspective. The body is considered to

be only a series of surfaces, linkages, energies and forces. A hidden depth, a desire for communication, expression or interpretation, or a desire to be revealed and socialized does not constitute this perspective. Hence, comprehending the place of the body in terms of an outside in movement puts more emphasis on the role of punishment (in various forms). Grosz refers to Nietzsche (1969) and concludes '[c]ivilization instills its basic requirements only by branding the law on bodies through a mnemonics of pain, a memory fashioned out of the suffering and pain of the body' (Grosz 1994: 131). This implies, however, that bodies are also sites of resistance against dominant or hegemonic discourses, and therefore also a site of emancipation. Still, we do not necessarily need to locate this resistance in a body as viewed by Fuller, or as viewed as an inside out movement.

In order to conclude these theoretical reflections in brief, I would like to underline some relevant points. First, we encounter in general an ambition to repudiate the mind–body dualism and to acknowledge the body as a central source or place of various subjectivities. Second, this involves a view of the body as a centre of meanings and agencies. But, before I leave these theoretical considerations, it needs to be underlined that they deploy very different views on subjectivity as part of corporeality. Fuller gives priority to the body as a distinct neurophysiological entity that continually strives to frame subjectivities as particular experiences, emotions and thoughts in order to achieve more adapted subjects. To some extent the concept body image, or imagined anatomy, that Grosz draws our attention to comes close to Fuller's view, but allows for a more fluid model. From this perspective it is not a distinct physical body that situates us in the world, but the imagined corporeality into which societal and cultural elements are internalized. The body is not a box, but a continuous making of an outside/inside boundary. Finally, in contrast to these perspectives, we can argue that there is no such thing as a subjective body in the sense assumed in the two previous models. On the contrary, our corporeality is a silent surface, or an empty space, invaded by networks of social and cultural scripts and discourses, striving, competing and fighting over a wasteland of subjectivities. From this perspective Oakley's (2007: 66) reflection makes sense: 'Bodies are forms and products of capitalist industry, shaped by a process that's alienating at its very core.'

A body chained to Jesus

The following example is from an article in the weekly gay magazine *Boyz* (2010) and from a similar article on the website for 'coming out spiritually', *MyOutSpirit.com* (2010), where Logan McCree provides a personal story about his passion for tattoos and the spiritual dimension the tattoos carry for him. In the introduction to the short article in *Boyz* (2010) we can read that McCree is 'one of the hottest porn stars on the planet' and that his spirituality is 'the most important thing in his life.' There is also a photo of McCree showing how his upper body is covered with tattoos. A slightly provocative, aggressive and eroticized masculinity characterizes the picture overall, making him look like an ancient warrior. A similar image of McCree is found also on the website *MyOutSpirit.com* (2010). Here he also uses the word warrior to describe himself and McCree is described as a spiritual man 'working to free himself and others from social and ego bondage'. In other words he is presented as a warrior of emancipation.

In several ways McCree is presented as a 'self-made man' when it comes to spirituality. Overall his spirituality and associated themes are articulated along lines of individualism, in accordance with what is often described as a turn to the self and the subjectivization of religion (e.g. Heelas *et al.* 2004). It is said that he does not come from a very religious upbringing. Spirituality or religion was not part of his family life. On the contrary, Logan tells the story of a boy being individually devoted to a spiritual realm from young age and how Jesus played a central role in the life of this boy and still does. This theme is reinforced even further on *MyOutSpirit.com* (2010) where the relevance of angels is central. Logan says, 'Since I was a little boy I felt that I am not 100 % human and I felt very connected to angels. I still believe that I am part angel and as a symbol for my deep connection with the heavenly warriors I got my own armature as a tattoo.' In this story, big wings are added to the photo of Logan.

A small difference in nuances can be observed between the article in *Boyz* (2010) and the article on the website. Whereas the connection to angels was on the surface on *MyOutSpirit.com* (2010), Christianity is more relevant to the fabric of the story in *Boyz* (2010). 'Jesus is the biggest inspiration to me', McCree states and he is described as a very devoted Christian who strongly feels that God leads him. He recollects: 'I gave up making plans when I figured out that God pushes me into different directions and I just have to follow.' He experiences his belief very strongly and he can therefore see no place for an intimate relationship or a partner in his life.

In addition to the very Jesus-centred story and the somewhat familiar discourses about devotion and giving one's life to the hand of God's master plan, McCree also describes his spirituality in very contemporary terms. Again we read a story that reinforces the theme of being a 'self-made man'. No church nor other religious organization or group is mentioned as central to his spiritual development. It is an individual spiritual quest McCree has entered, a place of his own. This position is based on the recognition of some sort of inarticulate pluralism or universalism, mastered by McCree himself. He states that 'my spiritual path isn't just a Christian one; I stand between or above all religions'. The eclectic approach involved in this is a central theme in the article. In *Boyz* (2010), for instance, Logan stresses that he is a Capricorn, that a wolf is his spiritual guiding animal, and that the archangel Michael is important, alongside the prince, as a mythological figure.

As I indicated, the conflicting relation between religion and (in particular queer) sexuality (cf. Munt 2010) is addressed already at the beginning of the stories in the form of the juxtaposition of being a porn star for which spirituality is the most important thing. 'Porn stars tend to get objectified both ways—usually neither the people enjoying the product nor those judging it see them as spiritual, conscious or complex human beings', McCree says (MyOutSpirit.com 2010). This is another part of the self-made spirituality that runs through the story. McCree declares that he is well aware that other Christians would probably not call him a Christian because of his profession and the form of belief he reinforces. However, in correspondence with juxtaposing these contrasting elements also the relevance of morality is underlined. It doesn't matter if Jesus is the Son of God or not, for McCree Jesus, described as a rebel with high moral integrity, is an important ideal for his own ambition to 'do the right thing', 'connect to the world', 'helping people', and to care for people and 'saying "no" if I see something wrong going on', as McCree puts it in *Boyz* (2010).

The relevance of Logan's moral position is not in conflict with being part of the sex industry. On the contrary, it is described as being an integral part of his profession. He reflects on his profession as a porn star in terms of one step along in his calling to become a public person and being able to reach out to other people. He explains on (MyOutSpirit.com 2010): 'That way I can "touch" as many as possible with the energy God gave me. Unfortunately it is not easy to keep this energy high all the time, especially when you are surrounded by people with negative energies. But that's why I am a warrior. . . because it is a fight after all.' Having high morals puts demands also on his daily work: he prefers to shoot films with people he can have a high opin-

ion of, a position he claims that the production company has accepted and respects. In this sense he is also described as a person that inhabits a unique position in the porn industry, in having a personal integrity. McCree can be said to establish distance from the stereotypical view of gay-life as sexualized, while still maintaining a positive identification.

The reason I address this case is, of course, that the contrasting and conflicting aspects are presented as a form of corporeality in McCree's life. The bodily aspect provides a basis for his subjectivity and it is through the body that meaningful connections are established. This is made explicit. In *Boyz* (2010) McCree states: 'My belief is the most important thing in my life and my tattoo chains me to that. So if I should ever lose my way, they'll be a reminder of what's really important to me.' His spiritual identity is imprinted in the form of tattoos all over his upper body. His body is covered with a harmonious pattern that unites and combines the various elements into one unique inscription. However, it is worthwhile noting that the body enters the story also in other ways. It is strongly present and sexualized through his work as a porn star, but is similarly a vehicle in addressing the theme of ascetic ideals. McCree does not allow himself to have intimate relationships and conducts a heavy daily workout programme, finally claiming to be willing to die for friends.

Finally, and before discussing this case a bit further, I would like to conclude by underlining that it might be problematic to look for one single corporeal subjectivity in the story about McCree. On the contrary, it is full of dissonances, an aspect that makes the story iconic and meaningful to a larger audience. The relevance, and strong presence, of such dissonances might also allow us to reflect on the story in terms of a fragmented body, or a story of the struggle in negotiating several bodies. Narratives and scripts, as Sara Ahmed (2004: 145), explains, 'shape bodies and lives including those that follow and depart from such narratives in the ways in which they love and live'.

Overlapping discourses

The iconic image of McCree in the magazine *Boyz* (2010) and on MyOutSpirit.com (2010) presents a self-made man in several ways. The choice of being religious is his. Further, he masters the content and the borders of this spirituality. He denies parts of himself and his body and trains it for other purposes—like an ascetic. Finally, he devotes himself to his spirituality and chooses to make it his destiny, being willing to die for others like a warrior. All this is scripted onto his body and into his self in several ways.

As indicated above, this story makes use of a very contemporary position. It mixes expressive and contrasting elements in an eclectic fashion and reinforces the self as a centre. The kind of spirituality given voice through McCree is not foreign in any way to Western culture today (cf. Frisk 2009). However, in the articles it is both directly and indirectly claimed that the context within which subjectivity and spirituality is connected makes it unique in the way it becomes an expression for emancipation. It is shown how the subjectivized religious space can be used to transgress discursive conflicts and hegemonic scripts. It is shown how this space allows for claiming a similar voice as the 'certain class of people. . . who care for and minister the souls of others and whose task is to cultivate them ethically and to know and direct the conscience of others', as Butler (2004: 161) puts it. McCree explicitly identifies himself as a (future) minister of souls.

It is obvious that this story has to be read as a counter narrative of the marginalized gay culture. The self-narrative and biographical form of the story is intrinsic to late modernity, but has also been particularly prevalent in gay subcultures (cf. Munt 2010: 3). Personal stories that intersect with contemporary cultural forms have further become even more common and public through the growing relevance of different media (cf. Lundby 2010: 58–62). The articles gain their meaning from bringing to the surface the conflicting discourses between sexuality and religion that has often troubled both the queer community and public voices claiming religious authority. McCree is the gay porn-star who does not even try to adjust to prevailing norms by making himself invisible. Instead, he contests and exhibits an inverted model, simultaneously claiming moral dignity and identifying with the stereotype about the over-sexualized character of LGBT-lives. As an icon he embodies a resistance against the hegemony exercised by the alliance between the heteronormative society and religious authorities over the body. The masculine ascetic warrior fits well into the image of this holy war to conquer new land and space that is connoted in the story. The play of stereotypes and public images provides elements that make the story meaningful, and connote emancipation and hence also transformation.

However, the personal form of this narrative also reinforces the relevance of McCree as a real, coherent person, despite the fact that this involves the externalization of a fragmented and conflicting corporeality, of the necessity to bring forth a subjectivity constituted by different bodies. From this perspective, the narrative is also about the vulnerability involved in marginalized subjectivities. It is a story about the personal sacrifice involved in collective transformation and it represents what could be called a politics of becoming,

that is, the 'paradoxical politics by which new cultural identities are formed out of old energies, injuries, and differences' (Connolly 1996: 261). In contrast to—or in cooperation with—the element of transformation and emancipation, McCree's story expresses simultaneously a fantasy of a new form of identity characterized by stability and permanency. Sacrifice and vulnerability is the language of this fantasy.

The aim of this article was to explore an example of how bodies and corporealities entering a particular story pose a greater challenge. From some brief notes on body culture in general and body modification in particular, I pointed out some examples of how to interpret these trends in general. I referred to ontological insecurity, compensating hypercarnate cultures and quests for identities in combination with the problem of permanency vs. transformation. Further, from a discussion about how to understand corporeality and to repudiate the mind–body dualism, the body was depicted as place of various subjectivities with different emphases. I pointed to the body as a vehicle of adaptation in terms of adjusting experiences, emotions and thoughts, in addition to framing corporeality in terms of body image internalizing social and cultural elements or scripted bodies, a silent surface invaded by hegemonic scripts.

Do any of these interpretations fit the example? Even though they, to some extent, represent conflicting understandings of human subjectivity, I would like to argue that they still provide material for interpretation and that the story of or about McCree has elements that correspond with them. The story is obviously a contemporary story about the search for and construction of a secure identity. It speaks the language of a new form of spirituality that further, in its particular contexts, entails a promise of empowerment.

On several levels, almost like a main theme, the body is given the role of a main agent or site in this search for a space that is simultaneously about transformation and permanency, not either or. The idea of change is connected to bodywork and, for instance, chaining oneself in several ways. Further, it is also a story about the necessity of controlling and working with the body as a means of adjusting the emotions, thoughts and experiences embedded in marginalized subjectivities and achieving a sense of dignity and pride. Finally, it is a story about how the body is articulated by and for hegemonic others and how new forms of agencies are made possible within the imagination of alternative bodies. Still, I would also like to point out that the distinction between the excarnate and the hypercarnate dimension of our culture can be questioned. The corporeality of a new iconic identity is mediated through a magazine and the internet, that is, the hypercarnate culture and the relevance

of corporeality is expressed within the excarnate sphere. On more general level, this can also help us to see that we are not dealing with bodies here, but with visual and discursive representations of bodies. We are dealing with body-talk, a body-talk directing our attention at forms of subjectivities, suppressed, lived and imagined.

The brief reflections above are not necessarily a feature of this story only. I will briefly point to another example. A somewhat similar pattern can be recognized if we turn to the website of the Church of Body Modification. It presents itself in the following way:

The Church of Body Modification represents a collection of members practising ancient and modern body modification rites. We believe these rites are essential to our spirituality. Practising body modification and engaging in body manipulation rituals strengthens the bond between mind, body, and soul. By doing so, we ensure that we live as spiritually complete and healthy individuals. (Church of Body Modification 2010.)

Similar themes (spirituality, health and being a complete whole of mind, body, and soul) are strongly underlined in both the mission statement of the church and its statement of faith, in combination with an emphasis on personal growth and development and the marginalization of the idea of a transcendental world. Further, the Church of Body Modification gives a very inclusive and eclectic impression and allows and fosters a mix of spiritual practices. Some of the ministers call themselves shamans or urban shamans. Some have a background in Wicca and others as seekers. Still—the biographical stories about the ministers more or less depict body modification as the ultimate goal, the end of a road of seeking. There is a strong statement of the right to alter the body, in combination with a stress on respect for the body.

In this case a new corporeal subjectivity is mediated through the internet. The Church of Body Modification seems to operate mainly through the internet. You become a member by applying online; you buy your ritual box on the same site; you apply to become a minister by a similar application in combination with an online interview. You gain the information and support you need in the internet community for members only—or by e-mail contact to some of the ministers. Finally, the self-identity of the Church of Body Modification also involves a sense of marginalization and empowerment similar to that of the LGBT-discourse. For instance, the internet community for members only has a class for discussing ‘discrimination in the workplace, in schools, and in the family setting’ that provides assistance and help from

church ministers. The deviant way of using the body calls for emancipating strategies.

Concluding remarks

Where does this take us? First and foremost my reflections above indicate that the academic discourses and the discourses in the story about McCree and on the website of the Church of Body Modification are overlapping. Hence, both parts can be understood as trajectories of a more general interest in the body that extends into what we conceive of as cultures quite different from each other. They are not independent of each other. It is worthwhile underlining that in both cases we encounter not bodies, but discourses about bodies, even though much of the academic discourse seems to assume that we could encounter and explore bodies as such. We are not dealing with corporeality, but with visual and discursive representations of our bodies in order to focus subjectivities. Body-talk represents a way of referring to what it is to be human, but of course a way that carries certain features and implications. The body seems to represent a sort of strong epistemological centre in an era of subjectivisation. The possibility of connecting this to religion also indicates that the body can be given this central role.

This should not, however, be understood as an effort to dismiss the relevance of the academic discourse, but rather as a critical position towards the strong epistemological claims made within this discourse. Oakley (2007: 149) makes a modest, but very relevant claim when she writes in the following way: 'Perhaps the body and the sense of self are linked (or not) in many different ways, but we only know about some of these because of the bias in the way knowledge is made.' It might be relevant to reflect on corporeality, not as much in terms of exploring parts of a more or less relevant ontology, but as representations of a changing epistemology, a discursive space through which we encounter, affect, master and change the world.

Understanding the story of and about McCree (and the construction of the Church of Body Modification) might require us to account for several and even conflicting understandings of the body and the role and place of corporeality in relation to subjectivities. Reimagining alternative bodies is meaningful in contrast with the idea of scripted bodies. The story about McCree is more or less about the re-scripting of a scripted body. The body we need to account for is not one body, but several bodies, in a way that is in accordance with the complexity of subjectivities. Hence, McCree's iconic body

makes sense as an incompatible and fragmented corporeality of several bodies: 'The wounded body often becomes a template of individual and collective memory, both a map and a moral charter' (Sheper-Hughes 2007). This brings us once again back to the question of epistemology.

As I pointed out above, subjectivities as a continuous construction of the individual subject within culture, history and discourse and within particular relations of power imply a sensibility for a process that is incomplete and a complex mix of both resonances and dissonances. The questions I have posed through my discussion above in this article are as follows: does repudiating the classic mind–body split involve recognition that the way subjectivity and corporeality are connected has to be just as complex as our understanding of subjectivities? Does this mean that we need to account for a corporeality constituted by several bodies, in other words, the body as a body scripted by prevailing hegemonies and their counter-scripts, and further their trajectories of imagined bodies striving also to dismiss, negotiate and adjust themselves to the different conflicting scripts? Is the effort to define a single body—scripted, imagined or neurophysical—an idealistic position in relation to every contextualized corporeality? The implications of this for the different discussions referred above presents, finally, a separate question.

Bibliography

Websites

Church of Body Modification

2010 Church of Body Modification. <http://uscobm.com/> (accessed on 7 January 2011).

MyOutSpirit.com

2010 Logan McCree's Sacred Body of Work. <http://www.myoutspirit.com/index.php?pag=article&id=53> (accessed on 7 January 2011).

Literature

Ahmed, Sara

2004 *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP.

Biel, Joao, Byron Good & Arthur Kleinman

2007 Introduction: Rethinking Subjectivity. In: Joao Biel, Byron Good & Arthur Kleinman (eds), *Subjectivity: Ethnographic Investigations*; pp. 1–23. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Boyz

2010 Passions, Spirituality. *Boyz* 22.7.2002: 62.

Butler, Judith

2004 *Undoing Gender*. New York: Routledge.

Camphausen, Rufus, C.

1997 *Return of the Tribal: A Celebration of Body Adornment*. Rochester: Park Street Press.

Connolly, William

1996 Suffering, Justice, and the Politics of Becoming. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 20: 251–77.

Featherstone, Mike

1999 Body Modification: An Introduction. *Body & Society* 5 (2–3): 1–13.

Frisk, Liselott

2009 Globalization: An Important Key Factor in Contemporary Religious Change. *Journal of Alternative Spiritualities and New Age Studies* 5. <http://www.asanas.org.uk/journal.htm> (accessed on 7 January 2011).

Fuller, Robert C.

2008 *Spirituality in the Flesh: Bodily Sources of Religious Experience*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Giddens, Anthony

1991 *Modernity and Self-Identity*. Oxford: Polity Press.

Glücklich, Ariel

2001 *Sacred Pain: Hurting the Body for the Sake of the Soul*. New York: Oxford UP.

Grosz, Elisabeth

1994 *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana UP.

Heelas, P., L. Woodhead, B. Seel, B. Szerszynsky & K. Tusting

2004 *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality*. Oxford: WileyBlackwell.

Lundby, Knut

2010 Mediatizing Faith: Digital Storytelling on the Unspoken. In: Michael Bailey & Guy Redden (eds), *Mediating Faiths: Religion and Sociocultural Change in the Twenty-First Century*; pp. 49–61. Farnham: Ashgate.

Lyon, David

2006 New Media, Niche Markets, and the Body: Excarinate and Hypercarinate Challenges for Theory and Theology. In: James A. Beckford & John Wallis (eds), *Theorising Religion: Classical and Contemporary Debates*; pp. 196–210. Aldershot & Burlington: Ashgate.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice

1963 *The Primacy of Perception*. Evanston: Northwestern UP.

Munt, Sally

2010 Queer Spiritual Spaces. In: Kath Brown, Sally R. Munt & Andrew K. T. Yip (eds), *Queer Spiritual Spaces: Sexuality and Sacred Places*; pp. 1–33. Farnham: Ashgate.

PETER NYNÄS

Nietzsche, Friedrich

1969 *On the Genealogy of Morals / Ecce Homo*. New York: Vintage Books.

Oakley, Ann

2007 *Fracture: Adventures of a Broken Body*. Bristol: The Policy Press.

Salecl, Renata

2001 Cut in the Body: From Clitoridectomy to Body Art. In Sara Ahmed & J. Stacey (eds), *Thinking through Skin*; pp. 21–35. London: Routledge.

Sheper-Hughes, Nancy

2007 Violence and the Politics of Remorse. In: Joao Biel, Byron Good & Arthur Kleinman (eds), *Subjectivity: Ethnographic Investigations*; pp. 179–233. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Smith, Christian

2010 *What is a Person? Rethinking Humanity, Social Life, and the Moral Good from the Person Up*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Springgay, Stephanie

2003 Cloth as Intercorporeality: Touch, Fantasy, and Performance and the Construction of Body Knowledge. *International Journal of Education & the Arts* 4 (5). <http://www.ijea.org/v4n5/> (accessed on 7 January 2011).

Sweetman, Paul

1999 Anchoring the (Postmodern) Self? Body Modification, Fashion and Identity. *Body & Society* 5 (2–3): 51–76.

Embracing the lash

Pain and ritual as spiritual tools

Introduction

‘When the whip is raised, when leather, scourge, and cane strike against covered or naked flesh, we stand before a stage—a stage on which ritual unfolds’ (Largier 2007: 13). This chapter explores the use of scourging in Wicca, where the unfolding of ritual takes place within a larger ritual context, potentially magnifying the efficacy of pain as a nexus of transformation and transcendence, in which flagellation ‘is not merely a type of beating or a manner of generating pain. Instead, it evokes a complex, multi-layered, imaginary horizon that encompasses religious, erotic, and legal frames of reference.’ (Largier 2007: 14.)

Whilst the use of flagellation for the purposes of purification, punishment or redemptive salvific activity has long been accepted in Christianity, its use in newly emergent religions such as Wicca, where the religious use of pain cannot be sidelined as an historical aberration but must instead be understood within the context of (post)modern spirituality, has elicited little debate. Whilst purification and, to a far lesser extent, punishment still have their place, in Wicca submission to pain must also be explored in terms of initiatory ordeal, as well as an opportunity for transcendence and as arousal, sensation, and energy generation. However, voluntary submission to the infliction of pain, especially in order to enable religious/spiritual experience, tends to be regarded as anathema and as such, remains largely hidden, concealed behind a veil of categorisations of sexuality and psychopathology developed since Krafft-Ebing in 1886. Whilst acknowledging that BDSM remains taboo amongst most practitioners of Wicca, this 60 year old religion contains within its practices elements of techniques often associated with BDSM, techniques which, though having an established history in the world’s religions, are now being pioneered by a small cohort of priests and priestesses within the ritual framework of a twentieth/twenty-first century religion.

Techniques associated with BDSM in the public imagination—specifically, blood restriction through binding and bondage, and flogging/scourging—tend to be ignored, sidelined, dismissed, and whitewashed, both by Wiccan practitioners and by academic studies of Wicca, rather than being explored as mechanisms by which boundaries might be transgressed through the infliction of pain, exercised on the body, eliciting religious experience from skin and flesh. Aidan Kelly (1991), for instance, makes passing reference to sexual excitement induced through scourging in Wiccan rites, whilst Ronald Hutton (1999) claims asthma and a genuine belief that bondage and scourging were idiosyncratic ways of attaining an ecstatic trance as reasons for the inclusion of scourging in Wiccan ritual contexts.¹ Neither makes any links to the long history of religious flagellation, to BDSM, or to pain.² I do not intend here to present an account of the history of flagellation, about which much has been written.³ Instead, I want to concentrate on those elements now more or less stripped of their association with medieval Christianity, and more commonly framed within the context/s of BDSM.

Wicca: a brief introduction

Wicca emerged in the 1940s, in an area of England known as the New Forest. Initially devised by a retired civil servant called Gerald Gardner, it drew heavily on Freemasonry, the occult societies of the late nineteenth–early twentieth centuries, the work of Aleister Crowley, and a panoply of novels, poetry and

- 1 Kelly claims that, ‘the rites can be boiled down to a set of practices designed to induce sexual excitement by scourging, and that this was Gardner’s distinctive personal contribution to, and main emotional investment in [Wicca]’ (Hutton 1999: 235), though it seems that there were more complex issues at work, including Gardner’s asthma, which disabled him from other more energetic mechanisms for entering trance states, and a genuine belief that bondage and scourging were idiosyncratic ways of attaining an ecstatic trance. As Hutton discerns (*ibid.*), Gardner’s novels are not works of flagellant fiction and his scrapbooks, though containing some erotic images of ‘pretty, nude young women,’ are not concerned with binding or flagellation. He concludes, ‘[t]his is not the profile of a straightforward flagellant’ (p. 235).
- 2 I began to explore this in a paper presented at the conference ‘Dangerous Sex: Contesting the Spaces of Theology and Sexuality’, University of Glasgow, 2002. My argument was that, whilst there is a common conceptual ground between Wicca and BDSM, the overlaps between the two remain unexplored, both by academics and by Wiccan practitioners themselves. This is still the case, and the continued ‘whitewashing’ of Wicca has been ongoing since I wrote that paper. See Pearson 2005.
- 3 See, for example, Largier 2007 and Roudinesco 2009.

academic work on European witchcraft and folklore. It styles itself as an initiatory mystery religion, after the mystery cults of the classical ancient world, operating for the few rather than for the many, and with attendant ideas of priesthood and of secrecy. This latter is not concerned with content *per se*—after all, one can download a number of Books of Shadows from the internet, and purchase a variety of ‘how-to’ books from the shelves of any bookshop. Rather, secrecy is concerned with the centrality of ritual praxis to Wicca, an understanding of which prioritises the essential role of experience over book learning, of experiential knowledge as a means of learning those things that cannot, in a sense, be taught. Such things include the use of various means of entering into alternative states of consciousness.

Contained within the materials Gardner brought together were a number of techniques typically believed to facilitate trance states and magical work, both in terms of specific spells and with regard to the alchemical transformation of the self. These eight techniques, which can be practised independently of each other, or in combination—drugs and ritual, trance and dance, sex and scourging, for example—are as follows: meditation; trance; dance; rites and spells; drugs, wine etc; the Great Rite (ritualised sex, usually practised by a couple); blood control/binding; and scourging. It is on scourging and, to a lesser extent, binding that I wish to concentrate.

The scourge in Wicca

The scourge is generally understood in Gardnerian and Alexandrian Wicca as one of eight magical weapons and, as we have seen, its use is listed as one of the eight paths of magic. Yet, unlike the other magical weapons, it has no provenance/pedigree in older magical systems such as that contained within The Key of Solomon or in the occult societies of the late nineteenth century⁴—although it does, of course, have a high profile in the cultural history of that era. As an instrument used for the purposes of flagellation, the scourge—along with rods, canes, switches, and whips—is, of course, associated with what the French termed ‘le vice Anglais’, the penchant for flagellation supposedly being inherent in the English, inculcated in English public

4 Although it could be argued that the imagery of the flail associated with the Egyptian god Osiris and used extensively by the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn evokes similar ideas to the Wiccan scourge, the crook (wand) and flail (scourge) being also equated with the pillars of Mercy and Severity respectively in the kabbalistic system central to the Order.

schools (specifically Eton) and practised, at least by the higher echelons of society, in private 'spanking' clubs. Gardner, however, never went to school at all; and yet he is widely believed to have introduced the scourge as the eighth magical weapon in his witchcraft religion.⁵ Why? And whence did the idea of the scourge as an instrument of magic in modern witchcraft arise?

As noted earlier, the practice of scourging and binding, according to Aidan Kelly, came from Gerald Gardner's own sexual predilections, though Hutton argues that this is not the case. One of Gardner's initiates, Olive Greene, claimed that, for Gardner, hard strokes of the scourge were necessary. She reports that:

[she] was only flicked lightly, but Gerald liked the strokes hard and strong. I was very nervous of administering such harsh punishment. Having had no experience of such things I started by tentatively flicking the scourge across him, believing it to be a purely symbolic action. But Gerald became very excited. First I had to warrick and warlock him, and he liked to be very tightly tied, so that the cords cut into his flesh. He then knelt at my feet, with his head bowed down and resting on the altar table. He was pathetically thin and emaciated. I felt one hard lash of the scourge and he would snap in two. But all the time he kept crying; 'Harder, dear, harder. I can't feel it at all. You must make the blood course.' He swayed as he knelt, and each time he felt the scourge, his head knocked the table and rattled all the tools on the altar. He kept multiplying the number of strokes to make it more and more. He said the reason for this was magical. (Heselton nd: np.)

There is, however, no corroborating evidence for this, and Greene's testimony is undermined by her later collaboration with Charles Cardell in the Rex Nemorensis scandal; whether she was sent by him to infiltrate Gardner's coven, or whether she simply became disillusioned after her initiation and told Cardell everything, her reports cannot be taken at face-value. The evidence for Gardner's taste for hard flogging therefore remains inconclusive, although it is a commonly held 'truth' among Gardnerian covens.⁶ In fact,

5 Philip Heselton (2003: 270–1) disputes this, claiming that a scourge was already in use and included among the magical weapons in the New Forest coven into which Gardner claimed he was initiated in 1939.

6 An early Gardnerian initiate, Fred Lamond, claims that, '[prior to 1958] binding and scourging was the only method we used for raising power, because it was the only one that worked for Gerald. The coven member who knew the person we were

Gardner appears to have regarded scourging as a particularly effective means of inducing trance and/or raising magical power. In *The Witches' Way*, Janet and Stewart Farrar cite a magical manuscript reputed to be Gardner's, in which Gardner argues that,

The simplest way [of raising power] is by dancing and singing monotonous chants, slowly at first and gradually quickening the tempo until giddiness ensues. Then the calls may be used, or even wild and meaningless shrieking produces power. But this method inflames the mind and renders it difficult to control the power, though control may be gained through practice. The scourge is a far better way, for it stimulates and excites both body and soul, yet one easily retains control. (Farrar & Farrar 1985: 53.)

What is certain is that binding and blindfolding are accepted as practices with a long pedigree in Masonic circles, and Gardner certainly drew heavily on his experience as a Freemason, particularly for his initiation rites (see Bogdan 2007). Scourging, however, more commonly tends to be associated with perversion, BDSM and with Christianity, and reactions vary. As Paul Huson noted in 1970:

many traditional-minded witches feel that [scourging] . . . though peculiar to certain aspects of later Roman versions of the Greek mysteries, seems to be more bound up with English 'public school' and 'spankers' club' traditions than any inherent in the craft itself. To be beaten, whether symbolically or in actuality, does not by any means arouse in everyone the same feelings of glowing inner cleanliness or spiritual tone-up that it apparently did for a Nordic warrior, cloistered medieval monk, English public school boy, or sky-clad witch. (Huson 1970: 214–15.)

However, as Huson indicates here, although BDSM tends to draw on Christian practices of flagellation and associated imagery, Wicca aims to draw on pre-Christian notions and practices, including that of flagellation. Gardner cer-

working for best knelt in the middle of the circle and was scourged by his or her partner while the rest of the coven just stood around them in a circle and contributed their power. . . . In the spring of 1958, after Gerald had left us to spend the summer on the Isle of Man, we decided that the B&S method of raising power was too damn boring. So we switched to the circle dance method of raising power. . . .' (Heselton nd: 20–1.)

tainly seems to have been convinced of the appropriateness of scourging in the ancient mystery cults, from which he believed Wicca primarily derived. In his first non-fictional work on Wicca, *Witchcraft Today*, published in 1954, he discusses the frescoes from the Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii. He quotes a description of the frescoes from Vittorio Macchioro's *The Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii* (1920). Of particular interest is the panel which Macchioro describes as follows:

Talatē⁷ stays her gesture with her hand and lifts the rod whilst the maiden kneels bewildered and terrified with her face well-nigh hidden in the lap of a compassionate priestess, to endure the ritual flagellation which replaces and symbolises death. Psychically she does not die, but she passes symbolically through death and dies mystically as the stigmatists die crucified in Christ. (Macchioro 1954: 101.)⁸

In his use of this description, Gardner stresses the symbolic death that initiates of the Mysteries were required to undergo, and the role of flagellation in this process—the necessity of pain for spiritual rebirth. It is a general theme of the later Roman versions of the Greek Mystery cults, and can also be seen in festivals such as the Lupercalia, during which women held out their hands to the whips held by men running through the streets, the touch of said whips being the awakener of desire and fertility. This idea of spiritual ‘awakening’ through the symbolic death of initiation is a standard part of Wicca, and since all births contain pain, in Gardnerian and Alexandrian Wicca in the UK scourging almost universally forms an important part of all three rituals of initiation (1st, 2nd and 3rd degree). The initiate is bound, blindfold and naked, purified with scourging, and then consecrated.⁹ In many covens, scourging is practised *only* as part of initiation rituals, during which a prescribed number of strokes are administered. According to Hutton, ‘the cords are used to apply a gentle restriction of the blood circulation to produce dizziness, and the scourge is applied very lightly and steadily to induce a rhythmical tingling sensation’¹⁰ (Hutton 1999: 235), drawing the blood away from the brain and into the body, thus enabling the person being scourged to enter a more ‘pure’

7 Daughter of Dionysus.

8 Doreen Valiente describes it as ‘an ordeal which the neophyte had to pass, and also perhaps as a means of purification before a person was admitted to the Mysteries’ (1994: 139).

9 See Vivianne Crowley 1990: 47, for an account of her initiation.

10 I.e. he stresses that this is not about pain.

state of consciousness. Likewise, Vivianne Crowley refers to this as a 'symbolic' activity, which,

is not designed to cause pain. This is not because of Western squeamishness. Most people are prepared to suffer in order to be worthy of initiation. [But] today . . . physical endurance is a minor part of our lives and the gifts of initiation are not won by undergoing a small amount of physical discomfort. It is an effort of the mind, soul and spirit which is required to achieve the goal of initiation—higher consciousness.
(Crowley 1996: 116.)

For the vast majority of Wiccans, initiations will be their only experience of a practice that could be interpreted as BDSM, their only voluntary submission to the *potential* infliction of pain. In some cases, even the potential for experience of pain is removed, for the scourge itself may consist of pieces of cotton thread or ribbons rather than anything more substantial. In cases where infliction of pain is clearly not the aim, to the extent that it would be well nigh impossible to cause even 'a small amount of physical discomfort' with the instrument used, Crowley's 'effort of mind, soul and spirit' becomes the primary means through which altered-, higher- or trance states of conscious are achieved. Thus, the body may be a strong physical ritual presence, being a naked, bound receiver of *light* strokes from the scourge (as Hutton suggests), but its power to effect transformation is thereby limited, and its ambiguous position in a religion that claims to dissolve the traditional mind-body dualisms is underlined. 'The primary subject [of] the skin, with its keen sense of touch and feeling, its sensitivity to excitement' (Largier 2007: 22) is subjected only to low-level arousal through which a trance state would seem impossible to achieve. And so the body appears to be under-utilised as a vehicle within which one might be 'transported'—to use William James's term—through pain, contact, rhythm, sound, as practitioners play with taboos in a tantalising rather than liberating manner. Thus, whilst accepting Carl B. Holmberg's argument that '[a]pproaching the edge of taboo intensifies feelings and even a sense of the sacred . . . [arousing] not just physically, but spiritually' (Holmberg 1998: 93), and Niklaus Largier's observation that 'the whip and the rod . . . embody the unity of physical and psychical arousal' (2007: 315), actually going beyond Georges Bataille's (1986) fascination of transgression, pushing oneself over the edge, 'taking on transgression, facing it, and incorporating it into . . . performance of self' (Holmberg 1998: 96), is not most Wiccans' response to the praxis of flagellation.

In fact, we can identify three main responses, or interpretative strategies to scourging and binding: rejection, acceptance, and enthusiastic advocacy. At one end of the spectrum are those for whom the use of scourging and blood control through bondage, are inappropriate, dangerous, and have no place in Wiccan ritual. Such people, as individuals or covens, have removed the scourge from their altars, do not use it even at initiations, and do not practice binding. This is most common amongst practitioners of feminist witchcraft, many of whom see the scourge as a symbol of (patriarchal) oppression, of sexual domination, of BDSM practices, and of ‘power-over’, although I have also come across one or two instances of this response among Gardnerian and Alexandrian witches. The use of the scourge seems to be considered ‘a perverse transgression of the taboos of bondage, pain, humiliation, and dominance’ (Holmberg 1998: 96).

By far the most common position is that of acceptance. The scourge remains one of the eight magical weapons, is placed on the altar, and is used at initiations and at other times. It is understood as a symbol of discipline,¹¹ ‘sign of power and dominance’, and the ritual agent of ‘suffering and purification’ used to administer initiatory ordeals (Hutton 1999: 229). Whilst nearly all Wiccans submit to the scourge as part of the ordeal of initiation, others use it far more often, and for a variety of purposes: aside from initiations, many Gardnerian covens use scourging as a means of purification before each and every rite, for trancework and divination (especially scrying), spellcraft, and to discipline misdemeanours in ritual.¹²

But this is still not—necessarily—embracing the lash, still not using pain. We thus come to a third position in relation to the scourge, a position at the opposite end of the spectrum to those who reject the scourge, similarly occupied by very few Gardnerian and Alexandrian Wiccans. These are the enthusiastic advocates, Wiccans perhaps with an interest in BDSM who make greater use of bondage and flagellation, and experiment with pain, drawing such techniques into the rituals of Wicca and regarding them as an inherent part of Wiccan ritual. For them, the abstract or symbolic appreciation

11 The instruments of flagellation were, of course, historically known as the *disciplina*. As such, it is a symbol of discipline—of the self as well as others, and more importantly the former. As Vivianne Crowley states, the scourge is a tool which it is important we make and consecrate ourselves; for it is a symbol of the self-discipline that is necessary to follow an initiatory path. The teaching given with the scourge in the first degree was that the initiate should be willing to suffer to learn. (Crowley 1996: 199.)

12 This is something I have seen taken very seriously, but most often in light-hearted fashion.

of scourge and cords or, even worse, their removal from the altar, signifies a ‘white-washing’ of Wicca. These are the practitioners who *do* embrace the lash, who *do* utilise pain.

Embracing the lash

I want to reiterate here that Wiccans at this end of the spectrum are extremely few and far between—I am talking about a handful of people within Gardnerian and Alexandrian Wicca, although we might note that many people in the wider Pagan community experiment with mixing BDSM techniques and religious ritual (see Kaldera 2006). But I have never been an advocate of the idea that large numbers are required in order for a study to be viable. If ‘one of the major “tasks” of theories of deviance is to protect the legitimacy of theories of normality’ (Simon 1996: 116), even in communities such as Wicca that are already regarded as transgressive, that already ‘agree to translate into strange acts the inadmissible tendencies that haunt us and that we repress’ (Roudinesco 2009: 5), then the apparent extremities of those who push the boundaries within a transgressive community perform a function in challenging the perversity of a religion that seeks simultaneously to both unleash and tame its dark side.

In ‘Masochism as Escape from the Self’, Roy Baumeister suggests that non-clinical masochists are ‘normal’ in every aspect of their lives other than the sexual, and tend to be high achievers, well-educated, and in positions of responsibility—in fact, they belong to exactly the same social profiling as most Wiccans,¹³ and members of NRMS in general. Yet, as I have indicated, very few Wiccans practice BDSM techniques or combine them with Wicca. Baumeister argues that masochism is comparable to intoxication, physical exercise, and meditation in its ability to facilitate removal from a high level of self-awareness, the powerful intensity of its sexual connotations being the only real difference. Furthermore, he suggests that the resulting low-level state of awareness brought about through the infliction of pain, the relinquishing of control, and subjecting oneself to humiliation (which he regards as the three principal tropes of masochism), enable transformation of the self, temporal and spatial focus on the immediacy of the present, and a concomitant narrowing of awareness to the physicality of the body—even more specifically, to that part of the body that is being subjected to the infliction of pain.

13 See Pearson 2003 and Hutton 1999.

Yet we must go further that this if we are to understand the use of binding and scourging and pain in Wiccan ritual. Pain, Elaine Scarry claims, ‘obliterate[s] psychological content’ and ‘banish[es] abstract meanings and symbols from awareness’ (cited in Baumeister 1988: 38); but this is to miss the importance of the explosion of pain as an intense sensation in the body itself. Pain generates a chemical response, an endorphin rush that produces a trance state *through* the physical body. It may also obliterate connection between the mind/spirit and the body, *through* the body, enabling the witch to move into a space between ‘the experience of the body and the domination of the [rational] mind’ (Cosgrove 1999: 433), a space in which the imagination, the image, is unfettered and released. The ‘simulation of boundlessness’ through binding evokes ‘a place where freedom seeks to reach beyond the dichotomy of choice and compulsion’ (Largier 2007: 22), where the unfettered ‘imagination—whether through the experience of [the gods] or the drunkenness of the senses’ (p. 30)—attained through the infliction of pain via scourging, enables an intensification of experience through a radical affirmation of the body.

This intense sensual-imaginative perception was exiled by the discourse of ‘sexuality’ begun in the late nineteenth century and continuing ever since, such that ‘imagination is subordinated to a “natural sexuality” ratified by reason, a “natural sexuality” that possesses its finality in the hetero-normative performance of the “sexual act”’ (Largier 2007: 446). Embracing the lash thus undermines the ambiguity of arousal that rejects the dominance of the ‘sexual’ or ‘sexuality’ over the body, and instead allows the body to become a site of boundlessness which opens up inner possibilities of experience rather than a container that, in seeking satisfaction, closes down the interaction between mind and body through the finality of orgasm. In suspending the end of arousal, in opening up to the ‘endless multiplication of arousal’ (Largier 2007: 447), the rhythm of flagellation and the intense sensory experience of pain has the potential to open the gateway to the affinity with representation and image that forms an essential part of magical ability.

In speaking of ‘magical ability’, I am referring not only to traditions of spellcraft commonly associated with witchcraft in the popular imagination, but to the alchemical idea of the ‘great work’, the very transmutation of the Self, central to Wicca as an initiatory system. This is the ‘greater magic’, little understood by those who look for magical powers evinced by spells, talismans and potions, and to some would seem to relate more to the mystical, although in Wicca the magical and the mystical are not regarded as opposites, any more than magic is regarded as something that is separate, or prior to, re-

ligion; indeed, the two are seen as intrinsic to each other. This 'greater magic', practised on the self, and the experience of the mystical that forms part of it, may be intensified through techniques that allow for an immediacy of effect on the psyche, including those that operate through sensation applied to the body, including voluntary submission to the infliction of pain.

Those who seek pain might be more easily identified with motifs of religiosity such as the flagellant or the martyr. Yet hyper stimulation through scourging in order to raise, manipulate and release magical energy requires the help of a fellow priest or priestess willing to wield the scourge, for it is not so easy—though also not impossible—for the Wiccan to inflict the scourge on themselves. In the dynamic between scourge and scourged, the distinction between self and other breaks down, the instrument used being perceived as an extension of the hand that wields it, the contact with the skin facilitating arousal in both parties through tactile and visual perception. As Largier notes, such tactile and visual perception is focused on specific regions of the body,

yielding an intensity that increases with every blow. The increased reddening of the skin becomes a stimulus in its own right, one that evokes urgency and concentration even in purely visual terms. All of these blows, moments of contact with the skin, and rhythmic sounds leads to a state of arousal not unlike a trance; indeed, it often takes precisely this form. (Largier 2007: 23.)

Both parties serve each other, in a disruption of traditional understandings of the dynamics of power in an economy of normalised sexuality, in which the refusal to seek closure facilitates an exploration beyond demarcated boundaries, in the margins between the mind and the body.

Conclusion

Wicca plays on these margins to a far higher degree than most other religious traditions; that it has room for transgression within its own frame is a reflection of the way in which it encourages individual exploration into ways of being, and largely refrains from judging others over the choices they make to facilitate their spiritual growth. Those who reject or accept the scourge are not denying the importance of the body and its centrality to Wicca; it is simply that those who embrace the lash choose to use the body as a specific tool in

an additional way, a way which utilises pain and seeks to master it. Thus, if what worked for Gardner was flagellation (whether because of his asthma, his own sexual leanings, or for any other reason), that's fine. Equally, if what works is dance, meditation, or drugs, that is also fine. So long as no harm is done to oneself or others, Wicca has no rules governing choice of magical technique. And flagellation, let us be quite clear, is about inflicting pain, not harm or injury; its use must be consensual, otherwise it is as abusive as any act of violence perpetrated on the body of another.

The use of the scourge in Wicca represents a religious, spiritual, and magical use of the body that introduces pain as arousal and transcendence, rather than as mortification, asceticism, or punishment of the body. The body is elevated to a site of spiritual experience encountered through intense ritual praxis within a wider ritual context. The use of the physical in order to reach 'beyond' the body in fact carries, or transports the body into a different relationship with mind, spirit, soul, one in which all are combined or modulated in the boundless realms of the imagination, beyond the constructed limits of what constitutes physicality—and beyond what is normally understood to constitute religion. The traces that the scourge leaves behind on the body are marks both of an encounter with the infinite, and of an experience of self-transformation.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Dr Conrad Harriss for furnishing me with the title for this paper and for many helpful discussions; and to Philip Heselton for kindly making available to me a draft manuscript of his forthcoming biography of Gerald Gardner.

Bibliography

Bataille, Georges

1986 *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*. Trans. Mary Dalwood. San Francisco: City Lights Books.

Baumeister, Roy F.

1988 Masochism as Escape from Self. *The Journal of Sex Research* 25 (1): 28–59.

Bogdan, Henrik

2007 *Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation*. New York: SUNY Press.

Cosgrove, Peter

1999 Edmund Burke, Gilles Deleuze, and the Subversive Masochism of the Image. *ELH* 66 (2): 405–37.

Crowley, Vivianne

1990 The Initiation. In: Prudence Jones & Caitlin Matthews (eds), *Voices from the Circle: The Heritage of Western Paganism*; pp. 65–82. London: Aquarian Press.

1996 *Wicca: The Old Religion in the New Millennium*. London: Thorsons.

Farrar, Janet & Stewart Farrar

1985 *The Witches' Way*. London: Robert Hale.

Heselton, Philip

nd *Father of the Witches*. London: Thoth Publications (forthcoming).

2003 *Gerald Gardner and the Cauldron of Inspiration: An Investigation into the Sources of Gardnerian Witchcraft*. Milverton: Capall Bann.

Holmberg, Carl B.

1998 *Sexualities in Popular Culture*. London: Sage.

Huson, Paul

1970 *Mastering Witchcraft: A Practical Guide for Witches*. Warlocks and Covens, London: Corgi.

Hutton, Ronald

1999 *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kaldera, Raven

2006 *Dark Moon Rising: Pagan BDSM and the Ordeal Path*. Hubbardston, MA: Asphodel Press.

Kelly, Aidan

1991 *Crafting the Art of Magic Book 1: A History of Modern Witchcraft, 1939–1964*. St Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications.

Largier, Niklaus

2007 *In Praise of the Whip: A Cultural History of Arousal*. New York: Zone Books.

Pearson, Joanne

2003 “Witchcraft will not soon vanish from this earth”: Wicca in the 21st Century. In: Linda Woodhead, Grace Davies & Paul Heelas (eds), *Predicting Religion: Christian, Secular, and Alternative Futures*; pp. 170–82. Aldershot: Ashgate.

2005 Inappropriate Sexuality? Sex Magic, S/M and Wicca (or Whipping Harry Potter’s Arse!). *Theology and Sexuality* 11 (2): 31–42.

2007 *Wicca and the Christian Heritage: Ritual, Sex and Magic*. London: Routledge.

Roudinesco, Élisabeth

2009 *Our Dark Side: A History of Perversion*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Simon, William

1996 *Postmodern Sexualities*. London: Routledge.

Valiente, Doreen

1994 *An ABC of Witchcraft Past and Present*. London: Robert Hale. (First published in 1973.)

Religious experiments in colonial Calcutta

Modern Hinduism and *bhakti* among the Indian middle class

Calcutta, 1874: it was one hundred and nine years since the British East India Company had taken possession of Bengal, sixteen years since the British Raj officially took over its rule and seventy-three years before Indian independence.¹ A vast and ancient civilisation lived under the rule of the inhabitants of a small North Atlantic island, who had managed to project their culture, their religion—and their economic interests—into almost every corner of the globe. It was a time when India was the jewel in the crown of the British Raj and Calcutta had been transformed into a Eurasian metropolis second only to London itself. 1874 was also the year when Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, a Vaishnava of the devotional (*bhakti*) school of Chaitanya (1486–1534), was born; he died sixty-three years later in 1937. The span of his lifetime was entrenched in circumstances and events that occurred in and around the city of Calcutta and came to shape the foundation of what is generally known as ‘modern Hinduism’ (the term ‘Hinduism’ will be discussed more in detail at the end of the chapter). For this reason, these years will serve as a suitable focus for this chapter.²

The year 1874 came round at a time of transition in India, when events that began more than a century earlier had started to produce novel patterns of change. In 1757 the Battle of Plassey had paved the way for total domination, as Britain won over French influences in the East. By 1772 the Mughal Emperor Shah Alaam II (1728–1806) had ceded Bengal, Orissa and Bihar to the East India Company; Bengal had become the first region of India to experience British rule and Calcutta had been named the capital of British India (remaining so until 1911). Subsequent years witnessed the unfolding of colonial culture as well as indigenous reactions for and against it. The period

1 This chapter is a revised and enlarged version of the introduction to the author’s doctoral dissertation (Sardella 2010), which is currently under publication.

2 For studies of modern Hinduism see, for example, Sharma 2002, Radice 1998 and Smith 2003.

between 1815 and 1914 came to be regarded as Britain's 'Imperial Century', and the years from 1837 to 1901 as the 'Victorian Era'. The Sepoy Rebellion of 1857 marked the end of the East India Company's autocratic rule and the beginning of control by the British government itself. In 1876 Queen Victoria was named Empress of India and in 1920 Gandhi was elected leader of the Congress Party. In 1939 Britain's colonial domains encompassed 23.9 per cent of the earth's surface (or 13,100,000 square miles), and comprised a total population of 470,000,000 persons (Townsend & Langsam 1941: 19). Throughout this period, Britain's political, linguistic and cultural influence in South Asia profoundly linked India to the rest of the world, until colonial rule ended in 1947.

In the West, the period between 1874 and 1937—the years spanning Bhaktisiddhānta's life—witnessed a series of watershed events that permanently transformed the cultural, geopolitical, technological and scientific face of the earth. Just prior to this period, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels had published *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), Charles Darwin had released *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and Alfred Nobel had invented dynamite (1867). And within this period, Alexander Graham Bell patented the telephone (1876), Paris hosted the first international electrical exhibition (1881), Karl Benz produced the first automobile (1885), Sigmund Freud published *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), the Wright brothers achieved success at Kitty Hawk (1903) and Albert Einstein published his groundbreaking theory of special relativity (1905). Then the First World War (1914–18) cast a veil of senseless darkness over the world, and its aftermath witnessed the rise of communism, fascism and Nazism. India itself was influenced by these global events on several levels, but nowhere more visibly than in Calcutta, which at around the turn of the twentieth century had become one of the major crossroads of the world.

Colonial Calcutta

By the time of Bhaktisiddhānta's birth, Calcutta had risen from rural anonymity to become the 'second city' of the British Empire: larger and more magnificent than either Edinburgh or Glasgow and the equivalent in beauty, magnificence and population to famed London and Paris. But like all metropolises, Calcutta also had a darker side. Rudyard Kipling described Calcutta as 'a city of dreadful night, filled with poverty, famine, riot and disease, where the cholera, the cyclone, the crow come and go . . . by the sewerage rendered

fetid, by the sewer made impure, by the Sunderbunds unwholesome, by the swamp moist and damp' (Kipling 1890: 234).

To convey a sense of this city's unique mingling of two starkly contrasting milieus as they converged at the end of the nineteenth century, a brief description will follow, freely adapted from two Western memoirs of that time: Zebina Flavius Griffith's *India and Daily Life in Bengal* (Griffin 1896: 66–7) and Anna Harriet Leonowens's *Life and Travel in India* (Leonowens 1884):

The capital city of Calcutta contained a population of approximately one million people and was organized in such a way that British and native districts were kept carefully apart. The British sector extended five miles along the Hoogly (Ganges) River and included a nobly appointed and much-frequented esplanade, which divided the town from Fort William. Along one side of this esplanade were the Government House, Town-hall, Treasury and High Court, and on the opposite side was Fort William, with the fine steeple of the Baptist Cathedral rising just beyond it, high above the surrounding foliage. Then, after passing under a triumphal archway, one emerged onto a spacious grassy area, famously known as the Maidan. Here all the principal roads converged and one was surrounded on all sides by an elegant display of stately architecture. This was the fashionable suburb known as Chowringee, which in every respect made Calcutta worthy of the appellation 'City of Palaces'. All the houses were built in the European style, three or four stories in height and most of them were connected by handsome terraces or open sunny balconies. The more opulent ones had shady verandas or high carriage-porches supported by Romanesque pillars, while some were rendered even more attractive by lush flower gardens with fine fruit trees.

Yet even this rather regal section of town abounded with contrasts and contradictions. Beautiful carriages containing personages of the highest social rank travelled down the boulevard along-side rickety old street-cars, ox-carts, rickshaw-wallahs and the like. On the avenue, the most magnificent European stores were found located within a few meters of poor Bengali natives peddling their wares from small, megerely appointed shops. And right next door to the Eden gardens, with its electric lights, fountains, and exquisite music, were the shanties of native sweets vendors, who could be seen leaning over pots of boiling oil, making their confections. On any given day within the same vicinity one could see a mingling of English bureaucrats going about at breakneck pace, Chinamen arrayed in red and grens silks, Zamindars adorned in spotless white clothes with jewelled chains of heavy gold wrapped around their necks, Parsees walking tall and proud in peculiar stove pipe hats, Burmese wearing red silk handkerchiefs wrapped tight around their heads,

zenana missionaries, Catholic padres and many more. Scattered all through this diverse crowd of people were the watermen with their leather bags of water on their hips, sprinkling the streets to keep down the dust.

In stark contrast to the grandeur of the British district stood the native quarter, known as 'Black Town', the residence of more than three-quarters of Calcutta's entire population. The severe transition between these two opposites was made even more extreme by the architectural pretensions of the one and the crude mud or bamboo habitations of the other. And yet within this relatively impoverished section of the city, with streets all narrow, unpaved and teeming with excessive population there could be found no less than twenty bazaars, well stocked with commodities, goods and articles from all corners of the world: rare and valuable products of the Indian loom; shawls and paintings from Cashmere; kinkaubs from Benares; teas and silks from China; spices, pearls and precious stones from Ceylon; rupees from Pegii; coffee from Java and Arabia; nutmeg from Singapore; the list could go on and on. Here the air was filled with the fragrances of vanilla, saffron, cardamom and sandalwood, all mingled with the scent of hot, newly prepared Bengali sweets, rich with cream and ghee; and here could be heard at all times the principal cry of the market: 'Come please Memsahib, I've got it!' Walking among these relatively few and scattered 'Memsahibs' were the throng of Hindus: graceful nut-brown maidens tripping gracefully with rows of water-jars nicely balanced on their heads; dark-hued young men, clean, washed and robed in pure white, laughing, talking or loitering about; Westernized *babus* sauntering along, dressed in handsome Oriental costumes, but with European stockings and shoes; common street-women, brilliantly attired dancing-girls; *brāhmins*, sepoys, fakirs and swamis, bedecked in various costumes, conversing in manifold tongues and dialects. And, above all, there were strolling jugglers, snake-charmers and fortune tellers, plying their curious arts and completing the picture of an Oriental bazaar. It appeared as if this teeming flow of humanity had been passing and gurgling through the streets of these native bazaars for all the centuries of foreign rule, unchanged in type, character, feeling, religion and occupation. Side by side with the Churches of the Brahma Samaj and the eloquence and sharp intellect of the educated Bengalis and other cultivated natives of Bengal, there were the temples of the goddess Kali and the large festivals in honour of Jagannath. Remarkably enough, among the majority of the native population of Calcutta as well as in the rest of India, the European influence was hardly felt at all.

The *bhadralok*

The stark socio-cultural and religious division between the British and Indian populations represented by the ‘white’ and ‘black’ towns, here vividly depicted by Griffith and Leonowens, had a long history. The early development of colonial administration and trade created the need for a new middle class, known as the *bhadralok* (literally ‘gentle or refined people’). The *bhadralok* were mainly composed of Bengali Hindus rather than Muslims. It initially included wealthy landlords and later incorporated journalists, teachers, and lawyers, who were recruited from the peasant gentry. The *bhadralok* were respectfully called ‘*babus*’, a title that came to refer to their acquired fluency in English. They worked as brokers to British traders, as interpreters and mediators in jurisprudence, and as assistants in matters of economic and political administration. Some of their defining traits were a tendency towards secular and liberal views, a strong commitment to education—the basis for their social and economic success—and a propensity to assimilate British habits, culture and taste (Bhattacharya 2005). The latter was to some degree the result of the widely accepted opinion among colonial and indigenous educators that Bengalis could improve culturally, socially and ethically only by discarding key elements of their native traditions.

The *bhadralok* preferred managerial and skilled jobs, which distinguished them from the occupations of the *chotalok*, the ‘small people’. The latter was mostly represented by servants, cooks and sweepers from Bengal and Orissa, as well as large numbers of immigrants from Bihar, the United Provinces and other parts of India. They were divided into various ethnic and linguistic groups, and collectively developed their own peculiar forms of religious worship, distinguished from those of the *bhadralok* (Thomas 1997: 25–32). Apart from the *bhadralok* and *chotalok*, a large portion of the black town’s population was constituted of Muslims shopkeepers, artisans, moneylenders and labourers. The *bhadralok* lived socially and culturally removed from the *chotalok* and Muslims, and only broke from their aloofness during occasional philanthropic initiatives, which became more frequent as the nineteenth century moved forward.

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the aspiring youth of the Hindu middle class filled the ranks of the *bhadralok*. Eager for employment in civil and professional services, they were carefully screened for admission, on the basis of rigorous examinations, into the few existing public schools. Institutions such as Calcutta University (1857) were created in order to train colonial workers who could serve the interests of the East

India Company, and later the Raj, with loyalty and expertise, and who could work as professionals in a Western secular environment. Missionary schools were also popular among the *bhadralok* due to the quality of their English education, but they were looked upon with suspicion because of what was perceived as an overly critical view of Hinduism, particularly with regard to 'idol' worship and caste.

The relations of the British with indigenous populations were rather varied, and spanned from romantic fascination to racial despising. After the Sepoy war in 1857, the British remained neutral to Indian religious and secular institutions that did not pose a direct threat to their dominion, but increased racial segregation to prevent sedition instead. As the colonial establishment increasingly restrained educated Bengalis from participating in key aspects of colonial culture, the *bhadralok* sought contact with progressive Western religious currents, such as the Unitarians, the Freemasons and the Theosophical Society (founded in 1875). It is from these encounters, and the profuse exchanges that they generated, that important strands of modern Hinduism emerged (De Michelis 2004: 47, 68–70).

The Bengali renaissance

The geographical and administrative proximity of the white and black towns in Calcutta inevitably meant that ideas flowed between the twos despite all attempts at segregation. Hindu ideas were discussed within the Western colony and Hindus absorbed the ethos, worldview and religious sensitivities of their Western neighbours. As a consequence of this interaction, besides a strong appreciation for Western culture and values, a Hindu and Bengali 'renaissance' gradually emerged among the *bhadralok*, which by the early twentieth century created the foundation for a stronger appreciation of indigenous values and culture.³ Some of the elements of the renaissance included: 1) an emphasis on the Bengali and Indian languages rather than English; 2) an eagerness to wear native clothes, such as the peasant male garb—an unstitched lower dress (*doti*), and a shirt generally made of cotton (*kurta*)—rather than Western garments; 3) the establishment of Bengali medium schools for education; 4) a new interest in local food, medicine and means of production; 5) a social awareness of and engagement in the amelioration of the condition of the destitute among the *chotalok*, which became integrated into the mod-

3 The term 'renaissance' has been questioned, see, for example, Raychaudhuri 2002.

ern Hindu mind as a whole; and 6) the shaping of a new regional and national identity. However, in terms of our narrative, the most important trait was the search for *religious* indigenous interpretations that could respond to, accommodate, and ultimately domesticate the various ideas introduced by the West.

Vaishnavism was at the time one of the more popular and active Hindu traditions in Bengal, and it had a long history going back to the sixteenth century and earlier. Its practice is centered upon devotion, *bhakti*, to the deities of Krishna and his female consort Radha. According to traditional understanding, Krishna, the ultimate object of devotion, is possessed of a divine form and personality, with the full range of attributes that make reciprocal loving relationships possible; here both the finite and the infinite are considered to be eternal, loving persons, capable of active emotional exchange. Moreover, while Krishna is considered to be the ultimate origin (or masculine principle), Radha (the feminine principle) is conceived as the personification of all divine potencies. As such, the combination of Radha-Krishna is thought to embody the two essential aspects of one infinite reality. The tradition furthermore regards Chaitanya as a combined incarnation of Radha and Krishna (Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī *et al.* 1999).

During the span of Bhaktisiddhānta's life, Chaitanya Vaishnavism comprised approximately one fifth of the Bengali population. The *bhadralok* perceived Vaishnavism in two rather contradictory ways. On one hand, it respected its cultural achievements in Bengal, from which Hindus had gained significant social and religious resources. It also admired its learned texts and sophisticated poetry, which had greatly contributed to early Bengali literature and inspired renowned poets such as Rabindranath Tagore (Tagore *et al.* 2003). On the other hand, the *bhadralok* despised the erotic tantric practices in vogue among the Vaishnava *chotalok*, as well as Vaishnavism's appeal to the emotions, which was in stark contrast to the secular rationalism and restrained Puritanism prevalent among them in the nineteenth century. It was the latter of these two perceptions that generally prevailed, despite attempts to increase Vaishnavism's reputation by prominent figures such as Keshub Chandra Sen (1838–84) and a number of wealthy Vaishnavas, who regularly published Vaishnava periodicals.⁴

In the 1870s, the Vaishnavas of Calcutta were reputed to be accepting *chotalok* such as prostitutes, outcastes and the rejected among higher *jatis* into their ranks. The more disadvantaged portion of the community formed a dis-

4 Tony Stewart and Hena Basu have collected 122 titles of Vaishnava periodicals published in Bengal between 1856 and 1983 (Basu 2009).

tinct sub-caste, named the *jati* Vaishnavas, which was placed just above the outcastes. Their spiritual teachers, however, were usually *brāhmaṇas* called Goswamis or Gośains, which added some degree of prestige to the community as a whole. In order to be regarded as a Vaishnava and receive initiation it was sufficient to pay a fee to a Goswami and arrange for a festival that included distribution of sanctified food (*mahotsava*), usually to those closely related to the initiating guru (Hunter 1875: 66–7). According to the 1872 census report of Calcutta and its surrounding district (the 24 Parganas), the number of Vaishnavas by *jati* or initiation was only about 36,000. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to assume that a considerable number of Hindus were informally involved in the worship of both Radha-Krishna and Chaitanya (Hunter 1875: 72–3). Chaitanyaite Vaishnavism was instead more popular among the Hindus of the rural areas of greater Bengal, which included the Eastern regions of Orissa, Manipur, Assam and Tripura. In the following section, some key modern Hindu figures will be discussed in more detail, particularly with regard to their contribution in shaping the perception of Chaitanyaite *bhakti* in Bengal. Their common trait was that they all belonged to the same privileged and educated class, the *bhadralok* (Fuller 2009).

Rammohun Roy

There is general scholarly agreement that the Bengali renaissance was inaugurated by Rammohun Roy (1772–1833), a landowner and prolific writer (Fuller 2009).⁵ He inspired the engagement of the *bhadralok* with colonial institutions such as the Asiatic Society (1784), with the press, the Christian missions, and with the recovery of the Indian past carried out by British archaeologists and Indologists. He was born into a *kulin brāhmaṇa* family (the highest rank) in Radhanagar in West Bengal and his father, Ramakanta, was a Vaishnava. Roy, however, contrary to his family's beliefs, championed a rational monotheism inspired by the *Upaniṣads* that was strongly aligned with Islamic and Christian un-iconic sensibilities. In other words, he came to reject the image worship that was practiced by the Vaishnavas of Bengal and others. He published non-dualistic explanations of the *Vedānta-sūtra*, which he later came to view as a viable alternative for modern Hindus to the gospel, which he had studied under the guidance of Christian missionaries. He planted the

5 For a comprehensive study of Roy's life, thought and historical context see, for example, Robertson 1999.

seed of a modern Hindu bourgeois religiosity that was particularly tailored to the *bhadralok* (Hatcher 2008). In other words, he became the prototype of a ‘householding spiritual seeker’ (*grhastha brahmavādin*) who lived in the world while pursuing spiritual aims.

In 1828, he founded the *Brahmo Sabhā*, along with Dwarkanath Tagore (1795–1846) and other local *brāhmaṇas*, for the purpose of worshipping the impersonal absolute, *brahman*. The institution was the beginnings of what later became the Brahmo Samaj, the most dynamic reform movement of the Bengali renaissance. Roy campaigned on several occasions for social, political and religious reform, and achieved remarkable results that had long term effects in shaping the intellectual frame of the *bhadralok*. His achievements included a rational outlook on religion and a historical, critical approach to religious texts, as well as a new awareness about the status and treatment of Hindu women and political rights. Nonetheless, his effort to eradicate image worship from Hinduism had no lasting effect.⁶ His allegiance to *Vedāntic* non-dualism, however, created a precedent that was followed by a large number of Hindu intellectuals such as Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) and former president of India, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888–1975).

Bankim Chandra, Bipin Chandra Pal and Keshub Chandra Sen

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838–94) was a *brāhmaṇa* and an accomplished writer.⁷ He was among the first students to get a degree from Calcutta University, and he made a career as a deputy collector and magistrate. Of particular interest to our narrative was his work, *Krishna-Charitra* (1886), in which he presented the Vaishnava deity of Krishna as a dignified national hero (Chatterjee 1991). He regarded, however, many descriptions of Krishna’s life in Vaishnava literature as morally unsound and as interpolations, particularly in regard to some explicit sections in the tenth book of the Vaishnava work *Bhāgavata Purāna*, which deals with the amorous exchanges between Krishna and his female companions, the *rāsa līlā*.⁸ His writings became a recognized source of inspiration for the nationalist movement and his poem,

6 Regarding Roy’s historical critical perspective, see Roy 1820.

7 For an introduction to Chatterjee’s religious thought, see Harder 2001.

8 *Rāsa līlā* is a circular dance. For a translation of the section of the *Bhāgavata* dealing with it see Bryant 2003 and Schweig 2005.

Vande mataram, became one of the national songs of India. It is today his most remembered contribution.

Bipin Chandra Pal (1858–1932) studied at Presidency College in Calcutta and was attracted early on to the Brahmo Samaj. He was also influenced by a high caste Chaitanya Vaishnava and member of the Brahmo Samaj, Bijoy Krishna Goswami. Inspired by Surendranath Banerj, he took an active part in Bengali politics and embraced for a time political extremism together with Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lajpat Rai and Aurobindo Ghosh. He is widely regarded as one of the fathers of modern India. He developed a Vaishnava ‘idealism’ that viewed the progress of society as the unfolding of God’s immanent presence in history (Pal 2002). He was quite influential in the independence movement and his most remembered contributions are found therein.

Keshub Chandra Sen (1838–84) is among the most eclectic personalities of the Bengali renaissance.⁹ A member of the Brahmo Samaj in 1856, he founded his own movement ten years later. Known as the Brahmo Samaj of India, it was born out of a schism within the original Adi Samaj. His movement also became a counterforce to another offshoot: the more liberalist and secularized Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. Sen came under the influence of Ramakrishna and created a universalist ‘New Dispensation’. It was inspired by Christian thought, Chaitanya Vaishnavism and various other Hindu religions. Sen instituted lay systems of practice and his experiments with communal living can arguably be regarded as the prototype of the modern lay ‘*ashram*’, so popular today around the world (De Michelis 2004: 49). Sen’s exploration of Hindu ‘spirituality’—that is to say, the emphasis on internalization and experience beyond ritualism, religious dogma, organized religions and priestly mediators—had a great influence in the shaping of modern Hindu movements. According to Sen, religious ‘enthusiasm’ was at the heart of the religious life, and his revival of Chaitanya *kirtan* on the streets of Calcutta created a new interest in Vaishnava *bhakti*, particularly among the *bhadralok*. The charismatic movement that he created, however, did not survive his death, since it lacked a sustainable institutional form.¹⁰

9 For an introduction to Sen’s life and thought see Kopf 1979: 249–86. On the New Dispensation see Damen 1983.

10 Regarding the often neglected relation of Sen to Western esoteric movements see De Michelis 2004: 49–90.

Swami Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) is the most well known figure of this period among peoples in the West. He promoted a particular notion of Hindu religion, often labelled *neo-Vedānta*, inspired by, but not equivalent to, Śaṅkara's non-dualism.¹¹ It rose to prominence in the early twentieth century and has now become the standard view of the 'essence' of Hinduism among most Indian and Western intellectuals: that is, in opposition to the popular belief in image worship of gods and goddesses, Hinduism, in its highest essence, views the flickering world of individual senses, form and personality to be ultimately unreal. Ultimate reality, according to this perspective, consists of an impersonal, formless spiritual essence, called *brahman*, which pervades and constitutes the timeless foundation of all temporary material manifestations.¹² This non-dualistic understanding had important practical implications for the spread of humanistic, rationalistic and egalitarian ideologies, because of its emphasis on the equality of all human beings. Indeed, it is likely that the embracing of a parallel view by Gandhi and several other prominent leaders of the nationalist movement facilitated the motive of invalidating the notion of a racial hierarchy and legitimized resistance against British colonial domination. In 1893, Vivekananda was invited to present his views on Hinduism to the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago. Exceedingly well-received, it quickly became the West's standard understanding of Hinduism's philosophical core.

One year later, Vivekananda travelled to New York to found his first Vedānta Society, and after returning to India he founded the Ramakrishna Mission. The primary aim of the former was spiritual enlightenment and well-being, while the latter has primarily been promoting the education and uplifting of India's populations (Beckerlegge 2000). And although Vivekananda's Vedānta Society never became a mass movement, the Ramakrishna Mission is still greatly popular and influential in Bengal.

During the same general period in which all of the above figures lived and worked, there was another: born a *bhadralok*, powerfully intelligent, well-

11 Rambachan 1994. For a critical study of Vivekananda see Sil 1997. Regarding his movement see Beckerlegge 2006. For a discussion of the term Neo-Vedanta see Dasgupta 1999.

12 Vivekananda for example states that 'image-worship cannot directly give Mukti; it may be an indirect cause, a help on the way. Image-worship should not be condemned, for, with many, it prepares the mind for realization of the Advaita which alone makes man perfect.' (Vivekananda 2006: vol. 5, p. 316).

versed in Western thought, but representing a religious perspective that was in many ways out of step with the apparently progressive currents of his time. That individual, still little known despite the fact that his influence has become widespread, is Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī.

Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī and the *bhakti* renaissance in Bengal

Bhaktisiddhānta represented a medieval religious tradition that claimed to hark back to a seminal understanding of classical Indic thought. That tradition was Chaitanya Vaishnavism and that understanding was *bhakti*. Here it is important to once again note that among most of his *bhadralok* contemporaries the primary tendencies were towards non-dualism, nationalism, humanitarianism, egalitarianism, rationalism, social consciousness, and the use of religion as a conceptual and practical partner in the achievement of these aims. These individuals were in search of new religious and cultural identities that could domesticate the ideas of the West, creating reform movements that were competitive with the more traditional strands of classical and medieval Indic thought. Being one of these more traditional strands, and beset with a number of other 'unattractive' features, Chaitanya Vaishnavism was generally absent from their selection list.

As has been hinted at earlier, although in its original dress this tradition had a profound philosophical basis, over the years it had divided into three forms, none of which were very appealing to most of the Bengali intelligentsia: the first was its popularized form, which they considered to be sentimental, morally weak, licentious and mostly the religion of the ignorant and illiterate lower class; the second was its caste-oriented form, which they considered to be elitist, nepotistic, socially callous and far too old-fashioned and out of step with modern times; and the third was its mystical-ascetic form, which they considered to be too otherworldly. Given this, one might legitimately wonder what it was about this tradition that so attracted Bhaktisiddhānta, who was every bit as savvy as the rest. The answer is that it was largely due to the fact that first his father Bhaktivinoda (1834–1914) (perhaps the greatest influence in his life), and then he himself, became acquainted with the original medieval writings of Chaitanya's immediate and most significant followers, Rūpa, Sanātana, and Jīva Goswami. As a result, he concluded that all three contemporary forms were misrepresentations of what was a highly austere, philosophical, moral, disciplined and egalitarian tradition.

Eventually Bhaktisiddhānta came to embrace what he viewed as the original core of this tradition, and dedicated his adult life to the recovery and propagation of its teachings. He did this primarily through the establishment of a pan-Indian religious institution, the publication of newspapers and journals, the printing and distribution of classical and medieval texts, and the writing of original commentaries. Throughout his life he travelled widely about India, lecturing and initiating disciples, and he won the esteem of numerous important Indian and European figures. He was also a controversial and unconventional character who spoke out against such things as caste barriers, ordinary gender roles and sections of the Goswami elite that he found abusive. He introduced such innovations as the establishment of Vaishnava *saṁnyāsa* and the offering of *brāhmaṇa* initiation on the basis of qualification rather than birth. In pursuit of these aims he employed modern methods of institutional organization and modern forms of communication and transportation that caused a good many indigenous eyebrows to rise. His statements against the modern non-dualist Vedāntic mainstream, as well as his critique of religious involvement in political and humanitarian work, became controversial and made him a maverick even among the *bhadralok*.

The really interesting feature of all this, however, was the content of the teachings that Bhaktisiddhānta propagated, which were based on the theory and practice of a personalist, theistic *bhakti*. It stood in stark contrast to the non-dualism that had become so prevalent among most of his contemporaries, and was out of step with the progressive, highly politicised and philanthropically-oriented tendencies of his times. These teachings were deeply theistic, presenting the highest truth or 'Supreme Godhead' as personal rather than impersonal and with form rather than formless. In this regard he championed Vaishnavism's iconic practices, as well as the ultimate reality of the form, realm and activities of a Supreme Being. He did so not on the basis of popular sentimentalism and eroticism, but on the basis of a complex philosophical understanding that posed a direct challenge to the non-dualistic views of Vivekananda and others.

Through the work of the Gaudiya Math (the name of the institution that he founded), Bhaktisiddhānta's voice gradually gained prominence in India. Nonetheless, after his death in 1937 his movement largely disintegrated due to a crisis of succession that ended in schism, and it seemed as if his life and work would remain a mere footnote in the annals of religious history. Some thirty years later, however, a watershed event would propel his movement to unexpected heights, and rapidly spread his perspective on the teachings of Chaitanya throughout the world, making tens of thousands of non-Indian

followers along the way. A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami (1896–1977), a *bhadralok* who had been educated at the Scottish College in Calcutta that Vivekananda attended, received initiation by Bhaktisiddhānta in 1922. Upon the explicit request of his guru to present the teaching of Chaitanya *bhakti* to the West, he founded the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (popularly known as the Hare Krishna movement) in New York in 1966. Bhaktivedanta's goal was to introduce Chaitanyaite *bhakti* first in the United States and Canada, and then to Great Britain and other parts of the world—a venture that ultimately created an indigenous counterflow to the Christian missions that had provided his education in colonial Calcutta in the early twentieth century.

Conclusion

Any discussion of India from the point of view of the West must deal with the problem posed by the colonial past and the ways in which India was colonized, interpreted and constructed to fit into an imperialist agenda. The terms 'Hinduism' and 'religion', for example, are themselves quite problematic, since they are born of Western and Judeo-Christian thought, and may not reflect the complexity and diversity of Indic traditions well enough. A translation and transmission of terms and concepts from one cultural domain to another is required, but it is bound to be merely tentative and approximate, since a comprehension of the full meaning of words and concepts related to Indic religions presupposes an extensive grounding in the rich religious thought of India. John Darwin has therefore suggested, to cite an example, that 'European accounts of other cultures and peoples should no longer be treated as the "authorized version", however full or persuasive' (Darwin 2007: 14; see also Chakrabarty 2000).

To add to the complexity of the hermeneutical challenges of this discourse, Noel Salmond has pointed out a number of stereotypes specific to Indic religions common in the West, such as that India is highly iconic while the West is an-iconic, that Indian religions are focused on mystical absorption and metaphysical abstractions, while Western religion is ethical and rational. Other stereotypes are that India is otherworldly, whereas the West is this-worldly (Salmond 2004: 3–4). These perceptions wrongly assume not only that Indic religions have one essence and are monolithic, but also that there is an unbridgeable dichotomy between 'East' and 'West', an ontological difference that makes impossible any real cohesion and ultimate reciprocal understanding.

Bhaktisiddhānta lived on the border between the nineteenth and the twentieth century, between the black and the white towns of Calcutta, between India and the West, and between two world wars. His effort to search for and apply *bhakti* to the social, political and cultural crises of his time is important for grasping the vitality and dynamism of Indic religions in our time. It is also important for appreciating the struggle carried out by a growing Indian and Hindu middle class to bridge the gaps between East and West, and on the basis of indigenous culture produce new ideas for reciprocal cooperation, which in the case of Bhaktisiddhānta were related to the idea and practice of *bhakti*.

Vivekananda's non-dualism largely defined Hinduism both for India and for the West, and although that definition may yet remain fixed somewhere in the Western scholarly and popular psyche, the alternative of *bhakti* personalism presented by figures such as Bhaktisiddhānta, and its potential to problematize non-dualism, constitutes an important addition to our understanding of the history and philosophy of modern Hinduism.

Bibliography

Basu, Hena (ed.)

2009 *Vaisnava Periodical in Bengal (1856–1983)*. Kolkata: Basu Research and Documentation Service.

Beckerlegge, Gwilym

2000 *The Ramakrishna Mission: the Making of a Modern Hindu Movement*. Delhi & Oxford: Oxford University Press.

2006 *Swami Vivekananda's Legacy of Service: a Study of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bhattacharya, Tithi

2005 *The Sentinels of Culture: Class, Education, and the Colonial Intellectual in Bengal (1848–85)*. Delhi & Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bryant, Edwin

2003 *Krishna: the Beautiful Legend of God. Śrimad Bhagavata Purāna, Book X*. London: Penguin.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh

2000 *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Chatterjee, Bankim Chandra

1991 *Krishna-Charitra*. Calcutta: The M. P. Birla Foundation.

Damen, Frans L.

1983 *Crisis and Religious Renewal in the Brahma Samaj (1860–1884): a Docu-*

mentary Study of the Emergence of the "New Dispensation" under Keshab Chandra Sen. Leuven: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven.

Darwin, John

2007 *After Tamerlane: the Global History of Empire since 1405.* London: Allen Lane.

Dasgupta, R. K.

1999 *Swami Vivekananda's Neo-Vedānta.* Calcutta: Asiatic Society.

De Michelis, Elizabeth

2004 *A History of Modern Yoga: Patañjali and Western Esotericism.* London: Continuum.

Fuller, Jason D.

2009 Modern Hinduism and the Middle Class: beyond Reform and Revival in the Historiography of Colonial India. *The Journal of Hindu Studies* 2: 160–78. <http://jhs.oxfordjournals.org/content/2/2/160.full.pdf#page=1&view=FitH> (accessed on 8 September 2009).

Griffin, Zebina Flavius

1896 *India and Daily Life in Bengal.* Philadelphia & Boston: American Baptist Publication Society.

Harder, Hans

2001 *Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's Śrīmadbhagavadgītā: Translation and Analysis.* New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors.

Hatcher, Brian A.

2008 *Bourgeois Hinduism, or the Faith of the Modern Vedantists: Rare Discourses from Early Colonial Bengal.* New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hunter, William Wilson

1875 *A Statistical Account of Bengal.* Volume 1. London: Trübner.

Kipling, Rudyard

1890 *Departmental Ditties, Barrack-Room Ballads and Other Verses.* New York: United States Book Co.

Kopf, David

1979 *The Brahma Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, Tony Kevin Stewart & Edward C. Dimock

1999 *Caitanya caritāmṛta of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja: a Translation and Commentary.* Cambridge, MA: Dept. of Sanskrit and Indian Studies Harvard University.

Leonowens, Anna Harriette

1884 *Life and Travel in India: being Recollections of a Journey before the Days of Railroads.* Philadelphia: Porter & Coates.

Pal, Bipin Chandra

2002 *Europe Asks Who is Shree Krishna: Letters Written to a Christian Friend.* Calcutta: Classic Publication.

Radice, William

1998 *Swami Vivekananda and the Modernization of Hinduism.* Delhi & Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rambachan, Anantanand

1994 *The Limits of Scripture: Vivekananda's Reinterpretation of the Vedas*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Raychaudhuri, Tapan

2002 *Europe Reconsidered: Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth-century Bengal*. New Delhi & Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Robertson, Bruce Carlisle

1999 *Raja Rammohan Ray: the Father of Modern India*. Delhi & Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Roy, Rammohun

1820 *The Precepts of Jesus the Guide to Peace and Happiness, Extracted from the Books of the New Testament Ascribed to the Four Evangelists*. Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press.

Salmond, Noel A.

2004 *Hindu Iconoclasts: Rammohun Roy, Dayananda Sarasvati, and Nineteenth-century Polemics against Idolatry*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

Sardella, Ferdinando

2010 *Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati: the Context and Significance of a Modern Hindu Personalist*. PhD dissertation. Department of Literature, History of Ideas, and Religion, University of Gothenburg.

Schweig, Graham M.

2005 *Dance of Divine Love: the Rasa Lila of Krishna from the Bhagavata Purana*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Sharma, Arvind

2002 *Modern Hindu Thought: the Essential Texts*. Delhi & Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sil, Narashingha P.

1997 *Swami Vivekananda: a Reassessment*. Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press.

Smith, David

2003 *Hinduism and Modernity*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Tagore, Rabindranath, Tony K. Stewart & Chase Twichell

2003 *The Lover of God*. Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press.

Thomas, Frederic C.

1997 *Calcutta Poor: Elegies on Urban Poverty*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.

Townsend, Mary Evelyn & Walter Consuelo Langsam

1941 *European Colonial Expansion since 1871*. Chicago: J. B. Lippincott & Co.

Vivekananda, Swami

2006 *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*. Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama.

The rise and fall of the Pentecostals

The role and significance of the body in Pentecostal spirituality

The body has always been centrally important to Christianity. Michael Featherstone (1991a: 182) observes that prior to the twentieth century, Christians predominantly glorified the soul and suppressed the body. For close to two thousand years, in the pursuit of greater intimacy with God, the physical body has been ordered in particular ways during worship (e.g. kneeling during prayer), or disciplined and denied as part of daily religious practice (e.g. fasting, self-flagellation). Giuseppe Giordan (2009: 228) notes that Christianity has controlled the body 'through a complex system of rules, rules governing everything from sexuality to dreams, from food to desire, from work to emotions, from medicine to dress, from birth until death, including even the celebration of mourning'.

In the final century of the millennium, however, a discernible shift has taken place in popular religious practice away from ordered asceticism to an eager 'consumption' of the power of God, especially in the Pentecostal and charismatic churches. In Australia, the UK and Western Europe, Pentecostals are one of the few Protestant groups to have grown in the past two decades. Within this tradition the body is not subordinated to attain a higher spirituality, rather spiritual experiences are openly signified through the 'out-of-control' body. The body is the site where the 'power' of God is manifested *through* the believer (as is the case with speaking in tongues). With experiences of this kind the worshipper is overcome by the 'power' of God, rather than instigating the bodily experience themselves, as is the case with swaying during prayer, fasting or liturgical dancing.

This paper addresses the role and significance of the body in contemporary Pentecostalism. It begins with a description of the various body-centred spiritual experiences common in this tradition. Next, it considers the social context of the Pentecostal body, arguing that the premium and importance placed on outward bodily experiences is consistent with a broader societal focus on bodies and bodily appearance. Finally, it draws on in-depth inter-

view data with Pentecostals to illustrate the processes involved in coming to have an experience in which one's body becomes the highly visible locus of spirituality.

The body in Pentecostalism

The term 'Pentecostal' refers to an ever-increasing sub-group of Protestant denominations or independent churches who place a strong emphasis on the so-called 'gifts of the spirit', which include speaking in tongues, being slain in the Spirit, prophecy, visions and miraculous healing. The doctrine of being 'baptised in the spirit' is central to Pentecostal teaching.¹

It is widely agreed that the Pentecostal movement began with the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles in 1906 and spread across the US and then further afield. Worldwide, it is now among the fastest-growing movements within Christianity. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2006: 1) notes that 'The major strands of Pentecostalism now represent at least one quarter of all Christians . . . ranking second only to Catholicism in the number of followers.' Internationally, the Assemblies of God is the largest Pentecostal denomination. Well-known Pentecostal denominations active in Australia include the Assemblies of God, Christian Revival Crusade, Christian City Churches and the Vineyard churches. Worship in these churches is contemporary: the music is loud and modern, the preaching fast-paced and lively. Pentecostal churches tend to have a very functional appearance and there is little use of traditional religious imagery (e.g. stained glass, altars etc.).

Closely related to the Pentecostals is the charismatic movement. The term 'charismatic' applies to individuals and groups within larger mainstream denominations who are either favourably disposed towards the Pentecostal experiences or have these experiences themselves. In Australia and Europe, charismatic congregations, small groups and individuals can be found in the Church of England (Episcopalian), Catholic, Baptist, Lutheran and Churches of Christ denominations, amongst others. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2006: 1) observes that Pentecostal and charismatic groups are

1 Baptism in the Holy Spirit refers to a 'second blessing' or spiritual experience, following conversion, in which the believer is empowered by the Holy Spirit to enjoy a deeper and more profound Christian walk. According to Alan Black (1991: 107), Pentecostals see baptism in the Holy Spirit as 'distinct from, and usually later than the experience of being born again, and quite distinct from the experience of baptism in water'.

often referred to as 'renewalists' because of their common belief in the spiritually renewing gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Body-centred spiritual experiences are an integral part of the renewalist movement and are interpreted as evidence of 'God's power' manifest here on earth. The two main body-centred spiritual experiences found in the Pentecostal tradition are speaking in tongues and being 'slain in the spirit'. Speaking in tongues (also known by the technical name 'glossolalia') involves speaking in an unknown, yet realistic-sounding language of which the speaker has no previous knowledge. It consists of indecipherable strings of words and phrases which sound more language-like than simple 'gibberish.' William Samarin (1972: 2) defines it as 'a meaningless but phonologically structured human utterance believed by the speaker to be a real language but bearing no systematic resemblance to any natural language'. It is important to emphasize that the language spoken by a tongues speaker is not a known language. Before becoming a tongues speaker, a person has no prior knowledge of this language and will not develop any comprehension of what is being said as they continue to speak in tongues, though they will almost certainly become familiar with the sound of their language and use the same language as they continue the practice (see Singleton 2002).

Pentecostals and charismatics attribute an important personal religious value to tongues speaking. In her ethnographic research amongst American charismatic Catholics, Mary-Jo Neitz (1987) found that most practitioners believe tongues speaking edifies them in their relationship with God. Pentecostals and charismatics believe that speaking in tongues enables an individual to 'bypass' their mind and allow their 'spirit' to communicate with God in moments of prayer and devotion. It is thus useful in daily religious practice and is used either in private prayer or during services of worship. (For a full discussion see Singleton 2002.)

Speaking in tongues is one example of a spiritual experience manifested through the body. Other notable experiences include shaking and falling. Shaking and falling customarily take place during worship services during which the faithful expect an experience of the Holy Spirit. A person might simply shake but not fall, fall over in dramatic fashion, or fall quietly to the floor. In each case, the cause of the falling or shaking is attributed to the 'power' of the Holy Spirit. There is no convenient, universally shared catchphrase available to describe the shaking experience, but the falling experience is commonly referred to as being 'slain in the Spirit', 'going under the power' or 'resting in the Spirit' (Poloma & Pendleton 1989: 421). The phrase 'carpet time' has also become popular in the 1990s. The phrase 'slain in the Spirit' is

the arguably the most common expression used in Pentecostal churches, at least in Australia. Many Pentecostal churches routinely have moments in the service where congregants may speak in tongues or are invited to the front of the church to experience 'God's power' and so may be slain in the spirit.

Although dramatic bodily manifestations of the Holy Spirit are the dominant type of spiritual experience in the late twentieth century amongst Pentecostals and charismatics, experiences of shaking and falling are not new in the Christian tradition. They have featured prominently in the Christian revivals—a time of organised spiritual awakening and fervour—that have erupted periodically since the Enlightenment. An Anglican minister, John Wesley, was instrumental in facilitating a revival that began in the late 1730s, sweeping across England and Ireland. During many of Wesley's revival meetings his followers had fits and convulsions, whilst others shook and fell (Johnson 1976: 366). Wesley wrote in his Journal:

About three in the morning, as we were continuing instant in prayer, the power of God came mightily upon us, insomuch that many cried out for exceeding joy and many fell to the ground (cited in Kent 1995: 93).

About the same time in the United States, a revival known as the Great Awakening was also characterised by bodily manifestations of the Holy Spirit (see Chevreau 1994). By the mid-twentieth century, however, these kinds of bodily experiences are found almost exclusively within the Pentecostal and charismatic churches.

Throughout the twentieth century, there have been a number of 'revivals' that have taken place within the Pentecostal and charismatic movement, all of which are characterised by dramatic body-centred experiences. The most well-known recent example is the Toronto Blessing of the mid-1990s.² This revival movement originated at the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship in Toronto, Canada, in the winter of 1994 and spread through a number of countries, including Australia. By September 1995, six hundred thousand people had visited the Toronto church to participate in the revival, whilst many more experienced the Blessing at their home church, after it was 'brought back' by those who had been to Toronto. Martin Percy (1998: 284) describes the Toronto Blessing as 'the name of a particular *experience* rather than of a local-

2 For accounts of various aspects of the Toronto Blessing, see Chevreau 1994, Porter & Richter 1995, Poloma 1996, 1997, 1998, Lyon 1998 and Percy 1998.

ity'. Chevreau describes some of the bodily manifestations associated with the Blessing:

We saw at the Airport meetings – uncontrollable laughter and inconsolable weeping; violent shaking and falling down; people waving their arms around, in windmill-like motions, or vigorous judo like chopping with their forearms (Chevreau 1994: 13).

According to Chevreau (1994: 12), reporting on the Airport Fellowship, 'people were coming under an anointing so powerful it left them drunk in the Spirit. . . they were falling about, laughing hysterically'. In one case a woman was 'unable to walk a straight line, certainly unfit to drive, or to host the guests that came for dinner the next evening' (Chevreau 1994: 13). Having the appearance and affectations of drunkenness is one example of bodily disinhibition associated with the Blessing. Philip Richter (1995: 9) reports that 'people occasionally start running energetically around the church, jogging on the spot, bouncing up and down as if they are on a pogo stick, even pretending to be racing cars'.

The most prominent experiences encountered as part of this revival are 'holy laughter' (uncontrollable fits of mirth) and being slain in the spirit. Below is an account from someone who was slain in the Spirit during this revival:

As they prayed, I started to shake and eventually fell to the floor where I continued to shake and jerk for hours. From that time onward, the shaking got stronger and would last longer. After several days, I began jerking violently without anyone praying for me, as soon as the worship started. (Poloma 1996: 14.)

Similar manifestations were reported at a number of churches throughout Australia, in both rural and urban areas, after the Blessing had been 'brought' to Australia by those who had experienced it in Toronto.

Today, Pentecostal and other charismatic Christians are the principal proponents and practitioners of these outward bodily experiences of God, whether it be in the context of a revival like the Toronto Blessing, or during a weekly church service. These bodily encounters are central to the Pentecostal and charismatic religious experience. In the next section I consider the Pentecostal body in relation to the wider socio-cultural context and speculate as to why outward bodily experiences are so important in this growing strand of Christianity.

The Pentecostal body in social context

The Pentecostal and charismatic churches are often described as being 'late modern' in character because of their favouring of popular culture elements in worship and the individualised kind of faith they espouse (the belief that God is interested in the mundane and intimate aspects of a person's life). The particular body emphasis found in this movement also appears to be highly late modern in character. The premium and importance placed on the outward bodily spiritual experiences reflects the consumerist and body-oriented tendencies of advanced capitalist societies.

Most contemporary social theorists agree that contemporary Western society, having moved beyond the nascent capitalism of the industrialising era, is a consumer society (see Featherstone, Hepworth & Turner 1991, Featherstone 1991a, Bocoock 1993). The *primary* orientation of individuals in a consumer society is towards consuming goods rather than producing them. In addition, a consumer society is characterised by the prodigious expansion of capital into previously uncommodified areas (Jameson 1991: 36). The transition to a consumer society came about as a consequence of improved production techniques and the manufacture of a new range of goods, allied to increases in disposable income. In like manner, the producers and sellers of goods use extensive marketing and advertising to encourage individuals to increase their consuming habits—the selling of a lifestyle in which the acquisition and ownership of various goods is an important part.

The body is especially important in consumer society. It is no longer viewed as a resource for the production line, as it was in industrial times. Instead, according to Featherstone (1991b: 170), consumer society emphasises 'pleasurable' activities for individuals to pursue and, more often than not, posits the body as the *bearer* of these pleasure and desire-oriented activities—eating out, exercise, internet sex, tanning salons. Furthermore, the visual media presents a constant display of highly stylised, yet potentially attainable, body images and types (Featherstone 1991b: 170). A new and proliferating array of goods are readily available for bodily enhancement in accord with the stylised representations offered in the visual media (Featherstone 1991b: 170).

In consumer culture, moreover, the outward 'look' of the body is increasingly important. In their sociological analysis of bodies within contemporary society, both Michael Featherstone (1991a, 1991b) and Bryan Turner (1992) argue that the body can be thought of as having two categories. Featherstone identifies these categories as 'the inner and outer body', whilst Turner describes

them as the ‘internal and the external body’, though both are describing the same thing. Concerns with health and the optimum functioning of the body are centralised on the inner body, whilst the appearance and movement of the body within social space is an outer body concern (Featherstone 1991b: 171). Featherstone suggests that within consumer culture, the inner and outer body are, more than ever before, conjoined—one’s outward appearance is seen and understood to be an expression of the inner self (Featherstone 1991b: 171). The inner body is maintained so as to enhance the appearance of the outer body, whilst the outward appearance *ostensibly signifies the inward state*.

Amid this broader social and cultural shift it is of no surprise that the body has become the clearly visible and primary bearer of a person’s spirituality, and that these experiences are both central and conspicuous in the Pentecostal and charismatic movement. By way of illustration, I mentioned above that in a consumer society the inner and outer body are increasingly seen to be conjoined, with the outer body signifying the inner state. In the case of the Toronto Blessing and being slain in the Spirit, the inner body is infilled with the presence of God, but this is manifested outwardly—to signify the higher status of an individual’s spirituality. An immanent God enters the inner body through the Holy Spirit and yet is clearly manifested in the outward bodily actions of the believer.

Furthermore, the Pentecostal preference for these experiences also reflects broader advanced capitalist trends in which goods (in this case, experiences) are increasingly consumed by individuals for personal pleasure and stimulation. This orientation towards the body may help explain the particular appeal of these churches (even in developing nations, whose peoples often want to take on the attributes of the ‘successful’ west). It is a form of religious expression consistent with the prevailing themes of the post-industrial age.

In making these claims, I am not suggesting that changes in advanced capitalism have *produced* the bodily manifestations central to contemporary Pentecostalism, slipping into what David Lyon (1998: 58) describes as ‘modernist-style reductionism’. Various religious groups have experienced ‘ecstatic’ spiritual experiences centred on the body long before the onset of advanced capitalism (since the beginning of Christianity in fact). However, the fact that bodily experiences are more important and central to a growing branch of Christianity *mirrors* broader societal changes in relation to the body. The Toronto Blessing and slain in the Spirit experiences are late-modern incarnations of previously witnessed experiences, and thus have new, contemporary meanings that make most sense when seen in their current cultural context—societies interested in a person’s outward appearance. I am arguing here that

spiritual experiences ought not to be considered apart from the contemporary cultural milieu in which they take place, for, as Anthony Synnott (1993: 36) argues in relation to the body, each new age seems to create and reconstruct the body in its own image and likeness.

Experiencing the Pentecostal body

As noted above, in the Pentecostal movement, the body becomes the conduit through which an encounter of an otherworldly kind is experienced and manifested—the body is the ‘setting for the drama’ (Lyon 1998). That said, body-centred experiences like being slain in the Spirit or speaking in tongues, while normative for Pentecostal churches, are hardly regular social experiences. Rather, by secular standards, they are quite bizarre. The person having the first-time experience of tongues or being slain is encountering something both desirable and unusual—and most importantly, given that it is centred on the body—highly visible.

So what is it like to have such an experience—one’s body becoming the ‘setting for the drama?’ In the next part of the paper I examine what it is like to have a Pentecostal body-centred experience. I will consider narratives told by two people having their first-time experience of being ‘slain in the spirit’. The two stories were told to me during a wider study of the spiritual experiences of Australian university students, during which I collected more than 45 stories about Pentecostal experiences such as being slain in the spirit, experiencing a miraculous healing, encountering evil or speaking in tongues (see Singleton 2001a, 2001b, 2002).

Why stories? Arguably, the best way to understand personal experiences is through examining the stories people tell about themselves. Telling stories assists individuals to engage in sense-making about their experiences, to order events in a coherent fashion, relate events to other events and attribute causality (Riessman 1993, Alasuutari 1995, Ewick & Silbey 1995). To assist with the analysis and discussion, each story discussed in this paper has been divided into small, numbered segments called ‘events’ (see Singleton 2001a, 2002). These are presented in the chronological sequence in which they were told.

The first slain in the Spirit story was told by a 20-year-old woman called Charlotte Heath.³ She was slain in the Spirit during a teaching and worship session on a church camp. Her story is a good account of how her body *became* the setting for drama.

Paraphrase of a story told by Charlotte Heath

1. Well, we had just finished watching a video. It was called . . . something to do with the Holy Spirit, I don't know it's video number eight of the charismatic course.
2. We were all sitting there in this wooden hut [on the camp].
3. Jamie [a pastor] stood up and says 'now I'd just like you to stand up and invite the Holy Spirit to come into our presence'.
4. So we stood there and waited for what seemed like eternity.
5. I started to hear people's breath whistling through their noses and a bit of thumping going on, like somebody collapsing.
6. I had my hand in my pocket going I don't really want to let go just yet.
7. I decided, well, OK, I'll, my hand can come up a bit now and I slowly raised it and relaxed everything.
8. I hear Jamie saying, 'would you like us to pray with you?'.
9. So I hear two people behind me, in each ear and it's a man speaking in tongues.
10. The lady on the left started talking in English and she somehow had the ability to know how to say all the right things that pushed all the right buttons.
11. I started to rock with my feet, forwards and backwards, just a little bit.
12. Eventually, it was the same tempo but the swing got a lot bigger and it was like I was really teetering on the edge of falling over.
13. But I still hang on and there was like resistance there; I have got to preserve my dignity.
14. All I remember there was this great battle in my head and in my heart. Are you ready to let go are you ready to trust God to let go of everything that you'll come to me yourself?
15. For the first ten to fifteen minutes it was no, I'm not ready, it's too scary.
16. Then there was sort of this feeling, no its OK, it will be all right, you just have to trust me kind of thing.

3 All interviewees have been assigned a pseudonym and other potentially identifiable details have been altered.

17. My picture of what was going on inside at that time would be here I am standing at the edge of a cliff.
18. Suddenly I am being led in a path and I am remembering everything that was painful in my life.
19. I am remembering all the pain and I start crying and its like, I'm crying in a different way from what I usually do, usually I don't cry at all, but this is like crying from the inside.
20. They [the people praying] kept saying, 'more power, more power'.
21. It was a very gradual thing and eventually you can just realise that it is so much more comfortable to be on the floor because it's so overwhelming and I lay on the floor and I was still sobbing.
22. I was laying down on the floor and I was recovering from this amazing, overwhelming experience.
23. That day I looked around afterwards and saw the different ways in which the Spirit touches people.
24. Some people were just, oomph, fell on the floor and just lay there.
25. Some people just laughed like hyenas and couldn't stop and it was very, very funny to watch 'cos like you know that they had no control over it.
26. There was this other guy and he lay on the floor and it looked like he was getting electric shocks to his heart.

Charlotte's slain in the Spirit story describes the loosening of the rational restraint which prevented her from fully experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit, manifested in the form of a falling experience. Within contemporary Christianity the body is the setting for drama—both 'overcome' by God and the object of attention from God's subjects. Not surprisingly, Charlotte's narrative bears witness to this particular social experience of embodiment. The Pentecostal body—unrestrained, exuberant, released to worship and colonised by God—is established in the opening few events (3 & 5) as the normative body for the social context in which she found herself. As the events unfold, Charlotte describes how she brought her body into conformity with this norm.

Charlotte asserts that whilst others around her readily fell in the Spirit (event 5), she did not accede unequivocally, and much of the 'middle' section of the narrative is devoted to her describing the gentle release of her bodily control. She suggests in event five that 'I had my hand in my pocket going I don't really want to let go just yet.' At this point in the narrative, Charlotte employs a discourse of reason to represent herself as both rational and reason-

able, not given to outrageous displays of unusual bodily behaviour. Collapsing to the floor in a state of religious ecstasy is not an appropriate form of religious expression for many church participants.

By emphasising her rationality, yet also claiming to fall in the Spirit, Charlotte is placed in the position of needing to demonstrate why she fell. In event 9 Charlotte says: 'the lady on the left started talking in English [rather than tongues] and she somehow had the ability to know how to say all the right things that pushed all the right buttons.' Suddenly, being slain in the Spirit is not as irrational as it first seemed. The lady saying the 'things that pushed all the right buttons' makes the possibility of falling more acceptable. Responding to the woman's ministrations, Charlotte starts to rock and sway and eventually falls (events 11–12). She rhetorically constructs collapsing to the ground as a more measured accession to the Holy Spirit, rather than a wild, out of control action: 'it was a very gradual thing and eventually you can just realise that it is so much more comfortable to be on the floor because it's so overwhelming and I lay on the floor and I was still sobbing' (event 21). Despite variously casting herself as resistant and reasoned, at the point of closure (designated here as events 23 to 26), Charlotte's body has become the setting for drama.

Earlier in the paper I described the bodily manifestations associated with the Toronto Blessing, a revival in the mid-1990s. This charismatic revival—like other revivals—saw thousands of people being slain in the Spirit. The next story is about a person experiencing the Blessing at her home church in Australia (pastors would visit Toronto, experience the Blessing there, then return to their local church and hold revival meetings. At these meetings, the Blessing phenomena—people roaring like lions, laughing for hours and hours, being slain in the Spirit—would appear). This Toronto Blessing story was told by a 20-year-old woman called Linda Ford. Her Toronto Blessing experience took place at a suburban church in her city. The following quote from Phillip Ashton, describes a typical Toronto Blessing meeting at this church:

The agenda for the meetings was kept very simple. Some worship, a short teaching or encouraging word, some testimony from folk who had been touched by God previously, some practical issues were addressed (such as falling and not falling, and that people would not be pushed by the prayers, etc.), and then we went into a time of prayer with individuals. (Ashton 1994: 2).

At this point in the service people received the Blessing. Here is Linda's story:

Paraphrase of a Toronto Blessing story told by Linda Ford

1. I just went one Wednesday night to Dingley [the church where the Blessing meetings were being held].
2. It was a very sort of charismatic service, very over the top, people jumping around and clapping their hands and singing all these wonderfully charismatic songs.
3. After the service they cleared all the chairs away.
4. During the service I had sort of been feeling, I really don't want to stay here, I want to get out, it's too you know, way too over the top for me.
5. But we decided to stay anyway because we'd come to see what'd happen so.
6. So we were standing there looking at all these people who are dropping to the ground around us.
7. I was sort of freaking out.
8. This guy just came up to me and goes, 'Do you want to be prayed for?' and I said, oh, no, I don't think so.
9. I said to my companion, 'What should I do, what should I do?' And he goes, well this is what you came for, why don't you just go and see what happens.
10. So the next person who came along asked me and I said yes.
11. They just stood one on either side of me.
12. They just said, you know, let the Holy Spirit come and give Linda your light and Holy Spirit.
13. It wasn't hypnotic but it was very sort of calming.
14. After a while I could only hear the two voices I had my eyes closed, and I couldn't hear the guy behind me and I couldn't hear anyone else and I just felt so relaxed, like I was going to faint.
15. I just felt like I was going to collapse. I could feel the muscles in my legs twitching, trying to keep me standing upright.
16. I just felt relaxed and I just let go and I fell backwards onto the floor.
17. I just felt this heat go down from sort of like my ears right down my back, just right down to the bottom of my spine.
18. I just lay there for quite a while and listened to what was going on around me and I just felt this intense heat that was just really strange.
19. I had this heat just going all the way down my back, so I just lay there for about ten minutes and my companion came over.

20. I didn't lose consciousness, I didn't faint, I didn't pass out, I didn't, you know, I wasn't hypnotised.

The theme of the body becoming the setting for the drama is central to this story. At the beginning, Linda identifies the charismatic nature of the service (event 2) and, based on what the audience knows about both charismatics and the happenings at Dingley, the type of body sanctioned in this context is the charismatic, Toronto Blessing body—uninhibited, unrestrained and a site 'colonised' by the power of God. In the opening sequence of events, Linda makes it abundantly clear that her preference for religious experience is quite at odds with the experiences taking place at Dingley (events 4, 7, 8). Through the middle of her narrative, Linda describes the process of being slain in the Spirit. Like Charlotte, she initially represents herself as a 'reasonable' evangelical Christian, but through sequencing the events she signifies a gradual acceptance of the possibility of having an ecstatic experience—which comes to pass (event 16). The story unequivocally represents a process in which her body becomes the setting for drama.

Each of these stories has described the process of being slain in the Spirit. For the two storytellers, this experience involved uncertainty and resistance before finally falling. Earlier, I noted that while normative for Pentecostal churches, being slain in the Spirit is not a regular social experience. These stories serve to illustrate that the person having such experiences may have to negotiate many personal issues—resistance, embarrassment, uncertainty—when the body is overcome by the presence of God. These stories are not necessarily typical, rather, they are simply reflective of how it might be for some. For others the experience of being slain may be straightforward, or wilder, or more ecstatic. Most importantly, these stories show how central the body is to the expression of Pentecostal spirituality. The physical body—not the mind—is the locus for the higher experience of God in the believer's life. Pentecostal spirituality is truly embodied.

Producing the Pentecostal body

These stories also illustrate the social processes involved in having such experiences. In becoming the setting for drama, the storytellers reported that they were encouraged by others to bring their bodies into conformity with a socially acceptable Pentecostal and charismatic standard. Put another way,

their bodies were subject to processes of normalisation and forms of institutional control.

In making such a declaration, I assert that bodies can be and are shaped through social processes, rather than existing as organic, taken-for-granted objects. To substantiate this claim, an explication of contemporary social theory concerning the body is necessary. Understanding, mapping and theorising the relationship between the body and society is an important area of inquiry in recent sociological theory (see Frank 1991, Shilling 1993, Synnott 1993, Turner 1992). Historically, the body has been viewed as 'naturalistic'—an organic reality whose experiences are the *a priori* of social representation or inscription (Turner 1992: 61). The body, according to this 'naturalistic' formulation, is foundational to social processes and experience. Chris Shilling (1993: 41) argues that 'naturalistic views hold that the [natural] capabilities and constraints of the human body define individuals, and generate the social, political and economic relations which characterise national and international patterns of living.' Naturalistic conceptions of the body have enjoyed widespread theoretical and popular acceptance over the past two hundred years.

Social theorists in recent years, however, have challenged the conventional notion of the biological body as the exclusive determinant of social experience. Encompassing a number of theoretical positions, these views may be classified under the rubric of 'social constructionism' (see Shilling 1993, Turner 1992, Frank 1998). Broadly speaking, in social constructionist formulations, the body is conceived not 'as something neutral and natural, but as socially (re)produced and inscribed according to specific practices and discourses' (Cranny-Francis 1995: 19). The body is understood to be subject to various forms and processes of restraint, control, inscription and normalisation, effected and experienced discursively and materially, which 'produces' the experience of embodiment. In the words of Shilling (1993: 70), 'the body is shaped, constrained and even invented by society'. In emphasising the socially constructed nature of the body, I do not wish to re-establish a binary between constructionist and anti-constructionist positions, by discounting the effect of biology (or even spirituality). Turner (1992: 17) negotiates a useful path when he suggests that the 'body is simultaneously, conjointly and concurrently socially constructed and organically founded'.

Social constructionists argue that the body is not only shaped through social processes, but in like manner, the body and bodily processes are the 'object of interest from others' (Radley 1995: 3), including various social institutions. The work of Michel Foucault (1977) is seminal in providing a

framework for comprehending the body as an object controlled by social institutions. According to Foucault, a new modality of power emerged in the late seventeenth century, allied to the onset of capitalism in Western society. As a consequence, the body became a target of power in new and different ways. Foucault describes this new type of power as ‘disciplinary power’. Foucault (1977: 215) reasons that disciplinary power ‘should be identified neither with an institution nor with an apparatus; it is a type of power, a modality for its exercise . . . a technology’. Because disciplinary power consists of a series of methods and techniques, any institution can put these to use. The new modality of power centred around the production of docile bodies: ‘the organisation, disciplining and subjection of the human body in such a way as to provide a submissive and productive and trained source of labour power’ (McNay 1994: 92). In his work *Discipline and Punish* (1977) Foucault describes the ‘disciplinary methods’ through which a docile body is produced. These methods include controlling the spatial distribution of individuals, regulating their activities, organising training and integrating the body into a system. These techniques allow the body to be normalised (McNay 1994: 94). Normalisation produces a person whose behaviour, experience and identity is ‘normal’ for a particular social context. Foucault (1977: 184) suggests that ‘normalisation became one of the great instruments of *power* at the end of the classical age’, employed by institutions such as the church, army and schools to produce docile subjects.

Foucault’s analysis of disciplinary practices and processes of normalisation is primarily concerned with understanding how the docile body was utilised by a nascent capitalist society. Western society, however, has moved to the different phase of advanced capitalism. The body required by advanced capitalist society is qualitatively different to the one required by capitalist society. According to Turner (1992: 21) the body required in late capitalism ceases to be the productive body—the human body is no longer primarily conceived as the bearer of labour power. The status, use and function of the body has changed. Social institutions, however, remain fundamentally concerned with regulating and governing bodily processes, not so much restraining and suppressing the body, rather, governing the normative appearance of the body. Turner (1991: 117) explains: ‘the exterior body is the medium through which feelings and emotions are expressed, but these expressions have to assume a socially acceptable form, if they are not to disrupt the normal flow of interpersonal actions. The exterior body problem is not one of restraint, but of normative representation.’

Upon examination, being slain in the Spirit appears to refute any argument about social control and regulation with respect to the Pentecostal religious body. Experiences of being slain in the Spirit and the Toronto Blessing are represented within Pentecostal circles as unmediated experiences of God—the body is ‘consumed’ or ‘overcome’ by a power external to the self. Do these experiences elide human forms of corporeal control and are recipients free from processes of normalisation? No matter what the genesis and cause of the experience may be, the social organisation of being slain in the Spirit is firmly entrenched in processes of regulation and governance to produce a body which is ‘normal’ according to certain standards. As the setting for drama and the locus for spirituality, the fallen, ecstatic body is the preferred body in the Pentecostal or charismatic context and various institutional processes are geared towards achieving this ‘normal’ body. The two narratives reviewed above provide ample evidence to substantiate this claim. Each of the narrators mentioned visiting special places where they could encounter these experiences—church services, revival meetings—and how they were assisted by church representatives to fall or shake. Turner (1992: 180) suggests that Foucault’s work focuses on how ‘active, unrestrained bodies were thus rendered “docile” through disciplinary methods’. Being slain in the Spirit can instead be refigured as restrained bodies becoming unrestrained whilst still conforming to a normative standard.

Conclusion

This paper began by highlighting the prominence of bodily-oriented spiritual experiences in the Pentecostal church. No longer restrained and ordered, the contemporary Christian body is exuberant, released to worship and be overcome by God. Being slain in the Spirit is the most prominent example of this shift in contemporary spirituality. I also observed what it is like to have such an experience, and examined the religious body in relation to wider the contemporary social context. The Pentecostal emphasis on bodily experiences is consistent with the late modern interest in the outward appearance of the body. I also argued that the Pentecostal body, despite claims to the contrary, is not free but colonised, inscribed and regulated as much as it is spiritual.

References

Alasuutari, Pertti

1995 *Researching Culture: Qualitative Method and Cultural Studies*. London: Sage.

Ashton, Phillip

1994 The Blessing is Spreading. *Spirit Life* 44: 2.

Black, Alan

1991 Australian Pentecostalism in Comparative Perspective. In: Alan Black (ed.), *Religion in Australia*; pp. 106–20. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.

Bocock, Robert

1993 *Consumption*. London: Routledge.

Chevreau, Guy

1994 *Catch the Fire: The Toronto Blessing*. London: Marshall Pickering.

Cranny-Francis, Anne

1995 *The Body in the Text*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.

Ewick, Patricia & Susan Silbey

1995 Subversive Stories and Hegemonic Tales: Toward a Sociology of Narrative. *Law and Society Review* 29 (2): 197–226.

Featherstone, Michael

1991a *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*. London: Sage.

1991b The Body in Consumer Society. In: Michael Featherstone, Michael Hepworth & Bryan Turner (eds), *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory*; pp. 170–98. London: Sage.

Featherstone, Michael, Michael Hepworth & Bryan Turner (eds)

1991 *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory*. London: Sage.

Foucault, Michel

1977 *Discipline and Punish*. London: Allen Lane.

Frank, Arthur

1991 For a Sociology of the Body: an Analytical Review. In: Michael Featherstone, Michael Hepworth & Bryan Turner (eds), *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory*; pp. 36–102. London: Sage.

1998 How Images Shape Bodies. *Body and Society* 4 (1): 101–12.

Giordan, Giuseppe

2009 The Body between Religion and Spirituality. *Social Compass* 56: 226–36.

Jameson, Frederic

1991 *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. London: Verso.

Johnson, Paul

1976 *A History of Christianity*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Kent, John

1995 Have We Been Here Before? In: Stanley Porter & Philip Richter (eds), *The Toronto Blessing – or is it?* pp. 82–95. London: Longman and Todd.

Lyon, David

- 1998 Wheels within Wheels: Globalization and Contemporary Religion. In: Mark Hutchinson & Olga Kalu (eds), *A Global Faith: Essays on Evangelicalism and Globalization*; pp. 47–68. Sydney: Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity.

McNay, Lois

- 1994 *Foucault: A Critical Introduction*. London: Polity Press.

Neitz, Mary-Jo

- 1987 *Charisma and Community*. Oxford: Transaction Books.

Percy, Martin

- 1998 The Morphology of the Pilgrimage in the Toronto Blessing. *Religion* 28: 281–8.

Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life

- 2006 *Spirit and Power: A 10-Country Survey of Pentecostals*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.

Poloma, Margaret

- 1996 *By Their Fruits. . . : A Sociological Assessment of the Toronto Blessing*. Wiltshire: Terra Nova.
- 1997 The Toronto Blessing: Charisma, Institutionalisation, and Revival. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36 (2): 257–71.
- 1998 The Toronto Blessing: A Holistic Model of Healing. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37 (2): 257–72.

Poloma, Margaret & B. Pendleton

- 1989 Religious Experiences, Evangelism and Institutional Growth within the Assemblies of God. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 28 (4): 415–31.

Porter, Stanley & Philip Richter (eds)

- 1995 *The Toronto Blessing – or is it?* London: Longman and Todd.

Radley, Alan

- 1995 The Illusory Body and Social Constructionist Theory. *Body and Society* 1 (2): 3–23.

Richter, Philip

- 1995 God is not a Gentleman: the Sociology of the Toronto Blessing. In: Stanley Porter & Philip Richter (eds), *The Toronto Blessing – or is it?* pp. 5–37. London: Longman and Todd.

Riessman, Catherine

- 1993 *Narrative Analysis*. Newbury Park: Sage.

Samarin, William

- 1972 *Tongues of Men and Angels*. New York: Macmillan.

Shilling, Chris

- 1993 *The Body and Social Theory*. London: Sage.

Singleton, Andrew

- 2001a No Sympathy for the Devil: Narratives about Evil. *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 16 (2): 177–91.

2001b Your Faith Has Made You Well: The Role of Storytelling in the Experience of Miraculous Healing. *Review of Religious Research* 43 (2): 121–38.

2002 The Importance of Narrative in Negotiating Otherworldly Experiences: The Case of Speaking in Tongues. *Narrative Inquiry* 12 (2): 353–75.

Synnott, Anthony

1992 Tomb, Temple, Machine and Self. *British Journal of Sociology* 43 (1): 9–110.

1993 *The Body Social: Symbolism, Self and Society*. London: Routledge.

Turner, Bryan

1991 Recent Developments in the Theory of the Body. In: Michael Featherstone, Michael Hepworth & Bryan Turner (eds), *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory*; pp. 1–36. London: Sage.

1992 *Regulating Bodies*. London: Routledge.

SOFIA SJÖ

Struggling bodies and body struggles

Explorations of body and religion in contemporary Nordic film

Introduction

The body plays a major part in society and culture. Bodies are not just all around us—as real bodies or imagined ones, in advertisements and magazines articles, in films and on TV, encouraging us to focus on our own bodies in turn—the body is also nowadays considered to matter in a partially new way and constitute a valuable and central area of research. Many academics have realized the limitations of previous studies that denied or ignored the body, and have proclaimed the need to take bodies seriously (Shilling 2005). Although the focus on the body in culture and media is far from always something unproblematic, it is clear that the body cannot be ignored. This is true within the field of religion as well.

The question in the minds of more and more scholars of religion is; what we can learn from bodies about religion (Coakley 1997). Other questions that have inspired research are; how have religious attitudes to the body changed, what has caused the change and where do religious individuals today find inspiration for their views on the body (Griffith 2004)? In search of answers to these questions an increasing number of scholars are turning to popular culture and the media—two related areas that play an important part in shaping religion today (Hoover 2006) and attitudes to the body (Wykes & Gunter 2005)—with a growing number of studies focusing on film: a medium that has always been about bodies. This article wishes to add to this specific area of research.

In this study the focus will be on representations of the body and religion in Nordic film. The aim of the article is to illustrate the kinds of representations of religion and the body that can be found in contemporary Nordic films, demonstrate how these representations relate to religion, the body and film more generally, and explore what perceptions of and attitudes to the body and religion the representations suggest. I begin the analysis with an in-

roduction to religion and film studies, religion in Nordic film and the themes and films chosen for this study. After this I will present a short overview of earlier studies dealing with the body, film, and religion, before I delve into the issue of the body and religion in Nordic film. I conclude by reflecting on the more over-arching ideas and attitudes that the material can be argued to point to and the possible changes and challenges the films express.

Religion, film, and the Nordic context

Bodies are, as already stated, and as will be seen in more detail below, essential to film, but why study religion and film and why concentrate on Nordic film? Over the last 10–15 years religion and film have quickly developed into a many faceted area of research. While the editors of *Screening the Sacred: Religion, Myth, and Ideology in Popular American Film* in 1995 could rightly claim that ‘scholars engaged in . . . film criticism have almost nothing to say about religion . . . And scholars who study religion have almost nothing to say about Hollywood film’ (Martin & Ostwalt 1995: 2), today the circumstances are remarkably different. A growing number of scholars have recognized the need to look to popular culture for an understanding of religion. Popular cultural forms such as film can, for example, as Bruce David Forbes and Jeffrey H. Mahan put it, help us to ‘learn more about widespread perceptions of religion and the role religion plays in the everyday lives of people’. An analysis of popular culture can furthermore ‘provide insights about how religions change and are changed by the cultures that surround them’ (Forbes & Mahan 2005: 2).

There are, however, many films that could be analyzed when discussing religion and the body. My motives for concentrating on contemporary Nordic film are multiple. Firstly, I am personally interested in religion in a Nordic context and Nordic film is therefore a natural area of research. Secondly, a lot has happened in Nordic film lately and the both national and international success of many Nordic films makes these films worthy of attention from a more international perspective as well (Nestingen & Elkington 2005). Thirdly, although religion is perhaps not a major theme in Nordic film, it is a subject that has been central in many successful films of late. As Arní Svanur Danielsson has shown we can find many and varying pastors in very different kinds of Nordic films (Danielsson 2009). We can also, as I have illustrated elsewhere, see how the interest in saviours and salvation that is so common in

American film and often connected to religious themes can be argued to be alive and well in many Nordic productions as well (Sjö 2010).

In one short article there is naturally not room to explore every contemporary Nordic film and their possible representations and conceptions of religion and the body. Instead I have chosen to focus on six films that I think well illustrate how religion and the body is often treated in contemporary Nordic film. These films are: *To verdener* (Worlds Apart, 2008), *Kielletty hedelmä* (Forbidden Fruit, 2009), *Adams æbler* (Adam's Apples, 2005), *Sauna* (Sauna, 2008), *Riisuttu mies* (Man Exposed, 2006) and *Så som i himmelen* (As It is in Heaven, 2004). In these films I have, using content analysis, identified three recurring ways of representing religion and the body. I have called these *body dilemmas*, *body salvation/redemption* and *body and spirit*. I shall look more closely at the films and these themes shortly, but first let me explore some previous studies on film, religion, and the body that can better help frame the themes and films dealt with here.

Religion, the body, and film—an overview

The body in film

Films are in many ways about bodies. In other words, films very often deal with subjects in a bodily way and tell their stories with and through bodies. However, some genres are more obviously about bodies than others. Pornography, obviously, puts both the body on screen and the body of the viewer at the centre. But bodies are also important in, for example, horror. In *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (1992) Carol J. Clover has discussed the (usually female) bodies that we see being tortured and maimed in horror films and the complex needs these bodies fulfil for the viewers and the gender structures in our society that they are connected to. Of the films we are analyzing here, one, *Sauna*, is a horror film. This makes Clover's and other studies on horror film of interest. Will we find the same need to torture female bodies or present the feminine and the *other* as monstrous in this film?

Several feminist film studies have fairly naturally explored the female body on film. Female characters on film often become their bodies. Yvonne Tasker has pointed to the need to sexualize women and focus on their bodies. 'Hollywood representation is,' as she puts it 'characterized by an insistent equation between working women, women's work and some form of sexual(ised) performance' (Tasker 1998: 2). The recent trend of strong women reveals a

possibly changing attitude to women's bodies. Women's bodies are now being more often represented as active and not just something to be looked at (Inness 1999: 103–13). Male bodies have changed as well and have occasionally become more of a spectacle (Tasker 1993: 111–27). Contemporary male heroes in film are furthermore often allowed to express their emotions more, which also connects them to their bodies (Sjö 2009). With this in mind we can expect to see an equation between women and their bodies in Nordic films. Nordic films do differ from Hollywood films, but here too certain gender structures are common (Gustafsson 2006). However, male bodies will be of interest as well.

Religion and the body

That the body is central to religion is not a new insight, but it is a circumstance that has lately received renewed interest. The body plays an important part in most religions, but the comprehension of the body has of course changed over time and is different in different traditions, also reflecting changes in culture generally (Mellor & Shilling 1997). Though religious ideas are often expressed through the body, the body as such is a far from unproblematic area. In many religions we find the belief that some bodies are better than others (Griffith 2004). In the Christian tradition, as in many other religious traditions, it is women's bodies that have often been found to be especially problematic (Becher 1990). This is also something that is perhaps likely to come across in the material chosen for this study.

The problem with the woman's body in religion has naturally led to women often being in focus in studies concerning religion and the body (Cooey 1994). Lately, however, more and more studies are also focusing on male and lesbian, gay or queer bodies. In her study, *Splitting the Difference: Gender and Myth in ancient Greece and India*, Wendy Doniger explores women and their bodies, but she also looks at, for example, androgynous bodies. Her study points to the problems with both female bodies and in other ways different bodies in certain religious traditions (Doniger 1999). In *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body* the contributors take a fresh look at the body in the Christian tradition and the many queer bodies that can be found here (Loughlin 2007). Both these studies illustrate the complex attitudes to the body that can exist in one and the same tradition, a complexity that is far from always made explicit, or explored. Will such complexity possibly come across in Nordic film?

Religion, film, and the body

The importance of the body in both religion and film has naturally inspired studies that combine these two areas. When, for example, discussing the often occurring saviour character in film (Baugh 1997), questions of the body have seldom been easy to ignore. Not the least films such as *The Passion of the Christ*, with its brutal and bloody depictions of the last hours of the life of Christ, have sparked some interesting debates (Denton-Borhaug 2005). The centrality of the body in films such as *Breaking the Waves* has also been argued to bring the body, sexuality and salvation into close and interesting proximity (Solano 2004). In this and other studies gender issues have naturally come up. Some films are considered to challenge traditional religious ideas of the body, but many underline not least the problematic female body (Rushing 1995).

Representations of the body in film have in several studies been related to contemporary ideas about the body and religion, and religious change. In her study of the body in American apocalyptic film, Katherine Low illustrates how these films, in the same way as the biblical apocalypse (Pippin 1999), centre on the body and how the female body is the problem, also reflecting anxieties in the real world (Low 2009). Maria Beatrice Bittarello has looked at how changing ideas of the body in science fiction film can be related to changing concepts of religion and the body in neo-paganism. What has inspired what can be hard to determine, but that a change has taken place in both areas is apparent (Bittarello 2008). Film, then, can express change and is therefore worthy of notice when dealing with change. The religious landscape in the Nordic countries is clearly changing, just as it is in the West in general. This is also likely to come across in the material.

The possibility for film to express a new bodily theology has been explored further by, among others, Gerard Loughlin in his *Alien Sex: The Body and Desire in Cinema and Theology* (Loughlin 2004). Stefanie Knauss in several studies has also explored the body and sexuality in film, pointing to what we can learn from film when discussing sexuality and religion (Knauss 2007). This study is not a theological study *per se*, but studies such as Loughlin's and Knauss's underline the many different voices in theology today and the complex ways films can be of use here. They also point to the many different films that may be of interest. The direct focus on religion and the body in some Nordic films makes these films a natural starting point when working in a Nordic context. With these and the above discussed studies and insights in mind we will now turn to the material for this study.

The body and religion in Nordic film

Body dilemmas

In 2008 and 2009 two films with an obvious focus on the body and religion were made in the Nordic countries. *To verdener*, a film that is based on a true story, is a Danish film directed by Nils Arden Oplev. This film is the story of a young Jehovah's Witness named Sara and the circumstances that lead to her leaving the religious group she has grown up in and which has been her life. *Kielletty hedelmä*, an award-winning Finnish film directed by Dome Karukoski, tells the story of Maria and Raakel, two young women who have grown up in a conservative Laestadian community, and the conditions that in the end lead to one of the women leaving the community. Though there are differences between *To verdener* and *Kielletty hedelmä* and the religious groups presented in the films, the parallels are noteworthy and interesting when discussing religion and the body. Both films deal with the problems of combining conservative religious ideas with more secular views and though they both seem to aim to give a varied view of the religious groups they are portraying, the themes that are brought to the forefront in each of the films relate to the body and sexuality.

In *Kielletty hedelmä* one of the first scenes in the film takes place in a church. Here we are allowed to hear a sermon about the sinfulness of the flesh at the same time as we can see the main characters checking out the young men in the congregation. In *To verdener* similar issues relating to pre-marital sex are early on brought up by the religious leaders. In the scenes that follow, Sara meets a young man, Teis, and falls in love. A conservative religious view of sexuality and the body—according to which, for example, the flesh is seen as weak and sexual activity before marriage as a great sin—are then from the very start contrasted with the young women's feelings and interests and this is represented as the driving conflict of the films.

For Sara what follows is a struggle to combine her beliefs with her love for Teis. This turns out to be difficult. She is forced to break up with Teis, but when Teis shows interest in the group they are reunited and have sex. Sara tries to hide their sexual relationship, but is thrown out of the community. In the end she leaves Teis, but does not return to the Jehovah's Witnesses, since she says she has lost her faith. For Maria and Raakel life is not that much easier. It is Maria who first decides to leave the community and go to Helsinki in order to experience everything that is forbidden at home. While Maria throws herself into this new life, Raakel tries to hold true to her beliefs. In the end it is Maria however that cannot break free from her upbringing. When

she has intercourse for the first time she is overcome by guilt. For Raakel the first sexual experience is more positive and in the end she is the one who chooses to leave permanently.

The conclusion of the stories is not exactly the same for the three women, but the logic of the narratives is similar: a sane person will leave the conservative ideas about body and sexuality behind and choose to live according to more secular views. Those that do not leave are either incapable of dealing with the loneliness that breaking with the community will lead to, or are unable to break free from the beliefs of the community. That we are in this case dealing with three young women is not surprising, but notable. As we have seen, it is especially women's bodies that have been found to be problematic in many religions, an issue that the films clearly explore. The focus on the sexuality of women is furthermore typical for the film medium. The films might then deal with real issues, but the issues can also, if one wants to perhaps simplify the films, be seen as an excuse to focus on female sexuality. In addition, coming of age stories about women tend to focus on sexuality (Franck 2009: 274–5), which also can be seen as an explanation and frame for the film. The slightly new issue that the films bring to the traditional stories of young women growing up is, however, religion, and this can be argued to give a partly new and somewhat more complex perspective to the films.

However one chooses to read the films—as a reflection of conservative religious groups, as two more films about female sexuality, or as coming of age stories with some non-traditional levels—the fact that religion and the body/sexuality is portrayed as being in conflict in the films is significant. The way this conflict is used as a driving force in the films suggests that this is really seen as a problem in contemporary Nordic society today. It can also be argued to be pointing to suspicious attitudes towards conservative religious groups together with a wish perhaps to understand them better. But it might also point to some changes taking place. Religious ideas, or some religious ideas, are challenged in a fairly unsurprising way, but religion as such is completely removed only from Sara's life. For Raakel and Maria faith remains important. As we shall see, this is the case in some of the other films analyzed here as well.

Bodily salvation/redemption

While the body in *Kielletty hedelmä* and *To verdener* is presented as a site of religious struggles, the body is allowed a perhaps slightly more complex but no less problematic role in the following two Nordic films to be analyzed: *Adams æbler* and *Sauna*. *Adams æbler* is a Danish drama-comedy directed

by Anders Thomas Jensen. The film contains religious references on many levels. The main character is Adam, a neo-Nazi who is allowed to serve a community service sentence at a church run by Ivan, a devout pastor. Adam is from the beginning determined to break Ivan and make him question God, but Ivan does not see the world as others do. He has had a horrible life, but he comprehends nothing of this. Towards the end we find out that Ivan has a brain tumor that will kill him, but as before in the film, nothing goes according to expectations.

There are many ways of understanding *Adams æbler*. It is clearly a film about the struggle between good and evil, but also a comedic story about faith. However, when we look to the structure of the film and the story arches of the main characters, redemption/salvation seems to be a key issue. In the film several characters are both saved and redeemed and this process is clearly connected to the body. Ivan's body in particular plays a fundamental part here. His body is at regular intervals beaten and broken. Adam quickly takes to violence in his doings with Ivan. When physical violence does not seem to have an effect, he uses mental abuse. Ivan's body responds to this by breaking down. In the end Ivan is shot through the head, but this is not the conclusion, instead this is the beginning of a new life for both Adam and Ivan. It forces Adam to make a choice and changes him, but it also confirms Ivan's beliefs.

In the Finnish film *Sauna*, redemption/salvation is also a major theme, though the conclusion is here not as positive. *Sauna* is a horror film, or a horror-drama and it is the director AJ Annila's second feature film. As in his previous film, *Jadesoturi* (2006), religious themes and struggling heroes are central to *Sauna*. As the title suggests the film is about a sauna. The story takes place in the sixteenth century. In the middle of nowhere, Swedish and Russian representatives who are drawing a new border between the nations come across a strange village. The people in the village are frightened and their fears are connected to a sauna. No one knows who built the sauna but once there was a monastery there. The sauna is, however, believed to be older than that.

Sin and punishment are central to *Sauna* and are both connected to the body. Sins can be traced on the body and it is through the body that a person can be saved or redeemed, or save someone else (or at least try to). The film begins with a murder. Eerik, one of the main characters, stabs a man repeatedly and when the man is dead Eerik declares that he was number 74. He has counted every man he has killed, not out of pride, but to know what lies on his conscience. Earlier in the timeline, Eerik and his brother Knut have washed themselves in a sauna exposing their naked and, as it would seem, innocent

bodies. From that point on, however, the crimes begin piling up. Knut locks a young woman in a cellar on Eerik's orders and is later haunted by images of her. When they reach the village Knut is immediately drawn to the strange sauna that is said to be able to wash sins away.

Driven by guilt Knut enters the sauna. When he returns he is no longer himself Eerik, a little later, finds a piece of skin, bearing a birthmark, pressed between the pages in a book. We know from the scene with Eerik and Knut in the sauna earlier that the piece of skin is Knut's. When Eerik looks closer at the piece he realizes that it is the number 75, the number of people he has by now killed. At this stage everyone except for Eerik and a young girl have followed Knut into the sauna. To try to save the girl Eerik sacrifices himself. After sending the girl away he undresses and enters the sauna where Knut awaits. Again Eerik's body is washed, but this time, as it would seem, in blood.

The focus on the body in *Sauna* can be considered something typical of the horror genre, equally so the religious references in the narrative (films such as *The Exorcist* (1973) and *The Omen* (1976) come to mind). The centrality of redemption/salvation in both *Adams æbler* and *Sauna*, however, also open up for comparisons with Jesus and Christ-like characters in film. Ivan can be read as a Christ-like character: he suffers, almost dies and changes the people around him. Eerik, too has some saviour characteristics. Just as with many other saviour characters on film or characters working for redemption, both of the characters suffer in a bodily way and underline the centrality of the body in the Christian salvation/redemption story—or at least in the filmic versions of these stories.

It is furthermore interesting to note, if one wants to do a theological reading of the films, the way the body is given power over the word in the narratives. No prayers or religious texts can save people, only bodily suffering. Thus the films could be argued to challenge traditional protestant ideas that deny the religious power of the body and proclaim the power of the word (Mellor & Shilling 1997: 99–128). However, the focus on the body can again be argued to simply be the way films handle ideas. That we are in both films dealing with suffering male bodies is not that surprising if we read them as saviour characters—male saviours often, as has been suggested, suffer bodily in film. From a gender perspective the suffering male bodies are interesting and shift attention onto the male body in a partly novel way that reflects some changes in how men are represented on film in general. Male bodies are also focused on in an interesting way in the two last films we shall analyze here; *Riisuttu mies* and *Så som i himmelen*.

Body and spirit

In *Riisuttu mies* and *Så som i himmelen*, similarly as in *Kielletty hedelmä* and *To verdener*, some traditional religious ideas and hierarchies are challenged and as in *Adams æbler* and *Sauna*, the challenge relates to the body. Here the goal however is not just salvation or redemption; rather, a different form of spiritual or religious view of the body seems to be sought.

Riisuttu mies is a Finnish comedy directed by Aku Louhimies. Since this film is a comedy, the ideas expressed should perhaps not be taken too seriously, but they are, just as in *Adams æbler*, still noteworthy. The film is about a pastor, Antti Pitkänen, who has been asked to run for bishop. While Antti tries his best to live up to the expectations of his wife, in-laws, friends and congregation, his life is really a mess. He is overweight and impotent. His best friend thinks he has sold out, his father-in-law that he is a loser and he himself that he is a fraud. Things do not become any better when he meets Vilma, a woman who seems to be in touch with herself and her life in a way Antti is clearly not, and whom Antti is almost immediately drawn to.

That the body is central to *Riisuttu mies* is clear from the start. In the opening scenes of the film we hear Antti in voiceover talk about his weight and next his impotence is revealed. This focus on the body continues throughout the film, often to comedic effect, but sometimes also in a more serious way. When Antti begins running for bishop his image becomes central. He is dressed in clothes that will present him as a modern pastor and expose his background as a musician, but this is just a question of representation. It is made clear that Antti will have to leave his music behind, since it does not fit with the image of a bishop. At the same time we see the current bishop leading a debauched lifestyle with lots of drinking and possible illicit affairs. Antti is no better; he too drinks and cheats on his wife, but he feels guilty and he prays for a miracle.

The many twists and turns of this film make the body an issue in complex ways. What I find especially interesting, however, are the positive views of the body that are a part of the story, though not always in a very obvious way. The film clearly criticizes some religious ideas about the body, such as negative attitudes to homosexuality and hypocritical attitudes to sex, but there are also views that are encouraged. Antti often has issues with his body, but there are scenes where he seems to enjoy it, for example, when he is allowed to sing and dance. These scenes take place in the church, or with people of the church and are thereby given a religious or spiritual reference. This positive attitude to the body reaches its height in the final scenes of the film, where Antti undresses before his congregation, declaring that he will not accept the symbols he carries if he is not wanted as the person and sinner he is.

The key message in *Riisuttu mies* is then that one cannot be good if one does not accept oneself and one's body. This idea of accepting the body is even more evident in *Så som i himmelen*. This film, directed by Kay Pollak, is one of the most watched and discussed Nordic films of late. The main character in the film is the conductor Daniel, who after a breakdown returns to his home village and takes the job as cantor and leader of the church choir. His arrival brings new life to the village, but also challenges traditional power structures. As the Christ figure he clearly is, Daniel brings hope to people, but he also suffers and dies. Every step of the way his body is focused upon. He is, like Ivan in *Adams æbler*, beaten up and he suffers from a bodily illness. Most interestingly though, I find, is the way the body is celebrated in this film in a religious/spiritual way.

The main idea in Daniel's 'teachings' is that everyone has a unique voice. This voice is not however something that can be found just through singing. Community, acceptance and a celebration of the body are needed as well. The unique voice is then given a spiritual and bodily dimension. We see the choir members exploring their bodies and an important part of the choir practices are also the coffee breaks, where the bodies are given nourishment in many ways. The enjoyment of the body is something that the choir members bring home with them too. The pastor's wife, for example, challenges her husband's beliefs in the sinfulness of the flesh and makes him open up for at least one night and the woman Gabriella, who lives with an abusive husband, receives the strength to leave him.

The great success of *Så som i himmelen* has naturally led to many studies and discussions of the film. Lars Johansson (2005) for example has compared the film with religious change that is taking place in the real world, explored in studies such as Paul Heelas's and Linda Woodhead's *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (2005). From this perspective as well the focus on the body becomes interesting. A lot of the new spiritualities point to the need to look to both body and spirit, something that Pollak has clearly expressed in his film. In *Så som i himmelen* these ideas are furthermore combined with a rather traditional filmic Christ character with a beaten up and broken body. The film also deals with traditional conservative ideas about sexuality, but contrasts these with more spiritual ones. The focus on men and their bodies in both *Så som i himmelen* and *Riisuttu mies* points to the reworking of some traditional gender structures in film. Female bodies are not however ignored here and though women would seem to very obviously and traditionally be connected to their bodies, they too are challenging. They are given the power to both teach and lead throughout both films.

Bodies in transformation

Contemporary Nordic film then, as the analysis above has shown, deals with religion and the body in complex ways that reflect trends in both film and religion. To summarize, the body can be an entity over which struggles over values and norms are fought, and, not that surprisingly, the female body is here the specific area of struggle. The body can also be connected to certain religious or Christian ideas as well as being an area through which religious goals are reached, in this case salvation or redemption, following in the footsteps of many Hollywood productions about saviour characters. The body can finally be given a clear, positive value and a religious/spiritual dimension. In this case the bodies and the religious themes in the films can be related to certain modern trends in religion. The films and the themes presented do not, of course, expose every aspect of how religion and the body are treated in Nordic film today. They also clearly deal with ideas about the body and religion on different levels: some more directly than others. However, taken together they do, I would argue, suggest some possible recurring perceptions of and attitudes to religion and the body in at least the Nordic countries today that are worthy of some further notice.

A first attitude to religion and the body that unmistakably comes across in the material is a negative view of what are seen as traditionally religious or conservative religious views on the body. This is not unanticipated. Conservative religious views that, for example, criticize sex before marriage, lust and physical enjoyment, do not fit well with ideas in society in general. Most people today, it would seem, are in support of sex before marriage and do not see the body as sinful. Consequently, it is to be expected that conflicts will appear and be built on when these ideas are expressed by certain characters in a film. Something that is worth noticing however is that the religious attitudes to the body in the films often become a bit one sided. Less traditional religious voices are not presented, at least not in the films that directly deal with these issues, *Kielletty hedelmä* and *To verdener*. Instead the conservative voice is often the only religious voice, something that far from reflects the reality in theology today, but perhaps suggests something about the general public understanding or religious attitudes to the body. In short, the films possibly mirror a perception that religious people have problems with sexuality and the body.

However, despite this negative attitude to what is represented as traditional religious views of the body, religion is as such seldom written off completely in the films. Instead some religious, or perhaps rather, spiritual, views are

even represented in a positive light. These are views that, as we saw in *Riisuttu mies* and *Så som i himmelen*, accept the body and combines bodily wellbeing with spiritual wellbeing. Though these views are characterized as a threat to religious institutions and hierarchies, they are nonetheless seldom completely separated from traditional religion. Rather, we can see in the films some representatives of the church or people connected to the church opening up to these ideas. As we have seen, we can relate the ideas to the changes that are taking place in the real world as well, specifically the turn from religion to spirituality. The films underline the challenges this turn represents for traditional religious institutions, but would also seem to wish to incorporate them into, in most of the films, the Lutheran Church. The perception of religion that we find in the films, then, is that religion is changing, but the place for religion can still be argued to be in the church—though not only there.

The films do suggest, then, as have several studies of religion in the real world, that a transformation is taking place and that this is a good thing. When discussing change, the question of gender also becomes central. In *Kielletty hedelmä* and *To verdener* we can see a not very surprising focus on female sexuality and female bodies, but the often recurring focus on men's sexual problems and suffering male bodies in the material, points to a change in traditional views of masculinity. Men's wishes to control women's sexuality is furthermore clearly expressed as wrong in the material, giving women back at least some power over their bodies, but male pastors' problems with their own sexuality in an interesting way also challenge pre-existent notions of the traditional male hero. Men, too, are their bodies, but this is not represented as a bad thing. Instead, being in contact with your body is seen as something good. The way women in the films play an important part in leading the men onto the right path also offers women a form of power. The values that are proclaimed in several of the films are in short values that can be read as traditionally feminine. However, one can argue that the absolute power in the films remains in the hands of men, since the films are often mostly about men. Despite this the attitude that the films suggest is that equality between the sexes when it comes to religion is a good thing and that being different is okay.

The bodily representation of salvation/redemption is also noteworthy from a gender perspective. The films dealing with this issue can be seen to borrow from the Christian tradition, but the Christian version of redemption is at the same time partly challenged and restructured. The films show that Christian ideas of salvation/redemption still work as structures for film narratives today, but for the stories to function, some changes need to be

made. The fact that it is mostly male bodies that are seen to be punished here is interesting, since it seems to question the power of the male and point to another form of challenge of male dominance. The focus on the body in the films can perhaps best be argued to underline the way the film medium traditionally handles religious (and other) ideas, but it can also be seen as something that makes sense for a viewer in a culture and a religious world where the body is in focus. A final perception that the films suggest, then, is that it is natural to deal with things in a bodily manner and that bodies are important—something that films might of course also be argued to have taught us in the first place.

Conclusion—from imagined bodies to real bodies?

In this article I started off by discussing the importance of religion and film research and the place of religion in Nordic film. I then looked more closely at some studies related to religion, film and the body, and analyzed six contemporary Nordic films expressing three recurring body and religion related themes, to see what they could contribute to the discussion of the body and religion today. The three themes, it was illustrated, point to a complex views on the body and religion in Nordic film that can be related to trends in both religion and film, but the themes were also argued to suggest some more general prevailing attitudes. A critique of traditional religious ideas was obvious in the material, but also an interest in a more spiritual view on the body. A prevailing dominance of Christian thoughts was clear, but also transformations of this tradition. Though some of the representations can be understood to be a result of the visual side of the film medium and the way that films often deal with ideas, they also clearly pointed to an interest in the body today in general, together with a changing religious landscape. The gender structures that could be identified in the material illustrated changes and challenges at this level as well, though male power was still seen to partly prevail. All in all then, the study points to many-faceted ideas about and ways of understanding religion and the body today.

A question that remains, however, is what this can possibly tell us about the body and the religion of the viewer. What is the connection between the body on film and the body of the viewer? This study has taken the form of a content-analysis and to go from representations of bodies and religion to saying anything for certain about real bodies is not possible. Still, when dealing with films the body of the viewer cannot be ignored and to claim that films

never have an effect on real bodies would be incorrect. In the same way that studies in aesthetics in general have come to focus on the body (Meyer & Verrips 2008), studies of how we view film have shown that watching a film is a bodily experience (Barker 2009). From this we can draw the possible conclusion that films about bodies and religion can, at least for some people, also have a clear effect on their own understandings of these issues and entities. For many the effect might be nothing more than a confirmation of certain ideas, but for others the right kind of film that speaks to that person in his/her situation, a more bodily transformation might take place. For this to happen the film does not necessarily have to deal with obvious religious issues, but religious themes of some kind might make a religious reading or experience more likely. Future studies will hopefully delve further into this question and be able to give clearer answers. But for now it can in any case be argued that Nordic films too, with their complex representations of body and religion, are a worthwhile area of study, whether one's interest lies with bodies on screen or bodies in front of screens.

References

Barker, Jennifer

2009 *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Baugh, Lloyd

1997 *Imaging the Divine Jesus and Christ Figures in Film*. Kansas City: Sheed & Ward.

Becher, Jeanne (ed.)

1990 *Women, Religion, and Sexuality: Studies in the Impact of Religious Teachings on Women*. Geneva: WCC Publishing.

Bittarello, Maria Beatrice

2008 Shifting Realities? Changing Concepts of Religion and the Body in Popular Culture and Neopaganism. *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 23 (2): 215–32.

Clover, Carol J.

1992 *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. London: BFI Publishing.

Coakley, Sarah (ed.)

1997 *Religion and the Body*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cooley, Paula M.

1994 *Religious Imagination and the Body*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Danielsson, Árni Svanur

2009 From State Officials to Teddy Bears: A Study of the Image of Pastors in Selected Nordic Films. *Studies in World Christianity* 15 (2): 162–5.

Denton-Borhaug, Kelly

2005 A Bloodthirsty Salvation: Behind the Popular Polarized Reaction to Gibson's The Passion. *Journal of Religion and Film* 9 (1). <http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/Vol9No1/DentonBorhaugbloodthirstt.htm> (accessed on 20 August 2010).

Doniger, Wendy

1999 *Splitting the Difference: Gender and Myth in Ancient Greece and India*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Forbes, Bruce David, & Jeffrey H. Mahan (eds)

2005 *Religion and Popular Culture in America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Franck, Mia

2009 *Frigjord oskuld: heterosexuellt mognadsimperativ i svensk ungdomsroman*. Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press.

Griffith, R. Marie

2004 *Born Again Bodies Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Gustafsson, Tommy

2006 Ett steg på väg mot en ny jämlikhet? Könrelationer och stereotyper i engelsk ungdomsfilm på 2000-talet. In: Erik Hedling & Ann-Kristin Wallengren (eds), *Solskenslandet: svensk film på 2000-talet*; pp.171–94. Stockholm: Atlantis.

Heelas, Paul & Linda Woodhead et al.

2005 *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality*. Malden: Blackwell.

Hoover, Stewart M.

2006 *Religion in the Media Age*. New York: Routledge.

Inness, Sherrie A.

1999 *Tough Girls: Women Warriors and Wonder Women in Popular Culture*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Johansson, Lars

2005 Tomma kyrkor och tvivlande präster? Från Nattvardsgästerna till Så som i himmelen. In: Tomas Axelson & Ola Sigurdson (eds), *Film och religion: Livstolkning på vita duken*; pp. 175–95. Örebro: Cordia.

Knauss, Stefanie

2007 The Sensuality of Sense Reflections on the Bodily Dimension in Filmic and Religious Experience. In: Stefanie Knauss & Alexander D. Ornella (eds), *Reconfigurations: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Religion in a Post-Secular Society*; pp. 197–216. Graz: Lit.

Loughlin, Gerard

2004 *Alien Sex: The Body and Desire in Cinema and Theology*. Oxford: Blackwell.
2007 (ed.) *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.

Low, Katherine

- 2009 Satan's Seductress and the Apocalyptic Hero: The Body in American Apocalyptic Films at the Turn of the Century. *Journal of Religion and Film* 13 (2). http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol13.no2/Lowe_Satan.html (accessed on 20 August 2010).

Martin, Joel W. & Conrad E. Ostwalt Jr (eds)

- 1995 *Screening the Sacred: Religion, Myth, and Ideology in Popular American Film*. Boulder: Westview Press.

Mellor, Philip A. & Chris Shilling

- 1997 *Re-forming the Body: Religion, Community and Modernity*. London: Sage Publications.

Meyer, Birgit & Jojada Verrips

- 2008 Aesthetics. In: David Morgan (ed.), *Key Words in Religion, Media and Culture*; pp. 20–30. London: Routledge.

Nestingen, Andrew & Trevor G. Elkington (eds)

- 2005 *Transnational Cinema in a Global North: Nordic Cinema in Transition*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

Rushing, Janice Hocker

- 1995 Evolution of "The New Frontier" in Alien and Aliens: Patriarchal Co-option of the Feminine Archetype. In: Joel E. Martin & Conrad E. Ostwalt Jr (eds), *Screening the Sacred: Religion, Myth, and Ideology in Popular American Film*; pp. 94–118. Boulder: Westview Press.

Shilling, Chris

- 2005 *The Body in Culture, Technology and Society*. London: Sage Publications.

Sjö, Sofia

- 2009 Postmodern Messiahs: The Changing Saviours of Contemporary Popular Culture. In: Tore Ahlbäck (ed.), *Postmoden Spirituality*; pp. 196–212. Åbo: Donner Institute.
- 2010 På jakt efter en nordisk räddargestalt: Frälsare, främlingar och religiös reflektion i modern nordisk film. *Finsk Tidskrift* 2: 87–95.

Solano, Jeannette

- 2004 Blessed Broken Bodies: Exploring Redemption in Central Station and Breaking the Waves. *Journal of Religion and Film* 8 (1). <http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/Vol8No1/BlessedBroken.htm> (accessed on 20 August 2010).

Tasker, Yvonne

- 1993 *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema*. London: Routledge.
- 1998 *Working Girls: Gender and Sexuality in Popular Cinema*. London: Routledge.

Wykes, Maggie & Barrie Gunter (eds)

- 2005 *The Media and Body Image: If Looks Could Kill*. London: Sage.

The post-secular position and enchanted bodies

The English-American writer Zoë Heller, at the beginning of her novel *The Believers* (2008), cites the Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci: ‘The challenge of modernity is to live without illusions and without becoming disillusioned.’ This diagnosis of modern life, given by Gramsci and elaborated in fiction by Heller, can be translated as pointing towards varying positions between secularity (even secularism), on the one hand, and (religious or political) belief and commitment on the other. This crossroads of belief and disbelief, or enchantment and disenchantment, is topical in new ways after recent revisions of secularization theories and the current revitalization of religions. Moreover, it also has bearings on how people bring together religions and bodies. The following question is of particular interest to me: in what ways can diverse religious and spiritual practices bring about and construct new kinds of enchanted embodiments within contemporary life, and what is being done with these embodiments, both by people themselves and by scholars of religion. First, I shall outline a preliminary diagnosis of the current situation, which I approach as the desire for enchanted bodies. After that I shall identify, though tentatively, three ideal types of practices by which this desire could be seen to be enacted. Finally, I shall consider some implications of this diagnosis for the study of religion today.

The desire for enchanted bodies

In their book *Re-forming the Body* (1997), Philip Mellor and Chris Shilling look at various formations and re-formations of bodies within Christian history and secularization. They finish the book with the following words: ‘If the modern project could continue to ignore the sensual human body, other than as a resource for commercial exploitation. . . , it would continue its descent into banality. If it turns out that it cannot, then something approaching the volatility and passionate intensity which characterized medieval life may again impose itself upon large tracts of the Western world.’ (Mellor & Shilling 1997: 201.) Perhaps this prediction by Mellor and Shilling is a little

bit overstated and romantic, and we are not exactly approaching the medieval situation today. However, if we proceed still a little while with Heller (since fiction is often an excellent heuristic device in the study of culture and all the kinds of desires that it nurtures), we can see that some sort of desire or urge (hunger, appetite) to enchant, or re-enchant (our research participants' but also the researchers') embodied lives can be observed.

In Heller's novel an atheist Jewish family in its way exemplifies and embodies the fragile conditions of those living in the 2000s. The lives of the parents of the family have been committed for forty years to stern leftist convictions and hard work for political justice. When the father of the family falls into coma and eventually dies, some unpleasant truths begin to emerge from beneath the surface. What follows is that his spouse is left bereft of meaning and purpose in life. Their three adult children have grown up in a world much too complex and compromised to be able to follow their parents' unwavering political path, and in their early midlife, they also find themselves in the face of the threat of banality and meaninglessness, all in their own ways—either as a result of the unpleasant downsides of modernity, as according to, for instance, Charles Taylor (2002), or total disillusion as according to Gramsci. Their respective ways out of this existential *cul-de-sac* are different from each other, taking the form of alcohol and drug abuse for the son, romance and religious commitment for the two daughters. All these choices and solutions provide some sort of sense of meaning, of destiny, in the face of modern anxieties, fragile identities and uncertain agencies. Addiction may be a relatively sad version of destiny: the addict is easily regarded merely as an object of uncontrollable forces instead of being an agent of his or her own destiny, whereas the agency in romance and religion is much more ambivalent and intriguing with regard to destiny.

Anthony Giddens (1991: 109–43) writes about fate as a notion that has lost much but not all of its hold in modernity. This is related to modernity being largely defined by the notion of risk. According to Giddens, fate has been bestowed with the sense of *fortuna*, as a preordained course of events, in traditional societies; in an important sense, the future has not been in the hands of humans, but gods. And this is what has changed: now people want to control their futures. Post-traditional societies are increasingly characterized by the growing awareness of many kinds of risk, and, accordingly, by elaborate risk calculations and risk-management efforts at both social and individual levels. Both groups and individuals aim at what he calls the 'colonization of the future' by various political, scientific and technological means; important examples of these means are economic calculation and medical technology.

People today are invited to take advice and make assessments that help them navigate a risk society and control, or at least minimize most known risks, thus providing themselves with futures which are as secure as possible.

According to Giddens, fatalism in the face of the unpredictability of the future is an alternative modern ethos for those who do not want to live their lives assessing risks and possibilities and taking responsible actions on the basis of this assessment. A fatalistic person does not believe in an individual's agency in managing and directing one's life in a complex and risk-filled world, but takes a cynical or ironic *laissez-faire*-ethos towards it. Lenny's addiction can, perhaps, be regarded as fatalism in anticipation of his future and destiny, whereas Karla's erotic adventure and Rosa's religious conversion seem to be solutions whereby they seek to build agency and active participation, if not mastery, with regard to their lives. However, of course, this is very relative and context-specific: both love and religion can be engaged with either in a fatalistic or in a more active and intentional-strategic manner. (In fact, Karla is depicted as someone captivated, nearly against her own will, by the force of love whereas Rosa's conversion is described as a more reflective and conscious action.) Moreover, love and religion may be understood as ways of engaging with destinies precisely because they involve both passive (fatalistic) and active attitudes and stances towards life and the future.

Thus, fate or destiny has not altogether been evacuated from modernity, but has its place alongside the risk-calculating ethos. Furthermore, I would like to make a slight but important distinction between fate and destiny. On the one hand, fate is more connected to the non-human deity *fortuna*—the Roman goddess was sometimes depicted as blind and quite merciless towards humans. On the other hand, destiny is connected to the interaction or dialogue between *fortuna* (or providence, in its more Christian version) and human action. Destiny would thus be understood as a *sense of direction and purpose in life that unfolds partly by means of human action*.

All the above solutions portrayed by Heller through her fictional characters involve not only the thinking minds of the people in question, but also their *sensing and committed bodies*. Drug addiction holds the body of Lenny in a stern grip. Rosa's newly found Jewish body is dressed in a completely new way from what it used to be and it learns gestures and positions with their ever thickening religious meanings and purposes. Karla's body, in love for the first time at an adult age, learns new sensuous pleasures and lessons of itself, of the other and the world. Bodies can thus be engaged and reoriented to bring out new experiences, visions and commitments in life. They can be oriented in such ways that they very concretely bring out new futures and des-

tinies to their bearers. Moreover, enchanted bodies are fragile attempts and orientations, surrounded by heavy structural conditions, and they are open to many possible perils towards embodied futures.

Heller depicts plausible characters and causes of events, even if they are fictional and not ethnographically documented ones in the strict sense. Moreover, many scholars of religion, especially those who study women's religious lives and women's relation to religion, report and analyze cases which are comparable with the fictional case of Rosa, who commits herself to Orthodox Judaism after having been brought up in an atheist family with only a Jewish background. To some extent Rosa reminds me of Sarah Bracke's (2008) research participants in Holland, for instance. They are youngish modern educated women who have chosen a relatively conservative version of the religion of their families; for some of them it is Christianity and for others it is Islam. In slightly similar way, Saba Mahmood (2005) investigates the puzzle of Egyptian women who piously adhere to conservative forms of Islam in their desire to construct embodied moral lives, even though there are also secular possibilities available for them in principle. Rebecca Lester's (2005) ethnographical study of a Mexican convent follows a group of postulants who consider their choice to become nuns as one possible and good way to live a woman's life in a woman's body in the midst of a modern and rapidly changing, as well as very demanding world. Jone Salomonsen's ethnography among witches in San Francisco (1999) opens up the world of feminist religious women activists who work to re-conceptualize and re-live both bodies and material environment. Joe McPherson's (2008) study of Reiki in Scotland shows how healers, most of them women, provide an alternative healing practice with an elaborate conceptualization and technique of the body.

In Finland, Johanna Ahonen is preparing her dissertation for which she has interviewed Finnish women committing themselves, their bodies and souls, to various versions of Hinduism, such as Hare Krishna or followers of Amma (see Ahonen 2006). Furthermore, some women and men (and this reminds us that this is not exclusively a woman-question even if for women the question of religion and body may be more acute) in Tuija Hovi's (2007) research have devoted their lives to charismatic Christianity. In this context one very much submits one's life to the religious community's interpretation of the Bible and God's will. One engages in daily religious practices and ritualized healing practices that enforce biblical interpretations, as well as anchoring them in bodily habits. All these contemporary enchanted bodies of women, and some men too, empowered with religious meaning and religiously legitimated agency, are something we can see and appreciate with post-secular

eyes. But what do I mean by the terms enchanted bodies and post-secular eyes?

By using the term post-secular I do not mean to say that something has essentially or irrevocably changed after a phase of secularization in the social and symbolic world. Rather, post-secular for me principally means *the somewhat more nuanced position and detailed gaze of the researcher than was possible some time ago*; a position from which we can now, after a period spent in the power of the secularization narrative, focus our attention on historically and culturally varying forms of enchantment, disenchantment and re-enchantment of embodied lives (see also Cannell 2010). Perhaps religious scholars are beginning to better learn their ways in a reality where people continuously use many practices to navigate between illusion and disillusion. By enchantment here I simply refer to meaning-making practices and operations that engage with other than simply empirically verifiable forces or entities that are in some sense *believed and used to resource* mundane or secular lives, summoned and used to make help things happen. Disenchantment and re-enchantment are relative to enchantment, pointing to the fact that enchantment is always a process, and as a process, it can grow or diminish depending on context (cf. Partridge 2004). We may be living in a historical period in Western societies (after such big changes as the collapse of the Communist empire, the rapid development of information technology and intermingling of cultural impulses) that creates more space and an increased urge for the enchantment of bodies than sometime earlier when certain political and epistemological dividing lines were more solid.

The post-secular position calls attention to various practical, rhetorical and imaginary in-between spaces, where different meaning-making practices and processes in relation to enchantment can take place. Examples of these in-between spaces could be health care contexts that allow alternative practices, such as energy-healing; gym practices that combine physical exercises and spiritual meanings, or forms of popular culture such as books and films that bring different worlds together. An example of the latter would be the bestselling novel, *The Lovely Bones* by Alice Sebold (2009), in which a murdered girl witnesses the life of her family on earth and eventually integrates with it.

An important aspect or focus of enchantment is the body. It is very much the body that is the location of the enchantments: its parts are given new names and meanings, or bodies are practiced upon and treated with methods that construct new aspects or powers in them. In many Western countries, such as Finland, bodies are conceptualized, imagined and lived today with many

more creative methods than they used to be. This is particularly done and talked about *more publicly* and openly than earlier, when issues like religious and political affiliation were strictly personal matters in Finland (cf. Bowman 1999: 2). Major religious (such as the Evangelical Lutheran Church) and scientific powers (such as Western bio-medicine) have increasingly become only two discourses and practices regulating and informing bodies among many choices and possibilities (see, e.g., McGuire 1988, Bowman 1999).

Identifying three ideal types of practice by which enchantment is enacted

There are currently many possible ways of categorizing both religious embodiments as well as theoretical perspectives in the research of body and religion. For instance, Philip Mellor (2007) distinguishes six of the latter, all having slightly distinct epistemological and theoretical starting points, as well as empirical foci. His models for religion and embodiment are: the emotional, permeable, learning, mimetic, mindful and global body. Mellor's map is very useful for those who want to familiarize themselves with the richness of perspectives on how religion and embodiment can be seen to be penetrating one another.

Here I am concerned with at least three subtly distinguishable *practices of enchanting bodies* that I think I can identify in the Western world today. These ideal typical practices of embodiment also resonate with my own research interests in religion and the body over the last ten years. In the so-called 'real world', these ideal types can mix and juxtapose in many imaginative ways. I nevertheless suggest that they reveal some real difference, for instance, in the sense that the first one is the most explicit and relatively easy to discern, whereas the other two types of embodiment may be more implicit and subtle, both for the eye of the researcher as well as for the practitioner. I hope that this rough typology will be of some preliminary heuristic or analytical value when looking at the religious landscape today. In using the term *practices* I refer both to practices of argumentation, rhetoric and imagination, as well as to more concrete and physical practices of embodiment. I follow Jerome Carrette (2000) in understanding even beliefs as meaning-making practices, and thus I will not consider them as essentially or ontologically different from more embodied practices. Although some practices are more prominent in, for example, theological religiosity, others in popular religion (cf. e.g. Mitchell

& Mitchell 2008), they all have to do with bodies in their own ways. What they require is, of course, different concrete research methods.

For the purpose of this article I refer to these practices as follows: 1) moulding the surface of bodies; 2) exercising bodies; and 3) re-imagining bodies and minds/souls. All these types of practices can be looked at as ways of teaching and cultivating *religiously meaningful and capable bodies* (Asad 1997). In the first type of practice the pedagogy works rather from the realm of the visible into the invisible, and in the second and third ones in the contrary direction, that is, from less to more visible. In the following, I will briefly describe them. The latter two will, however, receive more emphasis as I consider them to form a slightly bigger challenge to the study of enchanted embodiments today. One reason behind this is that this is often also the form of religion that scholars take part in, with body-practices that we may nevertheless not always be fully aware of.

Moulding the surface of bodies. By this I mean practices of endowing the visible or, the 'outer' body with religious meaning by the means of dress/undress, head-dress, tattoos, piercings, purposefully visible ways of placing bodies in space, as well as means of behaving or gesticulating and so on. This is a concrete and impressive traditional, but also modern, way of constructing religious identity and distinctiveness. It is an elementary social means of boundary-making and it includes a variety of specific *boundary-mechanisms* by which people draw the always indefinite line denoting where their (religious) bodies end and the (profane) world begin (Vincett *et al.* 2008: 11). These mechanisms and operations do not remain on the surface of bodies but, to varying extents and degrees, reach below the body's surface and to the inside (the mindset or the consciousness) of the person. Similarly, they are not simply physical, but also argumentative and metaphorical meaning-making practices, as I show in my research *Alaston ja puettu. Ruumiin ja uskonnon ääret* (Naked and Dressed: The Limits of the Body and Religion, Utriainen 2006). Rosa's new Jewish habit, in Heller's novel, exemplifies this type of body practice fairly well.

In many of the studies of women's religiosity mentioned above, bodies are moulded by religiously changing their outlook, either for special ritual occasions, or also in day-to-day life. The North American witches in Salomonsen's (1999) study may strip naked as a special spiritual practice whereby they train their egos to become less preponderant. The initiation ritual to become fully a witch includes a moment of both blindness and nakedness—the meanings of which include trust and surrender. For some of the Muslim women studied both by Mahmood and Bracke, the covering of parts of their bodies bears the

significance of both belonging to tradition as well as making a personal religious choice and stance towards society, life and the future. Thus marking and working with the borders and boundaries of bodies and also with the world may be an important and efficient religious practice.

The exercise of bodies. These are practices of argumentation as well as bodily techniques whereby embodiments are crafted and constructed from the 'inside out', for instance from religiously or spiritually exercising and cultivating bodies without necessarily marking this clearly on the surface of the body. This would contain some of today's popular exercises, such as yoga or meditation. Also, practices of putting bodies in contact with healing forces and energies (as Salomonsen's and McPherson's studies show), and empowering or resourcing them with the contact of supernatural beings, transcendent silence and emptiness, and so on, can be seen to belong to this category of body practice. These kinds of often, but not necessarily always eastern-inspired practices of crafting bodies from the inside out are becoming increasingly popular today, and people participate in them with differing degrees of orderliness, commitment and seriousness.

Also the life of the Catholic postulants which Rebecca L. Lester's study describes consists of a detailed and many-phased preparation programme by which they learn to take part in the complexities of modernity. A big part of this preparation could be seen as resourcing the future nun who will work in society among the poor, with the power and authority coming from her religion. Moreover, this resourcing is intimately tied to the affective and embodied condition of being human, Mexican and gendered. The postulants work with their bodily and cultural emotions and (erotic and other) desires and learn to cultivate their young modern female bodies as the bodies of God's handmaidens.

Re-imagining bodies and minds/souls. By this I mean practices that take place within the secular/profane sphere, whereby bodies are imagined and conceptualized in such ways that are different from and alternative to the Western secular scientific rationality. An example is contemporary health care: it includes spaces for and fragments of religious language and other practices that emphasize holism and spirituality. A lot of this could be seen as instances of *de-differentiation* if we understand it the way Grace Davie (2007: 224–7) does. By *de-differentiation* she encapsulates phenomena and events by which modernity turns actively and critically towards its own tendency to differentiate and segment spheres of life, knowledge and responsibility as well as corresponding aspects of the human being-in-the-world, and whereby it aims to bring these conceptual separations 'back' together. 'Holism' is often

the name given to this activity and a way of re-conceptualization by its proponents.

A characteristic of practices of de-differentiation is that they often articulate and legitimate themselves critically against the phenomenon and discourses of modernity, secularization, and very often more specifically of medicalization, which is argued to have violently or wrongly segmented the human being and the human body, and the female body in particular, and thus alienated it from its supposed 'original', 'sacred' and 'natural' way of being-in-the-world.¹ These acts and practices of de-differentiation can be found both in alternative well-being practices and discourses (such as Reiki in McPherson's study) as well as, and this is perhaps even more important in the post-secular vein, in official and 'secular' health care too. Thus health care contexts become influential in-between spaces. In practices of de-differentiation not only body and soul, but also other segments of life understood as having been driven apart (such as life and death, sacred and profane, self and other, transcendence and immanence, etc.) are actively stitched together. My research on how the language of de-differentiation, as well as the willingness to assume tasks of spiritual care has made its way into contemporary care of the dying, is one window to this aspect of contemporary embodied spiritual practices (Utriainen 2010).

In their own respective ways all these body-practices can be used to reconstruct the ways people relate to and act in their lives. If it is true that 'our view of life is dependent on how we operationalize our "bodily beings in the world"' (Merleau-Ponty in Mellor & Shilling 1997: 21), these embodied re-constructions, enacted through practices of training and cultivating religiously competent bodies (Asad 1997) are capable of bringing about lesser or greater transformations in views, attitudes and practices, as well as politics, of life and destiny.

These kinds of practices engage people as embodied *subjects* and *agents* of their own fragile destinies—subjects in the sense of being subjected to events, and agents in the sense of being capable of 'making things happen' (Meyer & Jepperson 2000). Destiny, as sense of meaning and direction in one's life, can be understood either as a predetermined course of events (as fate/fortuna) or, and this is how I define it here, as the unfolding of one's life course *with the help of human will and action*, in which case action involves the body. Thus,

1 Cf. Bowman 1999: 3: 're-emergence of holistic ideas about health and illness' in New Age healing. The same kind of critical holism can be found in much progressive spirituality, as studied by Gordon Lynch (2007).

transforming one's embodied way of orienting in life may, to an important extent, change or reorient one's future. When these transformations include a non-empirical, or divine authorization, legitimacy and motivation, they construct knowledge-structures and rationalities that can be seen as keyholes or windows to modernity's possible religious near futures.

My own research focuses very much on practices whereby people, mostly women, seek and actively make meaning and create destinies by and within healing or care-giving practices that include adjusting or re-adjusting body and soul. These practices are sometimes called 'holistic' and alternative spiritual practices by practitioners and users, which aim at re-constructing mind and body. This re-construction is done by combining secular (e.g. scientific and empirical) and more religious (non-empirical) forces and presences² as resources in the attempts to bring out transformation or active engagement with the destinies of people in question.

Implications for the study of religion today

It is possible to look closely at what kinds of boundaries (i.e. identities and distinctions) are created by these practices, and also what kinds of 'divine', 'supernatural', 'transcendental' or other non-empirical forces or enchanting meaning-making devices circulate and are used in diverse practices. In addition to these two interpretational models, one could also have a close look at the *pragmatic* side of these practices and ask what is achieved by them; what kinds of agencies, futures and destinies people are envisioning and bringing about with these practices. This would entail asking how these body enchantments are fitted into people's everyday lives as well as into more secular contexts. What is *done with them* in these contacts with the more secular sphere and in various in-between spaces? I mean that scholars of religion could find their ways into various negotiations and linkings between secular rationalities and not so secular 'irrationalities' (or super-rationalities), and their multiple complex and creative combinations.

- 2 I have borrowed the notion 'presence' from Robert Orsi (2005). By this term he refers to the realness of otherworldly entities or forces which religious people live with. An interesting issue to study would be to observe how religious entities or forces vary from more concrete presences to metaphors, and what is people's tolerance and sensitivity towards strong, and even embodied religious presence in different social contexts.

These contacts and in-between spaces are created within, as well as between, two territories; the secular and the religious. Such officially secular spaces as schools and hospitals may include pockets in which religious language or other practices can be found. Health care is a good example of a context of modern technical specialization and expertise, within which individuals sometimes have the sense of becoming merely objects of many distinct disciplines and knowledge. Thus, today it is possible to hear that in order to be able to sense coherence, wholeness and meaning, many people want to make space (both rhetorical and practical) where they bring together different spheres of knowledge, such as medical, spiritual, and so on, with respective parts or aspects of their own life in order to restore a lost 'whole'. If they do not want to step outside the modern world entirely (which is what only a minority of them wants) then they try to make the best of the two worlds. This may mean that they include some of the most valued parts of modernity, for instance, the atmosphere of the modern medical exactness, or scientific language, within various alternative or 'holistic' spaces (see, e.g., Besecke 2005 and Lynch 2007).

In this way, the best parts of modernity are often connected with magic and sense of purposefulness, the sense which means that there is something very special here for 'me'. What can also be combined, hoped for and attempted to be put (back) together by spiritual exercises, is the sense of being the *agent* of one's own life and destiny—the sense of being in charge, or at least, according to a more modest version, being capable of doing something to improve one's situation and future. At the same time, however, one may wish to be the *object* (or *patient*) of care, compassion, grace, healing forces or cosmic energies. People may want to have both choice and fate.

Furthermore, if these transformative practices of de-differentiation are motivated and legitimated by, as well as enacted within, such metaphysics and epistemologies that include a magical, transcendent or non-empirical *something more*, they may be welcomed to some degree as freeing people from experiences of being caught in an iron cage of instrumental rationality and empirical reasoning of the disenchanting world, or to provide a tool of criticism of that world. This feeling of relative freedom made possible by religion would be a very concrete example in today's social world of the transformative power of the imaginary, or, in other words, the 'power of as if', identified once by William James.

Bodily disturbances

Thus, in the context of this article, post-secular is the name for the heuristic position in which the scholar of religion finds him/herself today; it is a position from which we can better distinguish various kinds of enchanted lives and bodies. I have described and hinted at some possible tasks and locations for research above. To close my text, I briefly want to comment on the implications this position might have on our more overall position with regard to our object of research.

In contrast to the relatively safe situation within the frame of secularization theories and the objectifying view they have offered within the category of religion, the scholar of religion can no longer comfortably assume that religion (including religious bodies) is an object which is neatly located 'out-there' in the world of others.³ Alternative spiritualities and their respective metaphysics and rationalities are intertwined in the contemporary culture in so many ways that they inevitably mix with the life-world of the scholar in one way or another, even if he/she would claim to be non-religious. If new spiritualities are notable varieties of today's popular or folk religiosity, they are that precisely by the virtue of being found in multiple spaces: in the articles of women's magazines, in well-being practices, seminars of workplaces, film and fiction, talk-shows as well as in commercials of health food, fitness centres, drugs and cosmetics.

According to Dick Houtman and Stef Aupers (2008), research has not so far paid enough attention to the subtle ways by which new spiritualities become socialized today. Likewise, the many ways in which religion is in the process of relocation, as well as the ways re-enchantment works, need more attention (cf. Partridge 2004). For instance, Anne-Christine Hornborg (2008) provides an analysis of the various ways in which the Swedish public sector is engaging alternative spirituality nowadays in, for example, supplementary education for teachers, or in helping young children with their psychosocial problems. Also in Finland, it is no longer necessary to go to special fairs organized for alternative spirituality. Instead, some of these courses are provided by community-run adult education centres. In 2010, these centres (*aikuisopisto*) provide, under the category of 'specialities' (cf. in England 'per-

3 In anthropology this question has been present as the dilemma of participant observation. In the scholarship of religion this issue has been quite sensitively treated by Robert Orsi in his book *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (2005).

sonal skills', Bowman 1999: 5) courses for instance on Reiki and astrology in Helsinki and Vantaa (capital area). Under the category 'physical exercise' one would find yoga, Chi Kung and Shakti-stretching. Scholars of religion very likely participate in practices that mediate and support some undercurrents of these contemporary hybrids of religion, and how they are learned and used.

Challenges will abound and flourish. Perhaps these challenges will also differ in cases of female and male researchers, since at least some of the subcultures and practices of these new folk religiosities pander differently to the different sexes. There are, for instance, what I call 'predominantly female spheres'. This implies that some embodied practices, or body enchantments, are also gender-making practices in their own ways which articulate and modify mostly female bodies and their futures and destinies (cf. McGuire 2008: 158–83). To a certain extent this should not be surprising at all; if secularization or dis-enchantment has different implications for women and men, why would not re-enchantment do that too (see Brereton & Bendroth 2001, Woodhead 2008)?

Contemporary forms of religion are sometimes confusing to a female researcher, particularly if she is a feminist. While some body-enchantment practices may emphasize emancipatory female bodies, many others may look rather conservative. This bafflement may be felt strongly in research on women's religiosities nowadays, since religious agents are sometimes quite different from secular feminist emancipated agents in their choices about what to do with their bodies and how to construct embodied moral lives, agencies and destinies.

Alternatively, the female researcher may herself use some of the same resources or might be involved in similar practices, for instance in commercially organized or publicly available spiritual well-being practices, and thus intermingle with her own object of research. Furthermore, some feminists are already talking about a *spiritual turn in feminism / feminist research* (Braidotti 2008, Ahonen 2010). Would this mean that secularist feminist theories of religion are gradually giving way to more religion-friendly feminist theories that would, again in a new way, celebrate enchanted female bodies?⁴ How should the very often secular, or even secularist, feminist researchers then encounter this difference which is no longer such a clear-cut one? The colli-

4 Feminist theology and religion, which Gordon Lynch (2007) enumerates as important aspects of progressive spirituality, have introduced enchanted female bodies to the Western consciousness. However, they have sometimes been in a tense relationship with more secular feminist conceptions of religion and the body.

sions of feminisms and religions carry implications concerning the embodied and political agency that are of great importance not only to the study of religions, but also to social sciences in general, as Saba Mahmood (2005: 195–9) emphasizes.

For some of us it may be puzzling to investigate something from which we do not have the historical or cultural distance to safeguard us and our analytic categories against. For others it may turn out to be convenient since it provides lots of possibilities for participatory observation. I also want to highlight the issue of ethics and ask if this kind of a situation could be taken to be not less but *potentially more ethical*, in some ways. By this I mean that from the post-secular position the researcher could no longer make herself the sublime and unaffected knower of religion and enchanted bodies. Instead, she would have to admit that she is also part of her quite unstable object of research, at least culturally if not religiously. And this ethical position immediately becomes a methodological one with the implication that we must train our analytic eye for quite new kinds of sensitivities and powers of resolution in order to see the diversity of embodied lives between illusion and disillusion.

References

Ahonen, Johanna

2006 Spiritualistista feminismiä. Äiti Amma ja hänen suomalaiset seuraajansa. *Naistutkimus* 19 (4): 29–44.

2010 Nomadic Bodies, Transformative Spaces: Affective Encounters with Indian Spirituality. In: Marianne Liljeström & Susanna Paasonen (eds), *Working with Affect in Feminist Readings: Disturbing Differences*; pp. 112–25. Abingdon: Routledge.

Asad, Talal

1997 Remarks on the Anthropology of the Body. In: Sarah Coakley (ed.), *Religion and the Body*; pp. 42–52. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Besecke, Kelly

2005 Seeing Invisible Religion: Religion as a Societal Conversation about Transcendent Meaning. *Sociological Theory* 23 (2): 179–96.

Bowman, Marion

1999 Healing in the Spiritual Marketplace: Consumers, Courses and Credentialism. *Social Compass* 46 (2): 181–9.

Bracke, Sarah

2008 Conjugating the Modern/Religious, Conceptualizing Female Religious Agency: Contours of a 'Post-secular' Conjecture. *Theory, Culture & Society* 25 (6): 51–67.

Braidotti, Rosi

2008 In Spite of the Times: The Postsecular Turn in Feminism. *Theory, Culture & Society* 25: 1–24.

Brereton, Virginia Lieson & Margaret Lamberts Bendroth

2001 Secularization and Gender: An Historical Approach to Women and Religion in the Twentieth Century. *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 13: 209–23.

Cannell, Fenella

2010 The Anthropology of Secularism. *The Annual Review of Anthropology* 39: 85–100.

Carrette, Jeremy R.

2000 *Foucault and Religion: Spiritual Corporality and Political Spirituality*. London: Routledge.

Davie, Grace

2007 *Sociology of Religion*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Giddens, Anthony

1991 *Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Heller, Zoë

2008 *The Believers*. London: Penguin.

Hornborg, Anne-Christine

2008 Att återförtrolla det sekulariserade samhället. Är Sverige på väg in i Vattumannens tidsålder? *Svensk Religionshistorisk Årsskrift* 2006–2007: 33–59.

Houtman, Dick & Stef Aupers

2008 The Spiritual Revolution and the New Age Gender Puzzle: The Sacralization of the Self in Late Modernity (1980–2000). In: Kristin Aune, Sonya Sharma & Giselle Vincett (eds), *Women and Religion in the West: Challenging Secularization*; pp. 99–118. Hampshire: Ashgate.

Hovi, Tuija

2007 *Usko ja kerronta. Arkitodellisuuden rakentuminen uskonliikkeessä*. Turku: Turun yliopisto.

Lester, Rebecca J.

2005 *Jesus in Our Wombs: Embodying Modernity in a Mexican Convent*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Lynch, Gordon

2007 *The New Spirituality: An Introduction to Progressive Belief in the Twenty-first Century*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Mahmood, Saba

2005 *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

McGuire, Meredith

1988 *Ritual Healing in Suburban America*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

TERHI UTRIAINEN

- 2008 *Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McPherson, Judith**
- 2008 *Women and Reiki. Energetic/Holistic Healing in Practice*. London: Equinox.
- Mellor, Philip**
- 2007 Embodiment, Emotion and Religious Experience: Religion, Culture and the Charismatic Body. In: James A. Beckford & N. J. Demerath, III (eds), *The Sage Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*; pp. 587–607. London: Sage Publications.
- Mellor, Philip A. & Chris Shilling**
- 1997 *Re-forming the Body: Religion, Community and Modernity*. London: Sage Publications.
- Meyer, John W. & Ronald L. Jepperson**
- 2000 The “Actors” of Modern Society: The Cultural Construction of Social Agency. *Sociological Theory* 18 (1): 100–20.
- Mitchell, Jon P. & Hildi J. Mitchell**
- 2008 Embodiment and Immanence in Catholicism and Mormonism. *Social Analysis* 52 (1): 79–94.
- Orsi, Robert**
- 2005 *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Partridge, Chris**
- 2004 *The Re-Enchantment of the West*. Vol. 1. London: Continuum.
- Salomonsen, Jone**
- 1999 *Enchanted Feminism: The Reclaiming Witches of San Francisco*. London: Routledge.
- Sebold, Alice**
- 2009 *The Lovely Bones*. Boston: Little Brown and Company.
- Taylor, Charles**
- 2002 *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Utraiainen, Terhi**
- 2006 *Alaston ja puettu. Ruumiin ja uskonnon ääret*. Tampere: Vastapaino.
- 2010 Agents of De-differentiation: Women Care-givers for the Dying in Finland. *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 25 (3): 437–51.
- Vincett, Giselle, Sonya Sharma & Kristin Aune**
- 2008 Introduction. Women, Religion and Secularization: One Size Does Not Fit All. In: Kristin Aune, Sonya Sharma & Giselle Vincett (eds), *Women and Religion in the West: Challenging Secularization*; pp. 1–19. Hampshire: Ashgate.
- Woodhead, Linda**
- 2008 ‘Because I’m Worth It’: Religion and Women’s Changing Lives in the West. In: Kristin Aune, Sonya Sharma & Giselle Vincett (eds), *Women and Religion in the West: Challenging Secularization*; pp. 148–61. Hampshire: Ashgate.

Buddhism and the formation of the religious body

A Foucauldian approach

Introduction

Western conceptions of the body have often prejudiced our understanding of the body in Buddhist thought. We are often inclined, as Andrew Tuck has noted, to engage in a kind of isogesis, a kind of reading into texts values that reveal as much about ourselves as interpreters as it does about the text being examined (Tuck 1990: 9–10). I suggest these projections include ideas about monasticism, the transition from ‘Hinayana to Mahayana’, the notion of the authority of the Buddha in regard to his disciples, and the conception of the Vinaya as ‘law’. Along with this list of topics we may also include the ‘body’. The terms and issues I have listed reflect preoccupations of the modern age and are too often burdened with modernist meanings to be of much use (Reynolds 2005: 226).¹

Some dominant discourses in Western society have often emphasized the body as a physically and biologically given fact, to be understood like other ‘natural’ phenomena, through empirical investigation (Wright 2000: 1). The body in certain readings has been constructed as a caricature of the true inner being as a volatile animal with the soul as its prisoner (Bordo 2004: 3). For instance Plato in the *Phaedo* saw the passions of the body as a distraction to the philosopher.² Augustine emphasised the animal aspect of human nature and by contrast seventeenth century thought saw the body as a programmed system that could be controlled (Bordo 2004: 4).

Poststructuralist debates around the body (Foucault 1977, Bordo 1990, Grosz 1994) have demonstrated how our knowledge of the body is constituted in specific cultural and historical circumstances and in the context of particular relations of power. This chapter develops this approach to the body

1 Writing of the term ‘power’.

2 See Plato’s *Phaedo* 65 (c), 66 (c). In later dialogues such as the *Symposium* and *Timaeus* Plato had a more positive view of the body.

in Buddhism and thus attempts to show how the body has been represented within different discourses in Buddhist texts.

Implicit in my account is the remedying of the failure in some Buddhist scholarship to recognise different types of bodies (negative and positive) and to show how these aspects of the body, as enumerated by texts, operate together to constitute forms of identities capable of being constituted within different historical moments out of the pressure of new social and material changes. At the same time the body is seen as being capable of self modification in terms of that discourse.

I use the term 'body' in this chapter in a sense that it implies not only a physical aspect (flesh, bones, liquids etc.), but that it is connected to various cognitive and emotional capacities as outlined in the *khandhas* (see below) explanation of the human constitution. My concern in my treatment of the body is to avoid the problems of psychological analysis, as this form of analysis often implies the existence of a psyche or soul along with the ideas of complete individual self-determination.

The theoretical approach to this chapter

Michel Foucault made only a few references to Eastern religions in his work (Carrette 1999: 113).³ However, his writings influenced Edward Said and his work on *Orientalism* (1978), and were instrumental for those who have followed Said (Karlis 2005, Lieberman 1989, King 1999, Stoler 1995, Bendle 2002). Jeremy Carrette and David Bernauer in several of their books have also contributed to the connection between Foucault and religion.⁴

Foucault's interests in religion were reflected in his various 'case studies' on the complex workings of the relationship between religious structures, military establishments, educational institutions, and the role of these in shaping subjects. *Discipline and Punish* (1977) implied that a new type of punishment was the model for the control for an entire society within factories, and schools and hospitals, modelled on the modern prison.

He showed that 'disciplinary society' had three primary techniques of control: hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment, and the 'examination'.

3 For scholars who have used a Foucauldian approach to Buddhism, see Zhang 2005, Konik 2009, Wicking 2010.

4 Carrette 1999, 2000; Bernauer & Carrette 2004. These works have on the whole dealt with theology. See also McSweeney 2005.

An illustration of the first two of these forms of control may be seen in hospitals or schools where patients and students are subject to an objective truth, contained in medical analysis and pedagogy. The third form of control, the 'examination', elicits truth about those examined, and initiates procedures to supervise individuals' behaviour by forcing them to study by directing their course of treatment.

Foucault linked examples from these various examinations together and showed that there was a distinctive overlapping and borrowing between disciplinary regimes. This is clear, as he notes how the 'decury' (an ancient military unit) was taken from the Roman army and transferred to the Benedictine monasteries and later to some Jesuit schools. Monasticism was thus seen by Foucault as one of the earlier paradigm structures of disciplinary concepts (Foucault 1977: 315; Carrette 2000: 118).

The notion of the physical body is a cultural theme in Foucault's writings, as the body may be disciplined and controlled by various sorts of ideological regimes.

The institutions referred to above had similarities in that they contained disciplinary practices that shaped the individual's body (Foucault 1991: 109–41). One of the developments from Foucault's work (Coakley 1997, Brown 1988, Turner 1992) was the interest of a group of scholars⁵ who recognized that belief is a form of practice which is inscribed or reflected in the physical body. This approach argues that religious beliefs are not free floating, as they regulate the subject: the individual within the disciplinary regime concerned (Carrette 2000: 150).

In the monastic environment bodily desires are clearly visible, and their physical manifestations subject to correction (Stoler 1995: 165–87).⁶ While some Buddhist texts offer meditative practices built on the rejection of the body, they need to be balanced by other texts which emphasise the virtues of the body as a vehicle for Enlightenment (Mroziak 2004, 2007).

My objective in describing different administrative regimes for monastic communities in Buddhism is to critique how institutional structures shape and form the religious body. I see my study as sociological in a broad sense, in that it deals with the inner formation of monks, based on a study of how organisational mechanisms structure internal meaning for participation.

5 For Buddhist material on the 'body' see Collins 1997: 185–204; Williams 1998: 205–30.

6 On Buddhist education see Blackburn 1999 and 2001, McDaniel 2008, Samuels 2005 and 2010.

Buddhism as a path of self-cultivation of body and mind

Western psychology emphasises the vital importance of developing a sense of 'continuity, identity and on-goingness in existence' and a positive conception of self (Enger 1984: 25; Klein 2003: 331). From a Buddhist perspective, a secure identity although necessary in early years, is intrinsically problematic. Personal development is premised in Buddhism on the relinquishment of the subtle error of ontology about the permanence of the body and the idea of a fixed self (Hopkins 1983: 296–304; Ruben 1997: 79–108).

At the same time Buddhists have in general expressed an equivocal view of the idea of an authoritative canonical teaching⁷ and central ecclesiastical authority. Rather, the Buddha insisted on the primacy of self-knowledge and rational self-inquiry (Waida 1987: 3). Buddha suggested rigorous tests for religious seekers who wished to pursue their own religious path by providing a set of criteria to evaluate the authority of a teacher, religious teachings in general, or to provide a test to check on their personal development.⁸

The Buddhist path leading to the end of suffering and the path to Enlightenment is often summarised as a threefold cultivation: of virtue, consisting of ethical integrity and action or interaction (*sīla*), of meditative concentration to develop the heart and mind (*samādhi*), and of penetrating insight where one sees the illusion of a separate ego (*prajñā*) (Rothberg 2001: 165).

Buddhism evolved an array of techniques and practices. Different types of practices may be given to different temperaments.⁹ Such practices may also involve a wide variety of activities; charitable practices, journeys to visit

7 The word 'canon' must be used with caution as while the Theravada tradition is seen by some scholars to have a canon, the Mahayana 'canon' is seen to be an 'open canon', Veidlinger 2006: 19. See Collins 1990: 97. Steven Collins has argued that the Pali tradition remained open, as monks and nuns continued to recite both oral and written texts, see Collins 1992.

8 See for instance the 'four reliances' found in Digha Nikāya 3.108. Another formulation was seen in the Kalama-Sutta (Aṅguttara Nikāya 1.188 ff.). See the discussion of this sutta in Bond 1982: 8–15. Here I also mention the Mahapadesa-sutta in the Digha-Nikāya. This text sets out a procedure and criteria for determining whether a teaching should be accepted as the word of the Buddha (*Buddhavacana*). See Lamotte 1983 and 1988.

9 The Abhidharma and commentarial literature classifies personalities into six different types of temperaments: greedy (*rāja-carita*), hating (*dosa-carita*); deluded (*moha-carita*); faithful natured (*saddhā-carita*); intelligent (*buddhi-carita*); and speculative (*vitakka-carita*). See the Visuddhimagga 1976: 101 f. See also Huxley 2004.

venerable monks living in secluded places and so on (Dreyfus 2003). Here I note meditational practices.¹⁰ Meditation has been seen as a ‘disciplinary *mise au pas* of recalcitrant minds and bodies’ (Faure 1996: 259) and part of what Elster calls ‘the highly paradoxical goal of character planning (Elster 1983: 54). Meditation also helped practitioners deal with issues of sexual lust and desire in general, as the aim of such practices is to promote tranquillity of mind through the realisation of the impermanence of all things such as the nature of identity and the stability of the body.

Meditation practices may also lead to an analysis of the body and mind into component parts with the objective of discovering that there is no essential basis for these parts. Instead the student may learn through this experience that all these parts are baseless, conditioned and contingent (Boisvert 1995). The realisation of emptiness may enable monks to build themselves up: emptiness provides the opportunity for scrutiny and to ‘produce an interiorised subjectivity’ (Gyatso 1998: 184). In Buddhism changes in attitude and mind, as I have indicated, are fostered by methods of training. The texts in general, argues Naina Devdas (2004: iii), maintain that changes in attitude are possible because consciousness has the capacity to be aware of its own conditioning and can diversify its response to different influences.

Buddhist theories of consciousness are complex and locating the possible ‘I maker’, or the causal element in the process of self-formation, is not a straightforward process. In technical terms the doctrine of causality (dependent origination or *pratīyasamutpāda*) holds that all phenomena, including the self and the surrounding world, arise out of a network of relationships dependent upon other causes and conditions. The self is not to be understood as an essential, independent entity, but rather as a manifestation of complex causes, both mental and physical (Cuevas 2003: 713).¹¹ At the same time Theravada Buddhism posits that there is no overriding idea embodying the notion of will or self-mastery (Devdas 2008: 111).

Theravada scholars describe how *saṅkhāras*, or dispositions, form over time and how they generate and guide behaviour. These dispositions are not seen as autonomous, but arise and gradually develop from past decisions and behaviour. The suttas explain the relationship between *cetanā* (volition) and mental dispositions as follows.

10 The word that most closely is associated with meditation in Sanskrit is *dhyana*, *bhavana* and even *samadhi*. Robert Thurman (2010) says these ideas all indicate mind–body complexes that are sufficiently different from sensory or intellectual receptive states, although they may include these states sometimes.

11 On causality in Buddhism also see Macy 1991, Kalupahana 1975.

Purposeful thoughts and the processes of decision-making (*cetanā*, *sañcetanā*) generate actions (*kamma*) and these actions consequently generate tendencies and dispositions. These dispositions constitute the gradual shaping of character, which consequently becomes the basis for any future action and behaviour.¹² David Kalupahana argues that ‘while volition (*cetana*) may be the immediate act of deciding, “dispositions” (*sañkharās*) represent the gradually built-up character involved in decision making. The gradual forming of mental dispositions constitutes a will (*cetanā*) generated by past tendencies and dispositions.’ (Kalupahana 1995: 52.) In this context, Kalupahana argues that *cetanā* signifies an immediate intention or decision that generates from a mental action.

One classic account makes an analysis of the human individual based on the description of the body as constituting five *khandas* or *skandas* (Sanskrit).¹³ While the body as a whole may be seen as consisting of different parts, the path to Enlightenment involves the appropriate working of each ‘aggregate’, as each *khandha* is responsible for specific and different aspects of a human being. Collectively the five *khandas* are conceived of as being interdependent and mutually conditioned: it is by acting together that they produce the psychophysical continuum of an individual (Hamilton 1996: 172). The body thus conceived has no reliable basis for a self identity, in that it is seen as a composite and constructed entity that is linked to the world and which continues to exist wholly interdependently of self or other (Gray 2006: 296).

The five *khandas* are usually translated as ‘material form’ (meaning the body, *rūpa*); ‘feeling’ or the hedonic tone of any experience (*vedanā*); ‘cognition’ which classifies and interprets the mind (*saññā*); ‘constructing activities’ (*sañkhāras*); and ‘consciousness’ (*viññāṇa*) (Harvey 1995: 4).

Sue Hamilton writes that it appears that these terms are being understood in terms of one’s physical body and mental activities as a whole, as the physical locus of one’s experience (Hamilton 1996: 70). In this view the body is seen to be made up of the four great elements: earth, water, fire and wind, each of these processes abstractly corresponding to features of the processes of the body. A central feature of this active body is the senses, which are; seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and mind. These senses are doors to the body as the body provides us the door to the experience of the objective

12 I rely here on Devdas 2004: 28.

13 Standard studies include Gethin 1986, Harvey 1993, Boisvert 1995, Chang 1975, Bodhi 1976. The principle sources are the four primary Nikayas and the first three works of the Abhidamma-pitaka.

world. In this activity the mind and the body are interrelated and cannot be separated.

The *khandhas* may be seen as a class of phenomena which are subject to the laws of dependent origination (see below) in that they continuously rise and fall away (Gethin 1986: 49). The teaching of the *khandhas* is often deployed to exemplify one of the central ideas of Buddhism. These are the ideas of conditioned existence and the radical denial of soul, self or any form of substantial substance (Paniker 1990: 27).

The linguistic items translated lexically as ‘self’ and ‘person’ are expressed in Pāli as *attā*, *purisa/puggala*, and in Sanskrit as *ātman*, *puruṣa/pudgala* respectively. However while the self is seen not to exist, the expression is used in a number of contexts without there being a suggestion that there is a conflict with the doctrine of no-self or *anattā* (Collins 1982: 71). In other words terms such as the ‘self’, ‘I’, or the body do not designate independent substances; these terms are merely convenient designations for psychophysical substances (Mackenzie 2008: 263).¹⁴

I intend to show that there are a variety of discursive approaches to the body, as on one hand it may be seen as attractive and as an appropriate vehicle for realisation and on the other hand as undesirable or loathsome. Before I undertake this presentation I describe first religious organisational context which structured monastic communities.

14 The doctrine of no-self has been interpreted in various ways (Collins 1982, 1994; Pietz 2005: 188–210; Faure 1996: 242–68; Harvey 1995; Albahari 2006). The best interpretation according to Christopher Gowans is that ‘substance-selves have no reality and that process-selves have no independent reality but do have a dependent reality’ (Gowans 2003: 72). In the Buddhist system of ideas the Sanskrit terms (*svasaṃvedana* or *svasaṃvitti*) have been translated as ‘self-cognition’, ‘self-awareness’ or ‘reflexive-awareness’ to signify a form of self consciousness (Yao 2006: 1). These terms have been interpreted by *Dharmakīrti* and his followers (Dreyfus 1997, see also Yao 2006, Williams 1998) as a particular type of consciousness called self-cognition. This may be compared with what western scholars call apperception, or the knowledge we have of our own mental states (Dreyfus & Thompson 2007: 103). Pāli texts use the term *ahaṃkāra* or ‘I maker’ to describe the situation where the ‘I’ is conscious of its own self-awareness and how it is bought about (Collins 1982: 100–3, 263; Mackenzie 2008: 247). Here I note that the Pāli term to connote resolve or volition is *cetanā*. Translators have not given a consistent interpretation of this term and there is a debate over whether the term refers to a cognitive function with intention or is a factor which produces a goal directed action (Devdas 2008: 2, 3).

The organisational structure of the Sangha

Should we consider the shaping of a young novice in a monastery, after a period of time we might easily conceive that he/she would be a different person than the one that initially entered into the monastic fraternity. To consider the shaping of a monk we might consider the whole structure and format of restraining and supportive factors in personal development.

When recruits left householder life to join the Sangha they joined what the Buddha described as a superior life style, where a man or woman could pursue their spiritual vocation without the worries of family life. In this new life, ones' spiritual companions were seen as fellow brothers or sisters as they had only each other to depend on for support. At the same time, monks had responsibilities to each other and to the members of the lay community.¹⁵

Traditional sources indicate that within a Buddhist Sangha there was a division of tasks. In the Theravada tradition each monk was under a religious preceptor as well as an Abbott.¹⁶ In this tradition the relationship between the teacher and the novice was conceived as being like that between a father and son, the older monk providing guidance and instruction, with the student caring for his mentor (Powers 2009b: 143). Apart from the checks and balances provided by these relationships, matters regarding the integrity of the order were subject to the collective decisions of the order (Powers 2009a: 150).

The different Vinaya recensions also tell us of the Vinayadharas, or monastic experts, who were responsible for the study and exposition of the Vinaya (Dhirasekera 1981: 10). These experts traced their lineage back to Upali, who first recited the Vinaya. It is generally agreed that these officials were the group of experts responsible for drafting complex rules, such as those necessary for knowing how to lend money with interest and how to write up contracts (Schopen 2004).

With this object in mind I delineate several aspects of monastic culture to illustrate how long lasting communities require special means of socialisation. George Dreyfus suggests, like Foucault (Foucault 1977: 170; see also Weber 1978: 253), that monastic arrangements need technologies of power to form efficient members of a community, and as such communities need

15 On the role of friendship in the Sangha see Powers 2009a: 141–63. On the concept of duty within the Sangha, see Gombrich 1978. As regards the relationship between master and pupil and the shifting power factors see Elstein 2009.

16 See Wijayaratna 1990: 137–40 writing on the position as set out in the Pāli canon. For an account of the recent Tibetan tradition see Dreyfus 2003: 50, 61.

‘micro-practices’ aimed at forming effective members of a community and transforming the community into ‘docile bodies’ (Dreyfus 2003: 65).

One aspect of the formation of the self that interested Foucault was how the individual turned him/herself into a subject by means of knowledge, such as that produced by awareness of one’s sexuality, by which individuals were led to focus on their own subjectivity (Foucault 1977: 218). Thus Foucault says he sought ‘to analyse the practices which focus their attention on themselves, to decipher, recognise, and acknowledge themselves as subjects of desire’ (Foucault 1984: 5). In the context of monasticism, disciples had to face and deal with their sexual impulses by denial, sublimation, or through the institution of confession (Voyce 2009). I take Foucault’s suggestion here to indicate that a variety of forms of self-reflection were necessary as part of the personal training regime in which their sexual decision was the ‘occasion’ but not the exclusive occasion (Foucault 1984: 5). Foucault implies we should consider desire in general along with other mental distractions, disturbances or neuroses and consider by what means these negative states are transformed.

Buddhist texts deal extensively with how to achieve Enlightenment and they describe techniques to be applied to acquire spiritual progress.¹⁷ My goal is not to discuss those techniques *per se*, or to discuss the indications of how Buddhist texts might be ‘interpreted.’¹⁸ My emphasis is not hermeneutical¹⁹ but ‘processional’ as I am interested in the configurations of individual behaviour, both mental and physical, which develop through the interpretation process.²⁰

The Vinaya rules and the practices it extolled were one of the facilities within monastic life, along with other systems of mental and emotional training, such as meditation practices, ritual observances, sutra reading and so on. For example the *Compendium of Training* (Śiksamuccaya 1972), an eighth century text by Santideva prescribed many types of disciplinary practices for Bodhisattvas, such as the study of scriptures, confessional liturgies, forms of

17 See idea of ‘path’ in Chu 2003.

18 David Klemm here draws a useful distinction between two types of hermeneutics. *Hermeneutics as interpretation* happens when the emphasis is on the meaning as understood by the reader and asks the question about the author’s intention or what the original audience understood; it seeks invariant meaning. The second one is called *hermeneutics as practical philosophy* where the focus of the inquiry shifts to the activity of understanding. (Klemm 1986: 1–53.)

19 A literature is now emerging on a hermeneutical approach to Buddhist texts, see Lopez 1988, Nimanong 2006.

20 In this sense I am interested in Klemm’s form of *hermeneutics as practical philosophy*.

meditation, codes of ethical conduct and observances of monastic etiquette and deportment (Mrozik 2007: 5 and 2004). Taking these practices as a whole I am enquiring ‘what do these practices do for those who participate in them?’ In other words I am asking how personal programs shape and inscribe themselves on the body and thus create a certain subject (Schilbrack 2004: 8).

In terms of my approach these questions seek to give an account of the cultural processes of self-formation. Foucault’s work reflected a new interest in ancient Hellenistic ethics and the idea of philosophy as training in virtue (Foucault 1984 and 1986, Nussbaum 1994, Hadot 1995).²¹ He attempted to examine ‘lived ethics’ and to recover the meaning of *askesis* as a set of exercises in self-training or self-formation (Antonaccio 1998: 70). Foucault used this word within its Greek meaning, in a positive and productive sense as regards the ideal of perfecting one’s self, developing one’s capacities and becoming who one is (McGushin 2007: xii). Such modalities of being include beauty, tranquility, gracefulness and a number of other attributes. These attributes were to be obtained by an application of ‘techniques of the self’²², or what Hadot (1995) called ‘spiritual exercises.’ An art of living was thus a *tekhnē* in the sense of the Greek term for a skill or *savoir-faire* (Prado 2000: 137).

Two aspects of Foucault’s work are important in the construction of a religious subject. Foucault’s method implies we should examine the dynamics of religious institutions and the methods they utilise, such as confessional practices (Voyce 2009), ritual worship, and even modes of transgression.²³ Such practice ‘orders, defines and controls’ the religious subject through objectify-

21 On *Askesis*, see McGushin 2007. For a recent examination and overview of the literature of the comparison between Buddha’s teaching and Hellenistic philosophy see Gowans 2003: 42–5.

22 A ‘technique of the self’ may be seen as a practice which permit individuals by their own means to have operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality’, Foucault 1988: 18. This approach has been developed by other scholars in Indian studies, see Hattam 2004, Samuel 1994 and 2005, Ali 1998.

23 See Voyce 2010. Here the argument is made that ‘transgression’ serves the role of assisting practitioners to break out of the numbing encasement of rules. Sexual expression in the view of this author may be seen as a positive way to transcend mundane existence. In this regard see Gyatso 2005: 275 and 271–90, Gross 2000, Glassman 2003, Faure 1998. This view must be nuanced by the role of precepts in monastic life and the degree of conformity by monks as regards the precept over the misuse of sexual energies. It must also be remembered that there is no monolithic view on sexuality and that, as evidenced by Tantra, a variety of views on sexuality exist in Buddhism.

ing and normalising the disciple (Carrette 2000: 39). I call this ‘mode one’ of the construction of the ‘religious body’.

A central aspect of this approach is that belief may be seen as embodied²⁴ or inscribed upon and within a physical person. As Mary Douglas writes (1973: 137–9): ‘the powers and prohibitions of a given culture are reproduced on the bodies of its members.’²⁵ Foucault argues that physical practices, as well as spatial arrangements,²⁶ were intended to have physical as well as moral effects (Foucault 1977).

Several scholars have shown how the body is variously portrayed to present an apparent paradox in Buddhism in that while the body in some texts may appear as ‘loathsome’ or ‘bad smelling’, other accounts show that the body may be seen as a vehicle for enlightenment, or as a reward for good *kamma* (Collins 1997: 185–204; Dissanayake 1993; Wilson 1996: 63–6).

In these negative accounts the body is seen as a ‘repulsive amalgamation of bones, skin, sinews and malodorous dirt’ (Dissanayake 1993: 126). The body is further afflicted by old age, disease, death and suffering.

Some scholars have thus emphasized a negative account of the body in Buddhism showing it to be worthless or a handicap in spiritual development. For instance J. E. Bateson writing in the 1908 edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* summarises this Buddhist attitude to the body arguing that the ‘body can never be the abode of anything but evil and that final deliverance from all bodily life, present and to come, is the greatest of all blessings the highest of all booms, the loftiest of all aims’ (Bateson 1908: 758).²⁷

In other accounts the body is exalted rather than degraded. A classic example is seen in the perfectly controlled and decorous body of a monk (Hamilton 1996: 171). In other texts the receipt of a beautiful or wholesome body is seen as an appropriate vehicle for spiritual progress. This second form of literature praises the merit of the body as a necessary vehicle for spiritual progress. These sentiments find expression in several contexts that by implication indicate the approach of the middle way and the rejection of harsh asceticism. At the same time the gift of the body is considered as the fullest

24 There has been a growing interest in the sociology of the body since the 1980s. See for instance, Turner 1992, Shilling 1993, Brown 1988. In the Buddhist context see Collins 1997: 185–204; Dissanayake 1993: 123–44; Hamilton 1996: 169–93.

25 For the development of this theme in Foucault’s work see Carrette 2000: 109–28.

26 Few scholars have referred to the importance of the spatial arrangements of Buddhist monasteries and how these reinforce discipline through constant scrutiny and observation. However, see Faure 1998: 260.

27 Bateson quotes Sir Monier Monier-Williams (1899), the source of this view here.

embodiment of a Bodhisattva's charity, contrasting with the gift of lesser items such as material goods (Ohnuma 1997, 2000).

John Powers (2009a: 9) argues that in Indian literature there was a pervasive concern with ideal manhood, so that such elegant and beautiful deportment seemed 'natural and given' and thus was normative (Foucault 1977: 128).

Notions of ideal manhood resonate with depictions of the Buddha, and his impressive physical characteristics. The Buddha was skilled in wrestling, archery and the martial arts, as well as being attractive to women. The Buddha's good qualities and appearances were displayed on his body and should be read as a canvas for the proof of his spiritual attainment and the achievement of the purification of karma over previous lives (Powers 2009a: 19 and 2009b).

Through the observance of monastic rules and appropriate deportment, Bodhisattvas produced serene features and gestures. The effects of these practices would thus manifest in postures and movements of bodies. Thus the intention of these practices was to produce virtuous bodies as well as virtuous minds (Mrozik 2007: 5–6).

Buddhist monks and nuns also needed to demonstrate the high standard of deportment expected in general among religious ascetics (Powers 2009a: 19). One incident in the Vinaya tells of a complaint by laypeople that monks went into a village with swaying hips and swinging their arms. Thus the Buddha laid down a rule that monks should keep their bodies straight and upward and when walking into a town they should fix their eyes on the ground a few feet in front of them, in order to avoid looking at women.²⁸

The bodies of Buddhist monks were viewed as 'public spaces' on which their virtue was displayed. Bodily gestures were an important part of status formation, or part of what Habermas (1989: 7) calls a 'representative publicity', where lords and leaders were represented not as abstractions but through demonstrable bearing, conduct and insignia (Ali 2008: 25–56). Physical beauty and a calm exterior were associated with morality. Any lapse of morality could be criticised by laypeople, who by their donations had made a personal investment in the purity of monks (Powers 2009a: 90–1).

Second, Foucault indicated that while individuals may be structured or modified by institutional factors, they may also be formed by working and monitoring their own internal behaviour. Thus a person's religious body is generated through certain cultural processes, which may be internalised as

28 See the *sekhiyā* rules in the *Pātimokkha*, rules 7 and 16 the *Pātimokkha* (2001: 91, 93). For corresponding rules for nuns see *sekhiyā* rules in *Pātimokkha* 2001: 17, 233.

one of their own resources. I call this 'mode two' of the construction of the religious body.

Buddhist thinkers were interested in the reflexive nature of self-consciousness. In other words they were concerned with a 'subjectless self-consciousness'.²⁹ This form of consciousness may be understood in the light of the previous ideas about the *khandhas* and the idea that the *khandhas* are more than a list of components that make up a human being as they are a series of psychophysical events which are without permanence.

In following the indications of Foucault I argue that the development of the individual took place through the monastic engagement in self-formation as an 'ethical subject'.³⁰ In other words the disciples produce by way of scrutiny a subject (and a body) that might not have been there before (Foucault 1977: 194, 1986: 60–8, 1988: 16–49).

I have indicated that Buddhist monks utilize their bodies as objects of contemplation and as a locus of self-transformation. The path to enlightenment involves the whole human being as part of a physical process which is not separate from the mind, but which is dependent upon, or interrelates with the mind. I have indicated that Buddhist texts provide a wide variety of meditations that concentrate on the body. One of these meditations for instance is on the stages of the decomposition of the corpse.³¹

By involving themselves in meditations on the body monks have an opportunity to see into the transient impermanence of life and so to overcome desires and craving for conditioned existence. The body, through meditative practices, 'may be seen as a visceral reproduction in which, ultimately, a copy of a body can be re-transformed and restored into an original: into a body once again' (Kilma 2001: 569).

29 Frank 1991, cited in Yao 2006: 157. According to Manfred Frank there were three other types of consciousness which he described as subjective, relational and self-conscious.

30 Foucault indicated that there were different modes of working on one's self which he divided into four subsidiary questions or areas. The first concerns the *determination of the ethical substance*; the second is the *mode of subjection*; the third concerns the *forms of elaboration or ethical work*; the fourth concerns the *telos of the ethical subject*. See Foucault 1984: 27. For useful discussion of these ideas and applications in different contexts, see Dean 1999 and 1995.

31 For a comprehensive treatment of this topic see Visuddhimagga 1.178–9; Wilson 1996: 41–76; Boisvert 1996.

The role of authority and power in the shaping of the religious body

I have focussed on the process of the institutional shaping of monks. I now wish to focus on the issue 'that given the emphasis on self-development within Buddhism, what role does 'authority' and organizational structure (rules or forms of social hierarchy) play in self-formation and the construction of the religious body?

To develop this approach I explore some of the indications given by Foucault, and how his ideas might be used to examine the formation of the body in Theravada and Tibetan Buddhism.

As part of my inquiry into how monks are shaped by institutional practices I outline possible approaches to 'religious authority' to discuss how the religious body was shaped. My approach does not seek to locate where authority lies, or is held in institutionalised positions. Rather my approach is to locate how authority shapes or facilitates the production of the religious body.

Louis Gomez (1993) argues that the concept of authority has a wide semantic field in Buddhism and to understand how this concept operates in Buddhism we should examine in effect how the concept is *operational* (Gomez 1993: 8, my emphasis). To do this I argue it is necessary to discuss the relationship between 'authority' and 'freedom'³² and how aspects of these notions combined may create the religious body.

In the context of western ideas of authority, authority is seen as binding an alleged subject: 'authority has an exigency that advice lacks' (Green 1987: 584; Waida 1987). John Locke (1967: 324) put this idea as: all private judgment is excluded. Joseph Raz (1986) in a similar way expressed this idea in arguing that authoritative reasons pre-empt or exclude other reasons.

The above ideas of 'authority' are often based on the notion of 'compelling power' or 'domination' (Luke 1978, Flathman 1980). This approach is deficient as regards the monastic context. We might therefore make a distinction between two types of power, a 'power-over', or domination, and a 'power-to' (Wartenberg 1992: 781; Valantasis 1995).³³

This revised version of 'authority' instructs us to locate authority (or what I now prefer to call 'power') in the actions of subjects, where subjects recog-

32 The notion of authority is elusive as it is associated in modern times with a bundle of concepts such as the rise of the 'nation state' and the concerns of 'political legitimacy' and notions of 'duty' (Poggi 2006: 27–30; Konty 2007: 225–9; Iverach 1908: 249–54).

33 On an application of this approach to monasticism in other contexts see Krawiec 2002: 50–5.

nise themselves as products of their own self reflection and self-regulation (Prado 2000: 68).³⁴ It is implicit in such an account that authority is localised and that authority may be seen to be encouraging a desirable course of conduct. What we may call ‘ways of doing things’ may not depend on authority, but on habits, inculcated by self-experience following the recommendations of a master (Hart 1994: 17). In Buddhism, ‘authority’ may be conceived of as the power to persuade others about the validity of certain judgments about truth and judgment. Authority also refers to the things that possess authority, whether that is a person, doctrine or object (Gomez 1995: 2). Authority, as I now proceed to explain has other qualities.

‘Authority’ Gomez argues, utilising Mahayana sources, is guaranteed by the presence of the Buddha who has self-validating authority and whose sacred presence appoints or intrudes (Sanskrit. *adhitiṣṭhati*) (Gomez 1995: 13)³⁵ into the ‘passive recipient of sacred power’. I thus follow Gomez, in his approach to the concept of authority, and the notion that authority is connected to the idea of ‘authorisation’ or ‘empowerment’ and the idea of ‘bringing to life or activating’, through the bestowing of identity (to a disciple) through the power to inspire and fill with awe. In this sense the ‘self’ and the body thus participates in authority (Gomez 1995: 17–18). My conception of authority has a connection to Max Weber’s ideas of ‘charismatic authority’ when such

34 Foucault indicates we must examine power as a socially dispersed activity. Foucault indicates power, as an inherently relational force, is continually being co-created or co-constituted by interdependent presences. He insists power cannot be privatised, possessed or personally acquired, power may only be exercised. No solitary entity can ever produce, reserve, administer, take over, or transfer power. Secondly, he argues that since power is an interdependent and socially produced activity it is never solely at anyone’s command. Power relations involve a co-creator and co-participants. Power relations connect heterogeneous and multidimensional actors. Thirdly, although power itself is a perpetually dynamic exercise, it possesses no lasting substance; it nevertheless leaves behind material imprints in a relatively solid world of beings and objects. Finally, he argues that although power shapes and defines persons and communities, there are always those who escape the relations of power. His indications on power occur in several places in his writings, see Foucault 1988: 208–26. For an account of power in a religious context, see Schuld 2003.

35 Gomez does not cite any particular textual source in his article (1995) but there exists a discussion of this term and its various interpretations elsewhere. See Suzuki 1930: 202–5, 377–8. T. D. Suzuki defines this word as ‘sustaining power’, see Suzuki & Idzumi 1953: 79–82. Edward Conze (1973: 312) defines this word as ‘authority’. Paul Harrison (1990: 191) sees the term as ‘empowerment’. For a recent discussion of the term see Otto 2008: 142. I discuss more this term later.

authority creates transformations through ‘shamanic power’, as in Vajrayāna Buddhism (Samuel 1994: 54).³⁶

The formation of the religious body

A more nuanced approach to authority suggests we might not conceive of a one-way direction of power from one who embodies it onto one who is powerless. Second, we should acknowledge that power (should we see it as domination) limits the exercise of power, as the exercise of power requires a social interaction and the limitation on the abuse of power (Valantasis 1995). Third, we should differentiate authority from domination, as the approach to power I adopt encompasses and promotes resistance and agency (Foucault 1977: 194).

A supplement to these ideas is suggested by Foucault: that we should acknowledge that power is productive in that it ‘produces subjects’. Authority may therefore be seen as containing the capacity to kindle self-authority through self-activation and self-regulation (Gomez 1993: 13–18). This approach may be further utilised to understand the formation of the religious body and the role of the individual in self-formation.

The term ‘power’ rather than the term authority captures the idea of a transformation, or ‘flow of influence’, or ‘inspiration’, which occurs ‘when there is someone who confers it, and someone who can and does receive it and something, namely inspiration, that is conferred and received (Berzin 2010). The uplifting of a disciple may also depend on the spiritual merit (Sansk. *punya*) of a disciple and their capacity to receive inspiration and their commitment to their self-development (Berzin 2010). The concept of power in this context includes ‘magical power’ as seen variously in the Theravada and Tibetan traditions.³⁷

36 Pāli texts contain terms which could be associated with charisma that cover ideas of ‘supreme rule’ ‘supremacy’, ‘mastery’, ‘power’ and ‘miraculous powers’, see Piyasilo 1992: 82–3. For an analysis of charisma as interpreted by Weber, see Silber 1999: 180; Ray 1994: 423.

37 The word *iddhi*, which may be translated from the Pāli tradition as ‘power’, pertains to supranormal powers (clairaudience, clairvoyance etc). Theravada Buddhism doctrinally rejects the importance of otherworldly powers such as those pertaining to gods and other spirit beings, as they are seen as not ends in themselves. However, as several studies have shown, the ‘spiritual world’ was incorporated into Buddhist mythology and figured in monastic practice. Blackburn 1999. For good accounts of how spiritual mythologies and ideas of magic have been incorporated

Conclusion

I have indicated some of the discursive conditions for the production of the 'body' in Buddhist texts. I have not been concerned with the debate over the description of what actual physical and physical factors constitute each of the five *khandas*. I am concerned more with the structuring of the religious body through disciplinary and organisational regimes.

I have two issues to deal with. First, in the light of Foucault's writings on power, 'what is the nature of power and its role in the production of the body, in the context of monastic Buddhism?' To answer this question I discuss the role of power in the Vajrayana tradition.³⁸ Second, I ask what was the role of the Vinaya in the creation of the body?

I understand the word 'power' in two senses: as a relational force that might shift between the participants in a community³⁹ and as a 'presence' or 'force' which operates to shape a subject within the monastic context. While I have dealt with the former, I now deal with the latter.

The concept of *adhishāna* implies that power might be conceived of 'as the ability to manipulate and control reality' and when given to another as form of endowment, which when placed in another, becomes self-validating within that other.⁴⁰ Implicit within this account of power is the facility of a monk to internalise the Buddha's own Enlightenment, or to be self-authoritative (Makransky 2003: 111–36). In this sense power is productive in that it

into Buddhism, see Ling 1962: 75 ff.; Marasinghe 1974: 233 ff. For a recent study see Terwiel 2001.

38 I chose this tradition for analysis as this tradition has a greater emphasis on 'other power' and the use of 'empowerment' which took place through a series of consecration ceremonies where the *lama's* power or blessing was transferred to the student. Geoffrey Samuel has described this tradition as containing 'shamanic elements' (Samuel 1993: 244).

39 David Elstein (2009) has well shown that the relationships between a master and student may not necessarily reflect hierarchical factors, but may reflect more the relativity in spiritual proclivities of those involved in such a relationship.

40 Gomez 1993: 17. Charles Orzech argues (1998: 58) the term *adhishāna* has a range of meanings. However he argues the basic meaning is to provide a benediction. In a dialogue in the *Berzin Archives* it was suggested by a 'questioner' that this connotation may wrongly imply theistic connotations. In Tibetan the expression *byi-gyis brlabs* indicates a blessing, thus opening up the possibility that a transformational process 'through shamanic power' can bring about a real change in the world (Samuel 1994: 54). Alexander Berzin also emphasizes the idea of a 'transformation, by means of a brightening, into a state of possessing power and ability' (Berzin 2010).

produces bodies, in that it facilitates monks to construct forms of self-understanding and self-knowledge.

I have referred to the array of techniques available for monastic training. While Buddhism does not posit a self, or ‘autonomous will’, it concedes that there are functions of consciousness that initiate action (Federman 2010: 1–19). Buddhist salvation entails a transformation of the self through a process of re-conditioning to understand that the body and the mind are not divisible, but are based on interdependent factors. The ‘self’ is thus not limited to the corporeal constraints of the physical body (Grey 2006).

The ‘self’ and the body imply a relationship with surrounding things and events. These may include the element of power connected with the person conferring the ‘inspiration’, the spiritual readiness of a disciple and the merit of the disciple involved. No item in this summary has its own singular causal influence. When some of these factors are present disciples may experience transformation (Berzin 2010). The body is thus a product arising from the relationship between organisational structure, power and ‘self cultivation’.

I now deal with the second question and the role of the Vinaya in the production of the body. I argue that part of the formative process of monks is directed under the Vinaya as a ‘training scheme’. I do not argue that the Vinaya is a form of law in the western sense. The perception of an individual subject to law in the eyes of many contemporary western scholars is often envisaged as a rounded, autonomous person, typically seen as a product of the European Enlightenment (Gray 2006: 295). Under this view of law such a person is localised, disengaged and exhibits an individual independent self (Taylor 1989: 190 f.). However I ask ‘what is the legal concept of the body in the Vinaya?’ I put the word legal in italics as I have argued the Vinaya is a ‘training scheme’ rather than a law in a European sense. Buddhist monks do have a conception of the Vinaya as a form of training, as the ‘rules’ are bought home to them on formal ritual days such as those involved in ordination,⁴¹ confession and the end of the retreat (*Pavārāna*). Monks are also constantly aware of the laity pointing out infractions.

The *Pātimokkha* recital and the confession of faults ceremony promote self-disclosure and self-examination as well as a form of communal bonding and discipline. This form of disciplinary ceremony elevates the Sangha into a collective–individual body, as both confessor and confessant are complicit in the creation of self-awareness and the features of bodily structure. This wider conception of the Sangha as a ‘collective self’ is reflected in collaborative ac-

41 At the ordination ceremony monks must know the rules, see Crosby 2000.

tivity and a wider form of self-consciousness and bodily consciousness.⁴² The body in this sense was embodied in an individual and in the collective (Kasulis 2001: 62–3).

References

Original sources

Aṅguttara Nikāya

1930–6 *The Book of Gradual Sayings*. Trans. F. L. Woodward and E. M. Hare. London: Oxford University Press.

Dīgha Nikāya

1910 *Dialogues of the Buddha*. Trans. T. W. Rhys Davids and C. A. F. Rhys Davids. London: Oxford University Press.

Pātimokkha

2001 Ed. W. Pruitt and trans. K. R. Norman. Oxford: Pāli Text Society.

Śiksamuccaya

1972 *A Compendium of Buddhist Teaching Compiled by Santideva chiefly from Mahayana Sutra*. Ed. C. Bendall. Delhi: Motilil Banarsidass.

Visuddhimagga

1976 *The Path of Purification*. Trans. by Bhikkhu Nyananamoli. Berkeley: Shambhala.

Vinaya Pitaka

1879–83 Ed. H. Oldenberg. London: Williams and Norgate. Trans. *The Book of Discipline*, Vols 1–6. Ed. I. B. Horner. Oxford: Pāli Text Society, 1938–66.

Secondary sources

Albahari, Miri

2006 *Analytical Buddhism: The Two-Tiered Illusion of the Self*. New York: Palgrave.

Ali, Daud

1998 Technologies of the Self: Courtly Artifice and Monastic Discipline in Early India. *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 42 (2): 159–84.

2008 Aristocratic Body Techniques in Early Medieval India. In: Datta Rajat (ed.), *Rethinking a Millennium: Perspectives on Indian History from the Eighth to the Eighteenth Century*; pp. 25–56. Delhi: Aakar Books.

Antonaccio, Maria

1998 Contemporary Forms of Askesis and the Return of Spiritual Exercises. *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 18: 69–92.

42 Asad 1993: 103, writing on European monasticism.

Asad, Talal

1993 *Genealogies of Religion*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Bateson J. E.

1908 Body (Buddhist). In: *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*. Vol. 2; pp. 758–60. New York: Charles Scriber.

Bendle, Mervyn

2002 Michel Foucault, Religion and Governmentality. *Australian Religion Studies Review* 15 (1): 11–26.

Bernauer, David & Jeremy Carrette

2004 *Michel Foucault and Theology: The Politics of Religious Experience*. London: Ashgate.

Berzin, Alexander

2010 http://www.berzinarchives.com/web/en/archives/approaching_buddhism/teachers/spiritual_student/inspiration_relation_mantras.html (accessed on 1 April 2010).

Blackburn, Anne

1999 Magic in the Monastery: Textual Practice and Monastic Identity in Sri Lanka. *History of Religions* 38 (4): 354–72.

2001 *Buddhist Learning and Textual Practices in Eighteenth Century Lankan Monastic Culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Bodhi, Bhikkhu

1976 Khandha and Upādānakkandha. *Pali Buddhist Review* 1 (1): 91–102.

Boisvert, Mathieu

1995 *The Five Aggregates: Understanding Theravada Psychology and Soteriology*. Waterloo: Canadian Corporation for the Study of Religion.

1996 The Use of Death for Meditation Purposes in Theravada Buddhism. *Buddhist Studies Review* 13 (1): 37–54.

Bond, George

1982 *The Word of the Buddha*. Colombo: Gunasena.

Bordo, Susan

1990 The Body and Reproduction of Femininity: A Feminist Appropriation of Foucault. In: Alison Jaggar & Susan Bordo (eds), *Gender/Body/Knowledge*; pp. 13–33. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

2004 *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Brown, Peter

1988 *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Carrette, Jeremy

1999 (ed.) *Michel Foucault and Zen: A Stay in a Zen Temple Religion and Culture*. New York: Routledge Press.

2000 *Foucault and Religion: Spiritual Corporality and Political Spirituality*. London: Routledge.

Chang, Jui-Liang

1975 An Analytical Study of the Skanda, Ayatana. *Philosophical Review* 8: 107–21.

Chu, William

2003 Path. In: Ronald Buswell *et al.* (eds), *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*; pp. 635–40. New York: Macmillan Reference.

Coakley, Sarah (ed.)

1997 *Religion and the Body*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Collins, Steven

1982 *Selfless Persons: Imagery and Thought in Theravada Buddhism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

1990 On the Very Idea of the Pāli Canon. *Journal of the Pāli Text Society* 15: 89–126.

1992 Notes on Some Oral Aspects of Pāli literature. *Indo-Iranian Journal* 35 (2/3): 121–35.

1994 What are Buddhists Doing When they Deny the Self. In: Frank Reynolds & David Tracey (eds), *Religion and Practical Reason*; pp. 59–86. New York: State University.

1997 The Body in Theravada Buddhist Monasticism. In: Sarah Coakely (ed.), *Religion and the Body*; pp. 185–204. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Conze, Edward

1973 *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines and Its Verse Summary*. San Francisco: Four Seasons Foundations.

Crosby, Kate

2000 Uddis and Acikh: Buddhaghosa on the Inclusion of the Sikkhapada in the Pabbajja Ceremony. *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 28: 461–77.

Cuevas, Bryan

2003 Rebirth. In: Ronald Buswell (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*; pp. 712–14. New York: Macmillan.

Dean, Mitchell

1995 Governing the Unemployed in an Active Society. *Economy and Society* 24 (2): 559–83.

1999 *Governmentality*. London: Sage.

Devdas, Naina

2004 *A Study of Cetana and the Dynamics of Volition in Theravada Buddhism*. Doctoral thesis. Montréal: Concordia University.

2008 *A Study of Cetanā and the Dynamics of Volition in Theravada Buddhism*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Dhirasekera, Jotiya

1981 *Buddhist Monastic Discipline*. Colombo: M. D. Gunasena.

Dissanayake, Wimal

1993 Self and Body in Theravada Buddhism: A Topological Analysis of the Dhammapada. In: Thomas Kasulis *et al.* (ed.), *Self as Body in Asian Theory and Practice*; pp. 123–44. New York: State University of New York.

Douglas, Mary

1973 *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*. New York: Vintage Books.

Dreyfus, George

1997 *Recognising Reality: Dharmakirti's Philosophy and its Tibetan Interpretations*. New York: State University.

2003 *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping: The Education of a Tibetan Buddhist Monk*. Berkeley: University of California.

Dreyfus, George & Evan Thompson

2007 Asian Perspectives: Indian Theories of Mind. In: Philip Zelazo, Morris Moscovitch & Evan Thompson (eds), *The Cambridge Handbook of Consciousness*; pp. 89–114. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Elstein, David

2009 'The Authority of the Master in the Analects. *Philosophy East & West* 59 (2): 142–72.

Elster, Jon

1983 *Sour Grapes: Studies in the Subversion of Rationality*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Enger, Jon

1984 Therapeutic Aims in Psychotherapy and Meditation: Development Stages in the Representation of the Self. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 16 (1): 25–61.

Faure, Bernard

1996 *Chan Insights and Oversights: An Epistemological Critique of the Chan Tradition*. Princeton: University of Princeton.

1998 *The Red Thread: Buddhist Approaches to Sexuality*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Flathman, R. E.

1980 *The Practice of Political Authority and the Authoritative*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Foucault, Michel

1977 *Discipline and Punish*. London: Penguin.

1980 Afterword. The Subject and Power. In: Hubert Dreyfus & Paul Rabinow (eds), *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structure and Hermeneutics*; pp. 208–26. Brighton: Harvester.

1984 *History of Sexuality Use of Pleasure*. Vol. 2. London: Penguin Books.

1986 *The Care of the Self History of Sexuality*. Vol. 3. London: Penguin Books.

1988 Technologies of the Self. In: Luther Martin *et al.* (eds), *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*; pp. 16–49. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

Frank, Manfred

1991 *Selbstbewußtseinstheorien von Fichte bis Sartre*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.

Gadamer, Hans

1989 *Truth and Method*. New York: Crossroads.

Gethin, Robert

- 1986 The Five Khandhas: Their Treatment in the Nikaya and Early Abhidhamma. *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 14: 35–53.

Glassman, Hank

- 2003 Sexuality. In: Robert Buswell (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*; pp. 761–4. New York: Macmillan.

Gombrich, Richard

- 1978 The Duty of a Buddhist According the Pāli Scriptures. In: Wendy O. Flaherty & John D. M. Derrett (eds), *The Concept of Duty in South Asia*; pp. 107–18. Delhi: Vikas Press.

Gomez, Louis

- 1993 Sources of Authority in Buddhism and Buddhist Scholarship. *The Otani Gakuho*: 1–37.
1995 The Authority of Compassion and Skilful Means. *The Otani Gakuho* 74: 1–35.

Gowans, Christopher

- 2003 *Philosophy of the Buddha*. London: Routledge.

Gray, David

- 2006 Mandala of the Self: Embodiment, Practice and Identity Construction in the Cakrasamvara Tradition. *Journal of Religious History* 30 (3): 294–310.

Green, Leslie

- 1987 Authority. In: *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*; pp. 584–6. London: Routledge.

Gross, Rita

- 2000 Sexuality: Buddhist Perspectives. In: William Johnston (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Monasticism*; pp. 1154–8. London: Routledge.

Grosz, Elizabeth

- 1994 *Volatile Bodies*. St Leonards: Allen & Unwin.

Gyatso, Janet

- 1998 *Apparitions of the Self: The Secret Autobiographies of a Tibetan Visionary*. Princeton: Princeton University.
2002 The Ins and Outs of Self-Transformation: Personal and Social Sides of Visionary Practices in Tibetan Buddhism. In: David Shulman & Guy Stroumsa (eds), *Self and Self-Transformation in the History of Religions*; pp. 183–94. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
2005 Sex. In: Donald Lopez (ed.), *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism*; pp. 271–90. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Habermas, Jürgen

- 1989 *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Hadot, Pierre

- 1995 *Philosophy as a Way of Life*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Hamilton, Sue

- 1996 *Identity and Experience: The Constitution of the Human Being According to Early Buddhism*. London: Luzac.

Harrison, Paul

1990 *The Samadhi of the Direct Encounter of the Buddhas of the Present*. Tokyo: International Institute of Buddhist Studies.

Hart, Herbert

1994 *The Concept of Law*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Harvey, Peter

1993 The Mind-Body Relationship in Pali Buddhism: A Philosophical Investigation. *Asian Philosophy* 3 (1): 29–41.

1995 *The Selfless Mind: Personality, Consciousness and Nirvana in Early Buddhism*. Richmond: Curzon Press.

Hattam, Robert

2004 *Awakening-Struggle: Towards a Buddhist Critical Social Theory*. Flaxton: Post Pressed.

Hopkins, Jeffrey

1983 *Meditation on Emptiness*. London: Wisdom Publications.

Huxley, Andrew

2004 The Vinaya: Legal System or a Performance-Enhancing Drug? In: Tadeusz Skorupski (ed.), *The Buddhist Forum*; pp. 141–64. London: School of Oriental and African Studies.

Iverach, James

1908 Authority. In: *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*. Vol. 2; pp. 249–54. New York: Scriber.

Kalupahana, David

1975 *Causality: The Central Philosophy of Buddhism*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

1995 *Ethics in Early Buddhism*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Karlis, Rancevskis

2005 Said and Foucault: Affinities and Dissionances. *Research in Africa Literatures* 36 (3): 83–97.

Kasulis, Thomas

2001 *Intimacy or Integrity: Philosophy and Cultural Difference*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Kilma, Alan

2001 The Telegraphic Object: Buddhist Meditation and the Redemption of Mechanical Reproduction. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43 (3): 552–82.

King, Richard

1999 *Orientalism and Religion: India. Postcolonial Theory and the 'Mystic' East*. London: Routledge.

Klein, Anne

2003 Finding a Self: Buddhist and Feminist Approaches. In: Charles Taliaferro & Paul Griffiths (eds), *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*; pp. 329–44. Oxford: Blackwell.

Klemm, David

1986 *Hermeneutical Inquiry*. Atlanta: Scholars Press.

Konik, Adrian

2009 *Buddhism and Transgression: An Appropriation of Buddhism in the Contemporary West*. Leiden: Brill.

Konty, Mark

2007 Authority and Legitimacy. In: George Ritzer (ed.), *Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Sociology*; pp. 225–9. Oxford: Blackwell.

Krawiec, Rebecca

2002 *Shenoute and the Women of the White Monastery: Egyptian Monasticism in Late Antiquity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lamotte, Etienne

1983 The Assessment of Textual Authenticity in Buddhism. *Buddhist Studies Review* 1: 4–15.

1988 The Assessment of Textual Interpretation in Buddhism. In: Donald Lopez (ed.), *Buddhist Hermeneutics*; pp. 11–27. Honolulu: University of Hawaii.

Lieberman, Schaub

1989 Foucault's Oriental Subject. *PMLA* 104: 306–16.

Ling, Trevor

1962 *Buddhism and the Mythology of Evil*. London: Allen and Unwin.

Locke, John

1967 *Two Treatises of Government*. Ed. Peter Laslett. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lopez, Donald (ed.)

1988 *Buddhist Hermeneutics*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Luke, Steven

1978 Power and Authority. In: T. Bottomore & R. Nisbet (ed.), *A History of Sociological Analysis*; pp. 633–76. London: Heinemann.

Macy, Joana

1991 *Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory*. New York: State University of New York.

Mackenzie, Mathew

2008 Self-Awareness without a Self: Buddhism and the Reflexivity of Awareness. *Asian Philosophy* 18 (3): 245–66.

Marasinghe, M. M. J.

1974 *Gods in Early Buddhism*. Colombo: University of Sri Lanka Press.

McDaniel, Justin

2008 *Gathering Leaves & Lifting Words: Histories of Buddhist Monastic Education*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

McGushin, Edward

2007 *Foucault's Askesis: An Introduction to the Philosophical Life*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

McSweeney, John

2005 State of the Disciplines: Foucault and Theology. *Foucault Studies* 2: 117–44.

Monier-Williams, Sir Monier

1899 *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mrozik, Susanne

2004 Living Bodies: The Transformative Effects of Encounters with Bodhisattva Bodies. *Journal of Religious Ethics* 32 (1): 175–94.

2007 *Virtuous Bodies: The Physical Dimensions of Morality in Buddhist Ethics*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Nimanong, Veerachart

2006 Theravada Methods of Interpreting Buddhist Scriptures. *International Journal of Buddhist Thought and Culture* 6: 77–120.

Nussbaum, Martha

1994 *The Therapy of Desire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Ohnuma, Reiko

1997 *Dehadana: The Gift of the Body in Indian Narrative Buddhist Literature*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Michigan.

2000 Internal and External Opposition to the Bodhisattva's Gift of his Body. *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 28: 43–75.

Orzech, Charles

1998 *Politics and Transcendent Wisdom: The Scripture for Humane Kings in the Creation of Chinese Buddhism*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Otto, Douglas

2008 *Power, Wealth and Women in Indian Mahayana Buddhism*. Oxford: Routledge.

Paniker, Raimon

1990 *The Silence of God: The Answer of the Buddha*. New York: Orbis.

Pietz, William

2005 'Person. In: Donald Lopez (ed.), *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism*; pp. 188–210. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Piyasilo, Bhikkhu

1992 *Charisma in Buddhism*. Jalan Sultan: Dharmafarers.

Plato

1993 Phaedo. In: *The Last Days of Socrates: Euthyphro, the Apology, Crito, Plato*. Trans. by Hugh Tredennick. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Poggi, Gianfranco

2006 Authority. In: *Cambridge Dictionary of Sociology*; pp. 27–30. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Powers, John

2009a *A Bull of a Man: Images of Masculinity, Sex, and the Body in Indian Buddhism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

2009b Why Practicing Virtue is Better than Working Out: Bodies and Ethics in Early Buddhism. *Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal* 22: 125–52.

Prado, Carlos

2000 *Starting with Foucault*. Colorado: Westview.

Ray, Reginald

1994 *Buddhist Saints in India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Raz, Joseph

1986 *The Morality of Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Reynolds, Craig

2005 Power. In: Donald Lopez (ed.), *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism*; pp. 211–28. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Rothberg, Donald

2001 Awakening for all Beings. In: Janet Ruffing (ed.), *Mysticism and Social Transformation*; pp. 161–78. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

Ruben, Jeffrey

1997 Psychoanalysis is Self-Centred. In: Charles Spezzano & Gerald J. Gargiulo (eds), *Soul on the Couch: Spirituality and Morality in Contemporary Psychoanalysis*; pp. 79–108. Hillsdale, NJ: Analytical Press.

Said, Edward

1978 *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon.

Samuel, Geoffrey

1993 *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies*. London: Smithsonian Institution Press.

1994 Gesar of Ling: Shamanic Power and Popular Religion. In: Geoffrey Samuel, Gregor H. Hamish & Elizabeth Stutchbury (eds), *Tantra and Popular Religion in Tibet*; pp. 53–77. New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture.

2005 *Trantric Revisions: New Understandings of Tibetan Buddhism and Indian Religion*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Samuels, Jeffrey

2005 Texts Memorized, Texts Performed: A Reconsideration of the Role of Paritta in Sri Lankan Monastic Education. *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 28 (2): 339–67.

2010 *Attracting the Heart: Social Relations and the Aesthetics of Emotion in Sri Lankan Monastic Culture*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Schilbrack, Kevin

2004 Introduction: The Use of Philosophy in the Study of Rituals. In: Kevin Schilbrack (ed.), *Thinking through Rituals: Philosophical Perspectives*. New York: Routledge.

Schopen, Gregory

2004 Doing Business for the Lord: Lending on Interest and Written-Loan Contacts in the Mūlasarvāstivāda-Vinaya. In: Gregory Schopen, *Buddhist Monks and Business Matters: Still More Papers on Monastic Buddhism in India*; pp. 45–90. Hawaii: University of Hawaii.

Schuld, Joyce

2003 *Foucault and Augustine: Reconsidering Power and Love*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame.

Shilling, Chris

1993 *The Body and Social Theory*. London: Sage.

Silber, Ilana

1999 *Virtuosity, Charisma, and Social Order: A Comparative Study*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Stoler, Ann

1995 *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Suzuki, T. D.

1930 *Studies in the Lankavatara Sutra*. London: Routledge.

Suzuki, T. D. & Hokei Idzumi (eds)

1953 *The Gandavyutha Sutra*. Tokyo: Society for the Publication of Sacred Books of the World.

Taylor, Charles

1989 *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Terwiel, Barend

2001 *Monks and Magic: An Analysis of Religious Ceremonies in Central Thailand*. Bangkok: White Lotus Press.

Thurman, Robert

2010 *Meditation and Education: Buddhist India, Tibet and Modern America*. <http://www.contemplativemind.org/resources/papers/thurman.html> (accessed on 26 March 2010).

Tuck, Andrew

1990 *Comparative Philosophy and the Philosophy of Scholarship: On the Western Interpretation of Nāgārjuna*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Turner, Bryan

1992 *The Body and Society: Explorations in Social Theory*. London: Routledge.

Valantasis, Richard

1995 Construction of Power in Asceticism. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 63 (4): 775–821.

Veidlinger, Daniel

2006 *Writing, Orality, and Textual Transmission in Buddhist Northern Thailand*. Bangkok: University of Hawaii Press.

Voyce, Malcolm

2009 Buddhist Confession: A Foucauldian Approach. Social Science Research Network. Macquarie University Paper 2009.

2010 Ideas of Transgression and Buddhist Monks. *Law & Critique* 21 (2): 183–98.

Waida, Manubu

1987 Authority. In: Mircea Eliade (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*. New York: Macmillan.

Wartenberg, Thomas

1992 *The Forms of Power: From Domination to Transformation*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Weber, Max

1978 *Economy and Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Wicking, Andrew

2010 *Unfolding the Dharma*. Unpublished doctoral thesis. Melbourne College of Divinity.

Wijayaratna, Mohan

1990 *Buddhist Monastic Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Williams, Peter

1998 *The Reflexive Nature of Awareness: a Tibetan Madhyamaka Defence*. London: Curzon.

Wilson, Liz

1996 *Charming Cadavers: Horrific Figurations of the Feminine Indian Buddhist Hagiographic Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wright, J.

2000 Disciplining the Body: Power, Knowledge and Subjectivity in a Physical Education Lesson. In: Alison Lee & Cate Poynton (eds), *Culture and Text: Discourse and Methodology in Social Research and Cultural Studies*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Yao, Zhihua

2006 *The Buddhist Theory of Self-Cognition*. London: Routledge.

Zhang, Lili

2005 *The Cultivation of Self: Critique of Technical Practice within and Without Chan Buddhism*. Unpublished doctorate. Atlanta: Emory University.

Biographical notes

Veikko Anttonen is the Professor of Comparative Religion (Fi. *uskontotiede*) at the School of History, Culture and Art Studies at the University of Turku, Finland. He earned his PhD at the University of Helsinki in 1996. He has authored an intellectual biography on Uno Holmberg-Harva, a pioneer of comparative religion in Finland (*Uno Harva ja suomalainen uskontotiede*, 1987), a book on the 'Sacred' as a cultural category (*Ihmisen ja maan rajat*, 1996) and 'Territories and maps of Religious Studies (*Uskontotieteen maastot ja kartat*, 2010). Veikko Anttonen has been the President of the Finnish Society for the Study of Religion since 2005 and the editor-in-chief of *Temenos, Nordic Journal of Comparative Religion*. He was awarded Doctor Honoris Causa at the University of Debrecen, Hungary in June 2010. He has edited (together with Ilkka Pyysiäinen) a book *Current Approaches in the Cognitive Science of Religion* (Continuum, 2002) and contributed to such international works as *The Sacred and its Scholars* (Brill, 1996), *Guide to the Study of Religion* (Cassell, 2000), *Perspectives on Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* (Brill, 2000) and *Religion as a Human Capacity* (Brill, 2004). E-mail address: veiant@utu.fi.

Dr **Madis Arukask** is folklorist and works as Associate Professor in University of Tartu, Institute of Estonian and General Linguistics. He is also President of the Estonian Society for the Study of Religions. His main field of interest is traditional folk belief of Balto-Finnic peoples, first of all Vepsians and Votes. In last 13 years he has made fieldwork in Nord-Western Russia and written articles about different aspects of vernacular religion and folklore genres representing it. E-mail address: madis.arukask@ut.ee.

Asma Barlas is Professor of Politics and Director of the Center for the Study of Culture, Race, and Ethnicity, at Ithaca College in New York. She has a PhD in International Studies, an MA in Journalism and a BA in English Literature and Philosophy. Her primary research interests are Qur'anic hermeneutics, Muslim sexual politics and Islam and women's rights. Her best known book is "*Believing Women*" in *Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (University of Texas Press, 2002). For her cv see <http://faculty.ithaca.edu/abarlas/>. E-mail address: abarlas@ithaca.edu.

Dr **Måns Broo** received his PhD in 2003. His fields of interest include Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism, popular Hinduism, as well as contemporary forms of yoga. His publications include *As Good as God: The Guru Institution of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism* (Åbo Akademi University Press, 2003) as well as translations of Sanskrit Hindu texts into Swedish (*De tidiga Upaniṣaderna*. Nora: Nya Doxa, 2005, with Martin Gansten; *Hinduismens heliga skrifter*. Stockholm: Atlantis, 2010) and Finnish (*Joogan filosofia. Patañjalīn Yoga-sūtra*. Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2010). He is working as a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Comparative Religion, Åbo Akademi University. E-mail address: mbroo@abo.fi.

Oren Ergas is a doctoral student at the Hebrew university of Jerusalem and a winner of the Mandel Institute 2011 fellowship. Exploring the concepts of 'self' and 'knowledge' in Eastern and Western traditions as the basis of pedagogy, his dissertation in the field of philosophy of education points to the indispensability of body–mind practices (exemplified by yoga and taiqi) for Western conventional curriculum. His article 'Spirituality as a Pragmatic Science—Towards the Establishment of a Holistic Educational Rationale' is forthcoming on the *Journal of Religion and Education*. Mr Ergas is a trained yoga teacher and Chinese martial arts practitioner. E-mail address: oren.ergas@mail.huji.ac.il.

Céline Grünhagen, MA, has been lecturer at the Institute of Oriental & Asian Studies, Dept. of Comparative Religion at the University of Bonn in Germany since 2007. Her research focuses on current problems and developments concerning religions and their social settings, as well as religio-ethical questions regarding women and gender issues. She is currently working on her PhD thesis about gender and sexuality in Theravada-Buddhism, with special focus on the formation of norms and values, and the estimation of sexual aberrance. E-mail address: c.gruenhagen@uni-bonn.de.

Juha J. Hiltunen, Dr, Adjunct Professor in Native American Studies at the University of Oulu; anthropologist, cultural historian, artist, freelance tourist guide and non-fiction writer. His fields of expertise are ethnohistory, mytho-history, sindonology, history of war, ethnosexology and historical forgeries. Latest book: *Valokuva Jeesuksesta? Torinon käärinliina tieteen, historian ja Uuden testamentin valossa* (Kirjapaja, 2009). E-mail address: juha.hiltunen@oulu.fi.

Biographical notes

Tuija Hovi, PhD, is currently working as post-doctoral researcher of the Finnish Academy. She is also a member of a research team in the project 'Post-secular culture and a changing religious landscape in Finland' at Åbo Akademi University. Hovi's particular fields of interest are the psychological and anthropological study of religion and narrative studies in the context of contemporary Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity. E-mail address: tuhovi@abo.fi.

Visa Immonen, PhD, is an archaeologist who specializes in the material culture of the historical period and archaeological theory. In 2009, his PhD thesis was published under the title *Golden Moments: Artefacts of Precious Metals as Products of Luxury Consumption in Finland c. 1200–1600*. As an independent scholar at the University of Turku, and a visiting scholar at Stanford University, California, in 2010–11, Immonen is writing a biography of the Finnish State Archaeologist Juhani Rinne (1872–1950), and exploring the concept of medieval in archaeology. He is a member of the project examining the relics of Turku Cathedral. E-mail address: vialim@utu.fi.

Dr **Jay Johnston** (BA, Mart. Admin. MA Hons. PhD) is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Studies in Religion at the University of Sydney, Australia. Her research publications include *Angels of Desire: Esoteric Bodies, Aesthetics and Ethics* (Equinox, 2008) and numerous articles and chapters including 'Hermetic Embodiment: Angels and Intersubjectivity' in M. T. Mjaaland *et al.* (eds), *The Body Unbound: Philosophical Perspectives on Embodiment, Politics and Religion* (Cambridge Scholars Press, 2010). Her current projects include esoteric aesthetics and material culture; concepts of subjectivity, subtle bodies and animal–human relations in contemporary continental philosophy and with Dr Ruth Barcan, Wellbeing Spirituality and alternative health. E-mail address: jay.johnston@sydney.edu.au.

Isabelle Jonveaux is currently beginning a post-doc at the University of Graz (Austria) on asceticism and changing body in the current religious life. She is part of the research group 'Communicating bodies' (Graz) and of the Centre d'Études Interdisciplinaires des Faits Religieux (Paris). She finished last year a PhD at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales de Paris and Università degli Studi di Trento on the comparative economics of contemporary monasteries in Europe. She has published some other articles on the use of the Internet by religious communities and the new religious practices online (a Lenten retreat online). E-mail address: jonveaux@ehess.fr.

Sandra Junker, MA, is a doctoral student at the Department of Religious Studies of the Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-University of Bonn. Her main fields of interest are the history of the religions of Ancient Israel, Baha'i religion and religious aesthetics. Her main publication is 'Bahá'u'lláhs Deutung von Kapitel 24:29–31 des Matthäus-Evangeliums im Kitáb-i Íqán', in Manfred Hutter (ed.), *Religionswissenschaft im Kontext der Asienwissenschaften. 99 Jahre religionswissenschaftliche Lehre und Forschung in Bonn*; pp. 249–61 (Münster: Lit, 2009). E-mail address: sjunker@junkerwolff.de.

Matti Kamppinen is Senior Lecturer at the Department of Religious Studies, University of Turku, Finland. He has studied Amazonian folk religion and ethnomedicine, environmental risks and methodology of humanities. He has published in *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, *Temenos*, and *Int. J. Sustainable Society*. His latest book is *Intentional Systems Theory as a Conceptual Framework for Religious Studies* (The Edwin Mellen Press, 2010). E-mail address: matti.kamppinen@utu.fi.

Jens Kutscher, MA, studied Political Science, Islamic Studies, and Economics at Friedrich Alexander University Erlangen-Nuremberg and at the American University in Cairo. Currently being a research assistant at the Erlangen Centre for Islam and Law in Europe he prepares a doctoral thesis about on-line *fatwas*. His research interests include Islamic law with special attention to Islam in Europe and Islam on the Internet as well as a regional focus on Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Among his English publications is 'The Politics of Virtual Fatwa Counseling in the 21st Century' in *Masaryk University Journal of Law and Technology* 3 (1), 2009: 33–49. E-mail address: jens.kutscher@jura.uni-erlangen.de.

Göran Larsson is a Lecturer in the History of Religions at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. He is also affiliated to the Linnaeus Centre for Research on Learning, Interaction and Mediated Communication in Contemporary Society, Sweden. *Islam in the Nordic and Baltic Countries* (Routledge, 2009) is his latest publication. E-mail address: goran.larsson@religion.gu.se.

Michelle Lelwica is an Associate Professor in the Religion Department at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota (USA). She received both her Masters of Theological Studies (MTS) and her Doctor of Theology (ThD) degrees from Harvard Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She has been writing, researching, and teaching courses in the area of religion, gender,

Biographical notes

culture, and embodiment for the past 20 years. She is the author of *Starving for Salvation: The Spiritual Dimensions of Eating Problems among American Girls and Women* (Oxford, 1999) and *The Religion of Thinness: Satisfying the Spiritual Hungers behind Women's Obsession with Food and Weight* (Gürze, 2009), as well as scholarly articles, book chapters, and blogs dealing with issues relating to the body and religion. E-mail address: lelwica@cord.edu.

Mikael Lindfelt is Associate Professor in Systematic Theology at Åbo Akademi University. In his research he has mostly dealt with different kinds of theological and ethical issues, combined with issues in view of life-research. He has also made some contributions to different aspects of sports ethics and sports philosophy. Among his books in this particular field can be mentioned *Idrott och moral. Reflektioner över idrottens ideal* (Ethics and Morality: Reflections on the Ideals in Sports) in 1999 and *Meningskapande idrott. Livsåskådningsrelevanta perspektiv och empiriska kontraster* (Creating Meaning in Sports: A View of Life-relevant Perspectives and Empirical Contrasts) in 2006. E-mail address: mlindfel@abo.fi.

Mira Niculescu is a PhD candidate at the École de Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) in Paris, and is affiliated with the Centre d'Études Interdisciplinaires du Fait Religieux (CEIFR). She has been a visiting Research Fellow in 2009–10 at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (HJU). She works mainly on the interactions between Judaism and Eastern spiritualities, Jewish Renewal, and Western Buddhism. She focuses on 'religious bricolage', spiritual individualism, and transnational religious trends. She will publish in 2011 an article about 'Jewish Mindfulness' in the *Buddhism without Borders* collective book, and an article about Jewish-Buddhist phenomenon in a collective book about religious conflicts in France. E-mail address: mira.niculescu@ehess.fr.

Peter Nynäs, Dr.Theol., is Professor of Comparative Religion at Åbo Akademi University and project leader for the Centre of Excellence in Research 'Post-secular Culture and a Religious Landscape in Finland'. E-mail address: peter.nynas@abo.fi.

Dr Jo Pearson is Reader in Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Winchester, UK. Her research engages with Wiccan, pagan and magical groups, particularly with regard to disability, mental health, and pain. Recent publications include *Wicca and the Christian Heritage: Ritual, Sex and Magic* (London: Routledge, 2007) and 'Resisting Rhetorics of Violence: Women,

Witches and Wicca' in *Feminist Theology* 18 (2), 2010: 141–59. E-mail address: jo.pearson@winchester.ac.uk.

Ferdinando Sardella has completed his PhD dissertation about the life and thought of the modern Hindu revivalist Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati, which has received in 2010 the Donner Institute Prize, at the University of Gothenburg. He is at present a researcher at the Faculty of Theology at Uppsala University, and a fellow at the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies. His field of study includes Hinduism, colonial history, bhakti yoga, new religious movements in the West and globalization. He has published on these subjects in academic journals in Sweden, the United States and India. E-mail address: ferdinando.sardella@teol.uu.se.

Andrew Singleton, PhD, is a Senior Lecturer in the Sociology Program, School of Political and Social Inquiry, Monash University, Australia. His research interests in the sociology of religion include secularization, youth religion and spirituality, personal belief and alternative religions. He has published extensively in these areas both nationally and internationally. He is co-author (with Michael Mason and Ruth Webber) of the book *The Spirit of Generation Y: Young people's spirituality in a changing Australia* (2007). E-mail address: andrew.singleton@arts.monash.edu.au.

Sofia Sjö, Dr.Theol., is a post-doctoral researcher connected to the centre of excellence at the Department of Comparative Religion at Åbo Akademi University. She has done research into and published works on, among others, the following areas: religion and popular culture, religion and gender, and religion and sexuality. She is currently working on a project entitled 'Church, Faith and Meaning in Contemporary Nordic Film', which deals with representations of faith institutions and characters of faith in Nordic film and explores what meanings viewers have found in Nordic films. E-mail address: sofia.sjo@abo.fi.

Jussi-Pekka Taavitsainen, PhD, is a Professor of Archaeology at the University of Turku. He is specialized in settlement history, archaeology of the historical period, the history of archaeology, and the archaeology of religion. Taavitsainen's publications include the monograph *Suojoki at Keuruu: A Mid 14th-century Site of Wilderness Culture in Central Finland* (2005) by J.-P. Taavitsainen, Janne Vilkkuna, and Henry Forssell, and such articles as 'Lapp Cairns as a Source on Metal Period Settlement in the Inland

Biographical notes

Regions of Finland' (*Acta Borealia* 1/2003) and Immonen's and Taavitsainen's 'Language, Nationalism, and the Identity of Archaeologists: the Case of Juhani Rinne's Professorship in the 1920s' published in *Archives, Ancestors, Practices: Archaeology in the Light of its History* (ed. by Nathan Schlanger & Jarl Nordbladh, 2008). He is the director of the project examining the relics of Turku Cathedral. E-mail address: justaa@utu.fi.

Terhi Utriainen, PhD, Senior Lecturer. Docent in Study of Religions and Gender Studies at the University of Helsinki. Research Fellow at the Åbo Akademi University ('Post-secular Culture and a Changing Landscape of Religion in Finland' project). Fields of study: women's popular religiosity, religion and body, suffering, healing and agency. Main publications include: 'Agents of De-differentiation: Women Care-givers of the Dying' in *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 25 (3), 2010: 437–451; 'Ethics and Embodiment in Ethnographic Interactions', in Riku Hämäläinen *et al.* (eds), *Pilgrimage of Life. Studies in Honour of Professor René Gothoni*; pp. 120–32 (The Finnish Society of Sciences and Letters and Study of Religions, University of Helsinki, 2010); 'The Modern Pietá: Gendered embodiment and religious imaginary by the side of the dying', in William Keenan & Elizabeth Arwen (eds), *Materializing Religion, Expression, Performance and Ritual*; pp. 202–20 (London: Ashgate, 2006); *Alaston ja puettu. Ruumiin ja uskonnon ääret* (Tampere: Vastapaino, 2006); 'Naked and dressed: Metaphorical perspective to the imaginary and ethical background of the deathbed scene' in *Mortality* 9 (2) 2004: 132–49; 'Être là et être là. Au chevet des mourants' in *Ethnologie Française* 33 (2), 2003: 263–9; 'Bodies and Others Making religion: Phenomenology of the body and the study of religion' in *Temenos* 35–6 (1999–2000): 249–70. E-mail address: terhi.utriainen@helsinki.fi.

Dr **Malcolm Voyce** is an Associate Professor of Law at Macquarie University, Sydney. He holds a Doctorate in Law from London University (1983) in Indian Religions and a Doctorate in Sociology, on Foucault and 'governance', from Macquarie University, Sydney (2001). He has published widely on religion and the law in such journals as *The Journal of Legal Pluralism*, *Journal of Law and Religion* and *The Australian Review of Religious Studies*. E-mail address: malcolm.voyce@gmail.com.