Anthropology, Religion and Power: Rethinking Traditional Zones of Inquiry

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Religion and the Modernization Thesis

> The evolutionary future of religion is extinction. Belief in supernatural beings and in supernatural forces that affect nature without obeying nature's laws will erode and become only an interesting historical memory. To be sure, this event is not likely to occur in the next generation; the process will very likely take several hundred years, and there will always remain individuals or even occasional small cult groups who respond to hallucination, trance, and obsession with a supernaturalist interpretation. But as a cultural trait, belief in supernatural power is doomed to die out, all over the world, as a result of the increasing adequacy and diffusion of scientific knowledge... the process is inevitable. (Anthony Wallace 1966, 164-165; qtd. in Shupe 1990, 17)

For those who followed American presidential politics over the 1980s and early 1990s, Anthony Wallace's remarks seem, at the very least, to be premature. Religion—if U.S. national politics are any indication—is not anywhere near "extinction," and as a "cultural trait" appears to be surviving with vigour (Wald 1987, 51). To be fair to Wallace, however, one must place his remarks in historical context. In the 1950s and 1960s, it was still "fashionable" for western social scientists (particularly in the

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U.S.) to aver that religion would disappear as "modernization," and its twin "secularization" steadily advanced. According to this line of thinking, countries like the United States would witness a decline in religiosity, and Third World governments, imitating their First World exemplars, would "increasingly utilize secular as opposed to religious symbolism to legitimate and consolidate their rule" (Sahliyeh 1990, 4). Social theorists confidently maintained that a secular nationalism, rather than religion, would "provide citizens with a locus for their political allegiance and identification" (Sahliyeh 1990, 4).

Yet in the gaze of a now-wiser social science—informed by two decades of intense, worldwide religio-political activity—the secularization thesis has humbly receded, giving way to a new set of questions about the role of religion in the contemporary world. The rise of liberation theology in Latin America, the role of the Catholic bishops in overthrowing the Marcos regime in the Philippines, church involvement in the apartheid struggle in South Africa, the Islamic revolution in Iran, the Catholic church's support of Solidarity in Poland, the emergence of militant religious nationalism among the Shi'a in Lebanon and Sikhs in India, the coalition between Israel's conservative Likud and the Gush Emunim settlement movement, and the rise of the New Christian Right in the United States—all of these suggest that religion continues, secularization theories notwithstanding, to be a powerful medium through which peoples of *both* the First and Third Worlds experience social change.

The social movements mentioned above have dramatically altered the religio-political cultures of their respective societies. In so doing they have also—perhaps inadvertently—transformed the contours of sociological research. Religion, it seems, after "decades of neglect" in sociology, has made a comeback (Guth *et al*, 1988, 357). Moreover, the worldwide "resurgence" of religious activity, others argue, has prompted a broad, critical reassessment of how religion is conceptualized and studied in the social sciences.

Certain social anthropologists have been at the forefront of this critical reassessment of religion. Responding to what some have referred to as the international "resurgence" of religion, anthropologists are also rethinking old categories and revising analytical assumptions. This is perhaps fitting, for many of the geographical areas revitalizing social

scientific interest in religion are regarded as "zones" of anthropological inquiry.

In this article, I examine some of the epistemological assumptions undergirding anthropological studies of religious phenomena, and explore the development of more recent anthropological approaches to religion. Many of the features of anthropological theory have their provenance in the Western Enlightenment and its complex legacy of "modernism" and "primitivism." The specters of the *Philosophes,* the Victorian evolutionists and other harbingers of a secular modernity, linger as a back drop to the current discussion, as does the notion that religion is primarily a feature of "primitive" and "peasant" cultures—the two traditional staples of anthropological study. While I acknowledge the length and depth of this intellectual tradition, it is included here in cursory form only as a backdrop to my discussion of research conducted during the post-World War II period and, in particular, the last two decades. It is principally within the last fifteen years that certain scholars within anthropology have formulated radically revised approaches to religious phenomena—approaches which take into account not only the persistence of religion in diverse "modern" contexts, but also the powerful role religion continues to play in contemporary political processes.

The Scholarly Tradition

Over much of its history, the anthropology of religion has been dominated by four theoretical shortcomings. Firstly, anthropologists have tended to treat religion not as a modern phenomenon, but as a characteristic of "primitive" societies, as a *normative* condition for all preliterate peoples (Morris 1987, 1). This association has often been marked by a condescending characterization of preliterate cultures. The nexus between religion and primitive culture suggests that, for many anthropologists, religion has been part of a fascination for "other" cultures—a fascination that has depicted religion as "an affliction that *other* people have, a bizarre form of discourse for which . . . only bizarre explanations come to hand" (MacGaffey 1981, 230).

Secondly, along with its penchant to link religion with the primitive, social anthropology has also treated religion as an internal and psychic quality, as a way of thinking, or as a mode of rationality certain peoples use

to explain and respond to the world. Religion, in this intellectualist framework, is conceptualized as an abstract and metaphysical phenomenon, as a system of "pure ideas" that has little or no relation to its social, political or historical context (Lincoln 1985, 266).

Thirdly, when investigating the social effects of religion, anthropologists have often treated it as a kind of "social glue," a symbolic coagulant that holds disparate individuals together (Lincoln 1985; Thompson 1986). Examples of this approach abound both in the sociology of religion and anthropology, especially in periods when Durkheimian themes of function and structure dominated theories of how religion forms ideological communities (e.g., Warner 1961; Bellah 1967). Similar functionalist themes have also been recurrent in Marxist studies of religion which, although incorporating issues of power, have tended to treat religion simply as an ideological tool used by elites, as an ideological force which integrates (i.e., "glues") society by obscuring class inequalities and ultimately buttressing systems of social domination (e.g., Gluckman 1954; Thompson 1968, 416-419). In both these Durkheimian and Marxist studies, religion is a force functioning in a predictable manner, and is ignored as source of social division or as a medium of protest and transformation.

Fourthly, many anthropologists have unwittingly promulgated the notion that religion and politics are disparate realms within the social fields they study. Although anthropologists have investigated both systems of meaning and systems of power, they have done so in a manner which, in many cases, merely preserves a distinction between religion (as belonging to the realm of "meaning") and politics (as belonging to the realm of "power"). Mart Bax observes that

> in anthropology it has been almost standard practice to treat religion and politics as the private preserves of separate sub-disciplines that almost invariably become mired in their own theoretical assumptions. Religion is approached largely from a symbolic or culturological point of view. It is conceptualized as a system of meaning (supported by symbols and rituals) concerning "ultimate goals." This approach does not leave much room for a systematic inquiry into the social conditions and forces that generate and change such systems of meaning. (1991, 8)

These four characteristics form a rough "profile" of anthropological treatments of religion, indicating that the importance of analyzing religion as a constitutive force in the creation and exercise of cultural power has been largely overlooked.

Developing New Paradigms: Issues of Power

> Religions are basically concerned with problems of meaning and problems of power. Anthropologists have been recently much occupied with meaning problems—systems of thought and belief, classification of worldview, concepts of spirit and deity, image and apparition, cultic and symbolic communion . . . But many issues in the power relations of religious affiliation are still not clear. (Raymond Firth 1981, 583)

During the past two decades many of these ahistorical, functionalist and intellectualist assumptions about religion have undergone dramatic revision within anthropological literature. Recent studies indicate that anthropologists are more likely to see and study religion as an *ideological*, dynamic, vital and socially transformative phenomena. While this shift is not representative of anthropology as a whole—some of the old paradigms doggedly persist—many anthropologists are now focusing on how religious belief and practice are frequently caught up within processes of dramatic social change.

The "forces" behind this shift include cultural and historical factors, as well as the impact of long-standing critiques of religious anthropology by practitioners of the discipline.[1] Yet, perhaps among the most significant forces prompting this paradigmatic revision are questions many anthropologists are raising about the relation of religion to "power." In response to the emergence of the religious movements cited at the beginning of this article—particularly those organized around "liberation" and "nationalism"—many anthropologists have become interested in how religion is implicated in these power struggles. Talal Asad, for example, rejects approaches to religion that emphasize questions about "the social meaning of doctrines and practices" and the "psychological effects of symbols and rituals" (1983, 252). Finding these avenues of inquiry wholly inadequate, he argues that one should begin with questions about the historical conditions (the "movements, classes, institutions, ideologies") that give rise to

religious culture so that one can understand the "different ways in which it [religion] created and worked through institutions, the different selves which it shaped and shaped it, and the different categories of knowledge which it authorized and made available" (1983, 238). Eric Wolf's edited collection, *Religion, Power and Protest in Local Communities*, suggests that anthropologists should look at how symbolic processes (such as religious processes) construct individual identities, how they "anchor" them within a symbolically-constituted world, and how different socially dominant groups attempt to control these symbolic processes to further their political and economic interests. Wolf's collection explores how religious ideologies construct gender identities, how states penetrate and control kin groups through ecclesiastical intervention, and how religious cultures are linked to global economies—particularly how Christianity allied itself with the centralization of European state power during the modern era (see also Wolf 1991; Sanders 1988; Antoun and Hegland 1987; Quarles van Ufford and Schoffeleers 1987; Kertzer 1988; Laitin 1986; Lancaster 1988; Ranger 1982).

While a comprehensive survey of this literature is beyond the scope and intent of this article, I discuss briefly the historical development of anthropological studies concerning religion and power. Some of the most substantive reflections on religion and power emerged immediately after World War II, a period when traditional zones of anthropological inquiry (namely in Africa and Melanesia) were altered dramatically, and particularly as nascent nationalist movements erupted. During this period, anthropology was profoundly transformed as its principal subject matter, the unchanging "primitive," became the "colonized" subject actively seeking independence.

Religions of the Oppressed

There were five topics or types of special interest to anthropologists during this post-war period: 1) *Nativistic or revitalization movements*, characterized by the strong reaction of a minority group to a ruthless, dominating culture, and the desire among the minority for a revival of their own culture (see Linton 1943; Hill 1944; La Barre 1970); 2) *Cargo cults*, movements chiefly of the South Pacific, in which various groups coalesced around a prophetic leader who promised the resurrection of the dead, the

destruction of the colonial population, and the arrival of a miraculous cargo of trade goods (see Worsley 1968; Jarvie 1963); 3) *Messianic and millenarian movements*, in which a divine emissary was expected to intervene on behalf of the oppressed population and to transform the earth into a paradise for both the living and the dead (see Lanternari 1963; Burridge 1969); 4) *Syncretic churches* of Southern and Central Africa, the prophetic, messianic churches that blended their traditional African beliefs with the Christian missionary message (see Sundkler 1948; Bastide 1951); 5) *"Ecstatic" religions* in which social groups, in response to political oppression, developed cults around spirit possession in order for the powerless to advance their interests (see Lewis).

Though the subject matter of these post-war studies have long been, and continue to be, significant themes of human history, they have not received the kind of social scientific attention they warrant. Bruce Lincoln suggests that among scholars who have studied the "great revolutions"-namely the French Revolution (1789-99) and the Russian Revolutions (1905 and 1917)—there was an implicit acceptance of a "Marxist" theory of religion. "Religion" in these classics is treated largely as an established church aligned with the state; it is regarded as simply sanctioning the established political order (see Arendt 1951). For the anthropologist, writing beneath the venerated mantel of what had become Durkheimian functionalism, the nexus between religion and the expression of social unrest or even social change was rarely explored. This view of religion, as an integrating rather than divisive force, remained generally unchallenged in the dominant anthropological paradigms of the 1950s: British structural functionalism, American psycho-cultural anthropology and American neo-evolutionist anthropology (Ortner 1984, 128).

Finding themselves in situations which clearly contradicted such a view of religion, however, many anthropologists writing on cargo cults and millenarianism argued that the religious movements they were studying were liberation cults seeking to shed the carapace of colonialism. This perspective challenged static, functionalist paradigms of religion and spawned a new interest in "acculturation" or the ways in which cultures change through contact (Lessa and Vogt, 1979). Many anthropologists also treated the subjects of these movements, not as superstitious "primitives," but as people struggling for emancipation, that is, as individuals "affected by historical processes whereby they are altered and transformed"

(Lanternari 1963). Religion, in this framework, adopted more overtly dynamic qualities that had to be analyzed in specific historical, cultural and political contexts.

Religion and Process Studies

The emphasis on social unrest and change resonated with what eventually became a broader epistemological movement within anthropology—a "processual" anthropology which began to surface around the late 1950s particularly as the hegemony of a Durkheimian structural-functional paradigm waned. A central theme for some anthropologists wishing to break the harness of synchronic studies (e.g., Firth 1964; Turner 1969; and Leach 1954) was the generation and transformation of social forms, largely in the areas of new nations, urban cultures and what eventually became known as Third World development studies (Saltzman 1988). The process or "movement" metaphor seemed to indicate to anthropologists that "just as we appreciate the need for movement in ourselves, so we [must] appreciate it in those things we study" (Fernandez 1979, 38-39). Some of this processual momentum eventually trickled into religious anthropology where it was linked to broader questions about political power. John Middleton, for example, along with others in the "action-oriented" branch of process studies (Barth 1959; Bailey 1969), focused on how individuals use religion for political gain. Clifford Geertz (1964) tried to demonstrate how religious symbols can be vehicles for "revolutionary" action. Victor Turner (1974) developed a "processual symbolics" in which he related the manipulation of religious symbols to struggles for power (see also Moore and Myerhoff, 1977). Although these anthropologists did not uniformly or directly press for radical changes in the way religion was characterized in their discipline, their work, taken together, challenged the structural-functional model of religion by viewing religion as a dynamic social phenomenon embedded in conflicts over power. In this way, these studies can be seen as part of a broader conceptual shift to "process" and "power" within anthropology.

The data provided by such studies, while contradicting some of the traditional views of religion as purely symbolic discourse, or as merely integrative and supportive of dominant political structures, met at first with only limited success. Bruce Lincoln notes that a series of meetings were

held after 1956 around the publication of some provocative studies (Cohen 1957; Worsley 1968; Thrupp 1962). The most important of these was Eric Hobsbawm's influential *Primitive Rebels* in which he argued that though religious groups might be "rebellious," they could not be truly "revolutionary." Hobsbawm's supporters, defending what had become a "classical Marxist" thesis, suggested that these religious-based uprisings were generally ineffective and that their religious elements (millenarianism, rituals and symbols) led their members into "irrational modes of organization" and hence "rendered them incapable of success" (Lincoln 1985, 5).

Kenelm Burridge recalls how difficult it was to convince his contemporaries that religion was, in many instances, an important medium of social resistance, protest and change:

> Millenarianisms were regarded as social "sicknesses," "irregularities," or "madnesses," interesting perhaps, but not properly within the field of religion, which was thought of as the conservative and stabilizing element of society . . . Religion was so embedded in the social consciousness as conservative that, despite experience, the idea of religion as revolution or of revolution as religion seemed totally perverse. (Burridge 1985, 220-21)

Unfortunately, the questions these studies raised about the relation of religious culture to systems of power went largely unexplored, eclipsed by the dominant paradigms of the 1960s and early 1970s: Levi-Strauss's reified structuralism, the various perspectives adopted during the rationality-of-religious-thought debates, as well as "interpretive" symbolics, all discussed religion in largely phenomenological, apolitical and ahistorical terms. These paradigms side-stepped questions that the cargo cult and revitalization literature had posed about religion and the exercise of power.

Religion as Cultural Process

If one looks at anthropological studies as a collected body of works, the mid-1970s show anthropological interpretations of religion and its relation to the practice of power changing significantly. Many of the more recent anthropological approaches to religion offer a paradigm which argues that religion is not simply a static set of ideas that a group of people have about the world—it is also a system of meaning unfolding within a

history and culture, in politics and economies. In many of these studies, religion is regarded as the effort of a group by people to interpret its experience and give it a coherent form through a set of specific beliefs and practices—both of which are themselves shaped by particular historical and cultural circumstances. Raymond Williams has captured this active and processual sense of religious phenomena by suggesting that religious culture is a "system of signification" through which the social order is not only "experienced, communicated and reproduced, but also transformed" (1981, 207-210).

Those ethnographies exploring religious culture as "processes" span a great number of topics and ethnographic areas,[2] and while there is a wide diversity in this literature, as a body it does point to an anthropological rethinking of "religion" in light of a re-conceptualization of "culture." In much of this newer literature—following the tradition of both cultural Marxism with its emphasis on ideology, and French post-structuralism which views culture as an ideological ensemble—culture is treated as a "terrain of negotiation" or as "a complex of discourses" (Thompson 1986, 48). Many social scientists of this ilk adopt a perspective in which the social world is characterized as a field of "articulating principles"—a notion borrowed from Antonio Gramsci that refers to economic, political, ideological or other "discourses" which play a marked role in a particular culture. According to this line of thinking, any of these articulating principles (including religion) has the potential of becoming a "salient discourse," that is, it has the potential to acquire a *defining* effect on society.

While the "discourse" paradigm of society and religion is rather abstract, it does demonstrate that religion is no longer being treated by many anthropologists as a normative feature of a particular group of people, but rather as a cultural process— something that people "do" to make sense of themselves and their world around them, and possibly to change both. Religion is increasingly being recognized as a salient and dynamic discourse within the social terrain. Always engaged with other cultural, economic and political discourses, religion is not merely given secondary status as symbolic expression, but is acknowledged as something which can, and often does, exert tremendous social transformation.

Symbolic and Political Economies: Structure and Agency in Studies of Religion

The more recent anthropological research on religion has raised some significant theoretical issues about how systems of meaning (such as religious systems) are related to political economies, and about developing paradigms and methodologies which can address religion, social change and power from both a political-economic and a phenomenological perspective. These newer paradigms call for a rapprochement between academic disciplines that have traditionally avoided one another owing to the dichotomy existing between "political-economic" and "symbolic" approaches to culture. In the former camp, scholars have tended to overemphasize how political, economic (and in some cases, ideational) conditions shape human experience; in the latter, researchers have focused almost exclusively on the inner experiences, strategies and actions of human agents as they mediate the world around them. As a result, the study of religious phenomena, often associated with the "symbolic" and the "cognitive," has frequently suffered.

More recently, there has been a movement toward breaking down the epistemological walls dividing human experience (or *agency*) and the social environment (or *structure*) (see Giddens 1984; Abrams 1982; Bourdieu 1977; Sahlins 1981; Ortner 1989). According to some of these theorists, those who focus primarily on culture as an *internal* phenomenon (i.e., something internalized and made meaningful by human actors) must examine how political, economic and other such *external* conditions "structure" the very generation of human meaning and experience. Consequently, those who focus more on how political and economic conditions shape the production of meaning systems must also explore how human beings creatively interpret their experiences, in light of these limitations, and how they, ultimately, are able to transform the very structures engulfing them.

This paradigm—labelled variously as "practice theory," "process theory," "structuring" and "structuration"—collapses the rigid conceptual disjuncture between human agent and social structure to suggest that both are organically and inextricably linked. Sherry Ortner summarizes,

> . . . Practice theory . . . is in itself a theory of translation between an objective world and a subjective one, between a world constituted by logics beyond actors' perceptions, and a world constituted by logics spun by thinking acting agents. Practice theory always has two moments, one largely objectivist and one largely subjectivist. In the first, the world appears as system and structure, constituting actors, or confronting them, or both . . . But in the second, the world appears as culture, as symbolic frames derived from actors' attempts to constitute the world in their own terms by investing it with order, meaning, and value. (1989, 18)

As a theoretical orientation, the practice paradigm has some important implications for the study of religion. First, because this body of theory rejects any rigid conceptual posture that estranges human agency and social structure, traditional definitions of religion as a personal, internal, meaning-seeking activity or simply as a symbolic code functioning to keep society together ultimately have to be set aside. Instead, one must adopt an interpretation of religion that is essentially processual and contextual—people may construct meaning through a shared symbolic (e.g., religious) medium, but they do so within a world where existing symbolic (and other) structures are shaping the construction of their spirituality or religious sensibility. Religion, hence, is neither an internal meaning seeking event (a subjective moment) nor an external ideology or symbolic code shaping people's consciousness (an objective moment). It is both.

Secondly, practice theories fundamentally redefine traditional arguments that separate religious and political-economic discourses. Many of the practice-based studies of human society build on Max Weber's insight that ideological and political-economic systems are really two halves of the same coin. In the practice paradigm, religious systems, as particular kinds of "moral economies," are deeply tied to political economies—systems of production and distribution—and to the structures of power which pervade society. One can expect religion, then, to be very much at the heart of social discourse about power, politics and economics. In the practice paradigm, religion is embedded within a field of social "discourses" whose inter-relationships vary over history—which discourses religion is distinguished from, and which arenas of power it exerts an influence in, are an analytical problem for the social scientist.

The result, then, from a practice perspective, is a sense of religion as: (a) *individual/subjective*—religion acts as a set of resources with which

individuals creatively interpret the world around them; (b) *structural/social*—religion is a socially-shared mode of interpretation that acts as a set of symbolic limitations within which subjective hermeneutics occur; and (c) *processual/dynamic*—religion is a social practice which not only interprets and structures the social world, but which can also transform it.

Contemporary Approaches

There are several works that reflect the confluence of agency and structure, practice and process, moral and political economies in their treatments of religion. Pioneer studies are offered by Michael Taussig and June Nash. Both works look at the impact of capitalism on South American labourers, and attempt to combine political-economic and interpretive-symbolic approaches. Both illustrate how ideological systems (such as myth, ritual and religious beliefs) not only respond to, but also reformulate macro political-economic processes such as the creation of a money economy and proletarian-wage labour. Yet another pioneer, Sherry Ortner, in her study of Buddhist monasteries among the Sherpa of Nepal, explicitly adopts a practice paradigm to illuminate how certain religious beliefs and practices not only responded to a shifting social world but also reconstituted it.

An even more recent example includes Jean and John Comaroff's work which asserts the importance of examining culture, symbolism, ideology and the human agent within the context of political and economic structures. Building on practice themes and interpreting Christian evangelism as a "signifying" as well as political-economic event, the Comaroffs suggest that the colonization of Africa involved both a reorganization of the relations of production and the creation of classes, *and* a "colonization of consciousness." According to these authors, Protestant missionaries were the purveyors of moral as well as political economies—the two inseparable threads of western colonization of Africa—and that illuminating Africa's cultural history must involve careful analysis of how individuals experienced this moral and political-economic colonization as "victims" and as "agents" of a new social world.[3] In their edited collection on popular religion in Middle America, Stephen and Dow also discuss both the collusive and confrontational roles religious cultures have

played in response to state-making processes at different periods in history. Their volume emphasizes community reaction to state intervention and economic development as it is manifested in local religious practices. The contributors to this volume portray indigenous peoples not only as constrained by the forces of state and capitalist development, but also as "actively involved in building . . . social movements which counteract and in turn affect such forces" (1990, 19).

In each of the works mentioned above, religious beliefs and practices are not divorced from their cultural context, and are treated neither as a subjective, hermeneutical phenomena nor as a uniformly-functioning *external* ideological force. These studies, and their contemporary offshoots, indicate that religion is being viewed as an indigenous system of meaning—as a dynamic "discourse"—embedded within particular economic, political and historical circumstances with creative human agents at the core.

New Directions for the Study of Religion

In this article I have briefly outlined some of the epistemological assumptions—about the human social world and how it works—that have coursed beneath anthropological studies of religious phenomena. I have also explored the development of more recent and "enlightened" anthropological approaches to religion—approaches which have been stimulated partly by the rise of religio-political movements around the world and the challenge these have made to standard theories of religious phenomena. I have surveyed this material to advocate a concept of "religion" that builds upon "practice-based" studies, i.e., an approach that sees "religion" as discourse and process, as a dialectic of agency and structure, as human experience *creatively contextualized* in a political-economy, a culture and a history. At its most basic level, such an approach acknowledges the dynamic, rather than declining, influence religion plays in contemporary culture. The practice paradigm offers a better tool by which to understand the relation of religious belief to the exercise of cultural power. Without understanding the dynamic dimension of religion, it is not possible to grasp fully or appreciate the power and importance of social movements around the globe.

Endnotes

1. Critical reflection on anthropological treatments of religion is, of course, not simply a feature of the last two decades. Many anthropologists, for example, began to critique religious anthropology in the 1960s. E.E. Evans-Pritchard chastised anthropology for unquestioningly equating the study of religion with the study of human origins (1965, 4-5); Clifford Geertz (1964, 282) and Mary Douglas (1982, 81) both reflected critically on how modernization theories have differentiated primitive from advanced societies and associated religion only with the former.

2. These ethnographies encompass both processes of "resistance" and "domination" in their treatments of religious culture. Several authors, for example, have analyzed how traditional religious cultures articulate processes of "resistance," "rebellion" and "revolution" (e.g., Lincoln 1985; Ackerman and Lee 1988; Scott 1985; Gibson 1986; Apter 1984; Lan 1985; Ranger 1982; Keddie 1985; Jorgensen 1985; Bond 1979; MacGaffey 1983). Several ethnographies in the "domination" genre have focused on how hegemonic groups (such as the state) successfully appropriate and reconstitute traditional religious cultures to further their own control (e.g., Harries-Jones 1975; Brow 1988; Keyes 1987; Bossy 1970; Goody 1983), while others delineate how states fail to manipulate local religious traditions (Weller 1985), and hence experience diminished social power. An interesting debate within the resistance-domination literature on religion has involved disputes over whether Christian missions are essentially a vehicle for indigenous sentiments and interests, or whether they are a western import that functions solely to advance imperial control (Glazier 1980). While scholars have explored topics as diverse as Pentecostalism, Protestant fundamentalism and liberation theology, and have lined-up on both sides of the "resistance" and "domination" debate (see e.g., Higgins [1990], Berryman [1984], and Garma [1984], who represent the former position, and Manz [1988] and Annis [1987], the latter), there is a growing consensus that missionary efforts and effects must be treated dialectically (Lancaster 1988; Fernandez 1982; Ranger 1986; Gill 1990; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; Stoll 1990).

3. Anthropologist Carol Smith has also suggested that peripheral communities experience capitalism—as a world dominating and penetrating process—in a dialectical manner, i.e., they become victims to its structures but are, in some cases, able to shape the unique form capitalism takes by forcing it to adapt to some of their own cultural practices. These approaches do not deny the

tremendous social inequalities engendered by capitalist processes, but rather strive to acknowledge the creative agency of even the most oppressed populations—something that many authors feel is more respectful (and accurate) than depicting peripheral communities as simply the passive victims of capitalist domination.

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