

Anthropology and Religion

1 Culture and Religion

Starting from the anthropologically orientated conception that culture, as the world of things, and of people's relationships with them, "does make human subjects what they are" (Scharfe 2002, 22; o.t.), the issue outlines the most important theoretical tendencies, methodological specificities, and positions in scholarly discussions about culture and religion. The focus is on the field of Cultural anthropology/Euro-pean ethnology and in the German-language field once called *Volkskunde* since the late 1950s.

This historical view underlines subtextual implications of imprinting through internalised denominational, theological knowledge in the sciences of Religion. For an ethnographic approach within cultural anthropology, and for analysis from the perspective of historical, social, and cultural studies, there is a need to explore the terminological structures determining these disciplines to seek to identify how religion becomes visible as the object of communication. In this way, we can understand and accept the polyphony and hybridity of academic discourse and its practices in connection with Religion.

1.1 The Concept of the Human Being

If we ask 'What is a human being?', and we are a cultural anthropologist, an ethnologist, a specialist in cultural studies, we are always simultaneously asking: 'What is culture?' Researchers in these disciplines focus on the cultural contingency of humanity and of human individuals; they regard culture as a product of human action, as the 'work of human hands'. Culture, as the world of things, of cultural objectivisations and of people's relationships with them, calls for our careful and thorough consideration "because not only does it make human subjects what they are, it makes them in the first place" (Scharfe 2002, 22; o.t.).

The roots of this concept of the human being and of culture are traceable to the specific approach taken by what is known as philosophical anthropology, which began to emerge in the 1920s and for which Max Scheler (1874–1928), Arnold Gehlen (1904–1976) and Helmuth Plessner (1892–1985) laid the foundations. It developed a long-term impact on what came to be called cultural anthropology or European ethnology and in German sociology as it regrouped and re-established itself after 1945 (Fischer 2006; Greverus 1978).

A decisive influence came from the field's response to and adoption of the conceptualisation of a human being as possessed of 'world-openness', which is "in prin-

ciple tantamount to shedding the spell of the environment” (Scheler 1928). Human beings achieve this via their capacity for self-distancing (*Fernstellung*) from conditions in their environment and, in so doing, for making them into ‘objects’; this is their ‘ability to objectify’ (*Gegenstandsfähigkeit*). This is the ability of human beings to distance themselves via words, images, symbols, representations; that is, via a concept or idea removed from immediate experience. In this theory, then, human engagement with the self and the world takes place through interpretations of perceptions and experiences upon which active, lived experience and self-expression are contingent. From this it follows that the act of understanding is an integral part of the act of living.

Regardless of their critique of the generation of anthropological universals, the questions raised by what has been called philosophical anthropology have been constitutive of approaches in social theory. The reason therefore laid not least in the manner in which they have – while respecting the factuality of variability and change – linked questions around the natural biological foundations on which human beings’ lives and activities are based and those relating to the cultural and historical dimensions of human experience.

1.2 Religion as a Part or a Specific Form of Culture

The doubtless most influential response from the realm of cultural studies to the question of what culture is has been the proposal by Clifford Geertz in the form of an “interpretive theory of culture”, drawing on the semiotic, symbolic facet of culture as a tendency in human expression and communication. It presents an image of man as “suspended in webs of significance”, that is, culture, which “he himself has spun” (Geertz [1966] 1973, 5). Geertz sees the sum of these webs as an ‘acted document’ created via mimesis and participation in the life of a society. Progressing from this concept, he defines religion as a cultural “system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.” (Geertz 1973, 90) Geertz further suggests:

For an anthropologist, the importance of religion lies in its capacity to serve, for an individual or for a group, as a source of general, yet distinctive, conceptions of the world, the self, and the relations between them, on the one hand – its model of aspect – and of rooted, no less distinctive ‘mental’ dispositions – its model for aspect – on the other (Geertz 1973, 123).

Geertz’ approach, distinguishing religion’s ‘model of aspect’ and its ‘model for aspect’, points simultaneously to entanglements of meaning (cultures / religions), produced in continuous social practice, and to the character of these enmeshments as a resource driving that social practice. In this view, then, we can conceive of religion as

a cultural and social fact. In defining its general function as one of the creation of meaning, however, Geertz does not intend to raise it to the status of an absolute and universal principle. His assertions do not exclude the possibility that there are other ‘webs’ generating significance, other symbolic systems, nor that people in all societies adopt and share in the specific system of religion (Geertz 1973, 108–109, note 33)¹.

In his ethnological studies on material religious culture, whose emphasis centred on cultural history and phenomenology of religion, Lenz Kriss-Rettenbeck was an early responder to Geertz. Kriss-Rettenbeck’s exemplary exploration of devotional objects as material objects and specific entities representing actions demonstrated the possibility of “constructing ideal types both of entities and of devotional styles” from stable fields of meaning limited to specific situations, to the end of identifying instances of the performative. In his view, understanding such phenomena requires the researcher to examine and illuminate her own interpretive, behavioural, and expressive schemata as well as those of the ‘others’, her subjects (Kriss-Rettenbeck 1983, 219–220; o.t.), accompanied by the foundational necessity of – to speak with Geertz – “look[ing] for systematic relationships among diverse phenomena, not for substantive identities among similar ones. And to do that with any effectiveness, we need to replace the ‘stratigraphic’ conception of the relations between the various aspects of human existence with a synthetic one.” (Geertz 1973, 44) This is critique of comparative anthropology and religious studies, that assumed, in analogy to assumptions drawn from evolutionary biology, the existence of a series of ascending cultural levels in human society (magic → religion → Christianity). That also suggested relationships among cultural phenomena that occurred at great geographical distances from one another but appeared to bear similarities; and in so doing presumed the identifiability of specific stages of age or development in the phenomenon in question.

As early as the late 1950s, long before research in religious studies had taken the step, Kriss-Rettenbeck’s work, in particular, had renounced the habit of attributing magical, that is, irrational, and primitive properties to religious rituals that evade our own understanding. Citing as an example the Christian use of amulets and votives, Kriss-Rettenbeck concluded, in a manner which called the leading assumptions of contemporary comparative religious studies into question: “We may without difficulty trace the creation and use of all Western amulets to *participation mystique* (as in Lévy-Bruhl), but only if we restrict ourselves to a superficial interpretation of

¹ Asad (1993) emphatically critiqued Geertz’ conception, protesting that its terminology was largely influenced by developments in modern Christianity and was therefore of limited use to the analysis of other traditions, as well as showing a particular tendency to leave aside matters of the exercise of social and political power (Asad 1993). Fundamentally, this position corresponded to Asad’s call, in opposition to Geertz’ ‘universal’ definition of religion, for the exploration of what symbols mean in relation to the practical contexts of their use, to authority, and to forms of the exercise of power in society (Asad 1993, 53).

the outer appearance, negate all historicity and turn to a naïve psychologism in our interpretation.” (Hansmann and Kriss-Rettenbeck [1966] 1999, 8; o.t.)

Kriss-Rettenbeck’s exploration and interpretation of medieval Christian sources enabled him to develop productive theoretical starting points for work on religion from a cultural studies perspective. Via the question of how we might conceive of religiosity, specifically popular religiosity, he asserted the centrality of identifying and illuminating the “notion, valid in the main for the whole Church, of the relationship between teaching (‘liturgical/sacramental religiosity’), religious experience, cognition (‘spiritual religiosity’ as a *causa monachorum*) and human capacity (‘religious sensitivity’), each in their historical context (Kriss-Rettenbeck 1963, 14; o.t.). It is not by chance that this approach corresponds on a theoretical level with the theorems proposed by Peter L. Berger und Thomas Luckmann (1966) on the ‘social construction of reality’ (the objective reality with which one is presented, subjective reality, internalisation, and externalisation).

Unlike Kriss-Rettenbeck’s work, Luckmann’s theoretical concept of ‘the invisible religion’, with its philosophical and phenomenological basis, and the manner in which he conceives of religion (Luckmann 1967, 1991), did not directly elicit a great response until cultural anthropology became increasingly interested in topics relating to what were called alternative forms of faith and began to focus on empirical approaches. Luckmann’s afterword to the German edition of *The Invisible Religion* (1991) was of particular influence in this regard. It defines religion as founded in the fundamental anthropological constant of the human capacity to transcend the immediate environment and experience other, extra-ordinary ‘realities’ beyond the everyday empirical sphere. The act of transcending alone does not amount to religion; instead, religion provides a framework for the interpretive attachment of meaning to experiences of the transcendental and shapes the ways in which a culture engages with these experiences. Religious consensus arises through the passing down as tradition of conventions, both canonical and non-canonical and varying in the degree of their binding force (Luckmann 1967, 1991, 167–172). Put succinctly, it is via religion that “experiences of transcendence [are] socially constructed” (Knoblauch 1997, 186; o.t.), are “formed and ma[de] the subject of rules, with varying degrees of success” (Luckmann 1985, 34; o.t.). Cultural studies may draw on this in forming a concept of religion as a “part or specific form of human-created culture” (Scharfe 2004, ix; o.t.).

In light of the increasing difficulty of gaining a clear picture of ‘lived religion’ in complex, pluralistic societies with strong cultures of individualism, this broad concept of religion promises to add precision to our analysis and interpretation of what is religious and what is not. ‘Small’ and ‘intermediate transcendences’, which transcend the actual direct experience, as in the journey of memory through time and space or the indirect experiences of the other (Luckmann 1991, 164–183), reveal their religious or spiritual character when an actor interprets them, from within her worldview, as pertinent to an extra-ordinary region of meaning and when they find expression via discursive practices and acts of materialisation. In this way, we

conceive of theoretical approaches to understanding religion as models that raise our awareness and enable us to analytically access practices a society interprets in a religious context, rather than as universal definitions.

2 Self-Consciousness

2.1 Understanding Other People

What has been called the ‘ethnological paradigm’, and its approach, based on understanding other people via the methodology of participant-observation-based fieldwork, cast light on actions and products subjectively deemed to hold meaning, as interpretations of the world, and on the conceptions that attach to these products and actions. This attempt to draw near to the view from within, to modes of experience, made the sensitivity and the emotional constitution of religion visible, laying the groundwork for the insight “that the categories of function and functional rationality alone are insufficient for the attainment of a more profound understanding of notions of faith and acts of religion.” (Kohl 2001; 171, o.t.) It was the emergence of an anthropology of understanding that enabled us to describe the acts of others in terms that ascribed to them and credited them with a proper logic and rationality within their own cultural and religious systems of meaning; this was understanding in the sense of recognition of grounds for actions that were invested with meaning and therefore rationality.

How do people, facing their objective realities, their environment, the things, actions, practices and linguistic expressions around them, garner meaning from them and create meaning in the act of their interpretation? How do they come to understand the fabric, woven of knowledge and the attribution of meaning, of ideas and notions communicated to them and passed down the generations and of which they are part, in all its symbolic complexity? And how does this fabric come to be; how does it constitute itself through a shared understanding of shared symbolic practices? Interpretive ethnology, led by the desire to understand, has come to focus on these questions. It is a field closely associated with Clifford Geertz, who drew directly on the hermeneutics of biblical exegesis. After the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when Hermann Gunkel had sought to identify the “Sitz im Leben” (place in the life of people) of Old Testament texts, this area of scholarship had gained influence and significance for a historically driven *Volkskunde* that was increasingly taking on the character of cultural anthropology, and for a religious ethnology of practical theology (Gunkel [1925] 1963).

Geertz asserted a contextualising, perspective-centred approach via complementary or mutually commenting upon, contradicting, questioning interpretations of social discourses and practices enables the generation of a ‘thick description’ of reality. The core of this exploration, therefore, is the understanding and interpretation via

hermeneutic means of human cultural creativity – of how humans understand their world (Geertz 1973).²

In terms of theories of knowledge, this technique of standing back from the subject/object, positioning oneself as distanced, other, as part of the hermeneutic process and to the end of avoiding ‘going native’ in total identification, creates a point at which the approaches of historically focused cultural anthropology and ethnological fieldwork meet and intersect. Stepping back and distancing oneself from others’ religious worlds of ideas and worldviews calls for us to reflect thoroughly upon ourselves, for it entails standing apart from our own – in the broadest sense of the term – religious experiences, those experiences which go to the heart of our humanity and act as powerful codeterminants of our identity. It may be that in so doing, we gain a particularly clear, perhaps painful sense of our own relativity.

2.2 Estrangement – Making the Familiar Strange

The discourse around knowledge in ethnology/cultural anthropology has accorded a key role to the researcher’s understanding of her own emotional access to her subject and to uncovering its initially unconscious undergirding with her own values (Clifford and Marcus 1986).³ Klaus Peter Köpping proposes the centrality to understanding during fieldwork of comprehending the dialectical relationship “in which the researcher, in the encounter with the other, meets the boundaries of [her] self and [in which] that self becomes conscious both of its prejudices and of the values it holds most dear” (Köpping 1990, 14; o.t.).

In this context, Köpping and Heike Kämpf have pointed to the heuristic relevance of Helmuth Plessner’s hermeneutics to interpretive praxis in ethnology and cultural anthropology (Köpping 1990, 14; Kämpf 2003). The human position in the world that Plessner terms ‘eccentric positionality’ is about a capacity for reflexivity; a human being is able to step back from herself and to take an attitude to herself with which she acts in accordance, and, in understanding, to step back in distance from the act of understanding itself. In 1948, drawing on his experience as an emigré, Plessner speaks of painful experiences which led him out of the sphere of the familiar and opened up a view to the discovery of the Other; experiences acting as catalysts to a ‘cognisant comprehension’ which brings about consciousness of an interpretive approach to the world:

2 The scope of this article prohibits a discussion of the ‘writing culture’ debate and its critique of the approach to culture as ‘text’ (Clifford and Marcus 1986), which primarily emphasises the discursive nature of writing in ethnography, or of the postcolonial ‘writing against culture’ approach (Abu-Lughod 1991).

3 For an overview of the debate see Berg and Fuchs (1993).

That is why the estranged vision of the artist fulfils an indispensable condition for all genuine understanding. It lifts what is invisible in human relations because it is familiar, into visibility; in this new encounter, understanding is brought into play; so that what is in fact familiar becomes accessible by virtue of being estranged. Without this estrangement there is no understanding; it constitutes a roundabout approach to the familiar, the counterfoil which puts the familiar into perspective as foreground and background and makes it comprehensible (Plessner 1978, 31).

There is now no way back to the former state of unconsciousness, of taking things as read: “Instead, the knowledge of the provisionality and constructed character of the comprehension [we have] achieved is inherent to this act of understanding.” (Kämpf 2012, 398, o.t.)

Following this argument, we as cultural anthropologists must abandon any notion of our research aiming towards a final and thereafter immovable understanding and therefore definition of the Other – specifically here the Other of religious practice – in its difference to what we identify as our own. For, were we to continue to seek such finality, we would lose our insight into the interrelationships and interreferentialities among perspectives drawn from our own cultural horizons in the practices with which we approach understanding the Other.

3 Making Religion: Approaches to Interpretation

3.1 Thing-World

The influence of phenomenological approaches and the methodological repertoire of research in the field effected a turn towards subjective components of religious experience which has enabled insights into the interrelationships among fields of significance pertaining to religious teachings and the specific experiential worlds of actors. At this juncture, the question has arisen of the extent to which cultural anthropology and ethnology can seek to explore subjective religiosity. Around the end of the 1990s the emphasis on the subject observable up to that point in the field’s evident focus on personal, internal experiences of reality was challenged. Calls emerged for a new concentration on their “externalisations, in which [these experiences] become visible and which arise, are shaped anew, and invented in [subjects’] engagement with the culture passed down [to them]” (Scharfe 1997, 149; o.t.). The ‘thing-world’, the performative praxis of rituals and gestures, of images and signs, habitual religious practices as the embodied substructure of group-specific acts of making the world – in other words, ‘lived religion’ in its material visibility and its historical making – are key points of departure for work on religion in cultural anthropology and ethnology. As previously indicated, the roots of this approach lie in a constructivist view of cultural and religious phenomena (objectivations) in their constructed entanglements of interrelationships. These phenomena come into being through practices of adoption

and of the imposition of a specific character on such rituals and acts, upon the sediment of attributions of meaning passed down the generations and enacted by, for example, religion constituted in the form of a church and / or via individual access to other corpora of knowledge.

This approach corresponds overall to the more recent notion of material religion, which conceives of images, objects, songs, and specific bodily movements as mediating the transcendental and seeks to understand the interconnections between religious experience and materiality, with the aim of achieving an “integrated approach that includes the mental dimension within a material approach” (Meyer 2012, 11; o.t.). This concept came to be in a context of increasing critique levelled from representatives of the humanities and cultural studies at tendencies towards de-materialisation perceived as being at work in constructivism and semiotic interpretive methods: “[I]nstead of prioritizing semantic approaches that look through concrete manifestations so as to get at the abstract meanings behind, it is key to approach religion as a mundane, practical and material affair – as present in and making a world” (Meyer 2012, 20; o.t.). Attributions of meaning are nevertheless directly related to the materiality of a thing’s physical shape and form, in which are ‘inscribed’ societal prescriptions for courses of action; the entanglements of meaning created by human hands materialise in an open-ended process.

There is a view that the perception of a process of de-materialisation being at work on religion has emerged, *inter alia*, from the response to Thomas Luckmann’s work, a response whose concomitant has been a concentration on individual religious cosmoses of meaning which form in the personal sphere, beyond and aside from institutional forms of religious socialisation. This tendency may also be responding to the observable decline in the institutionally linked ‘visible’ practice of faith (Meyer 2011, XV). This said, Luckmann does not suggest that religion is dissolving, disappearing from modern, pluralistic societies, but rather that it is manifesting in other new socio-cultural forms outside institutional religion lived via churches and other similar bodies, diffusing through areas of society, such as sport, politics, and entertainment, which we do not associate with traditional ideas of what religion is. This process, suggests Luckmann, makes religion ‘invisible’, that is, no longer recognised for what it is (Luckmann 1991; cf. Scheer 2015, 90).

In the context of research into religion from the perspective of Protestant theology, which explores religion as an institutional phenomenon, of ecclesial studies, of sociology and what was once *Volkskunde*, likewise for research into Protestant religiosity, we can indeed perceive a neglect of ‘lived religion’, leading to its invisibility. The origin of this development lies in the Protestant conception of the personal sphere and of the inward nature of faith (inner belief) alongside freedom of conscience to be exercised in accordance with one’s judgement (free conscience). Studies by Anglo-American cultural anthropologists/ethnologists on Christianity refer in this context to a ‘mentalistic’ or ‘Protestant bias’, which denotes self-perception as more modern or progressive than other confessional communities or denominations due to the assumed ability to be religious without material aids. It is in line with the

tradition, theologically initiated in the Reformation, of rejecting the use of mediating forms to tackle the problem of presence and materiality. Another influence here is a hangover from a religious aesthetic prized by a middle-class Protestant milieu, which defines a correct way to practise religious emotionality to the ultimate end of attaining the proverbial 'Protestant inwardness of faith'. This has entailed a narrative which, in line with a specific denominational culture-critical theology, degraded the use of things, rituals and the physicality associated therewith as ephemeral, superficial, and devoid of true meaning.

From the late nineteenth century onward, forms of religious externalisation, through the influence of evolutionist notions in religious studies, fell under the essentially age-old suspicion of being tantamount to magic, superstition and fetishism, as therefore essentially archaic, pre-modern, primitive stages of culture. This claim to superiority over the use of things, perceived as 'irrational', failed to take account of the dynamics of religious actions and practices as conferring meaning. Rituals performed within a community or collective, accompanied by the transferral of a cultural knowledge held by those involved and consciously reflected upon to a (greater or lesser) degree ('tacit knowing'; Polanyi 1958), generate sensory dispositions and moods which provide the required conditions for acts of transcending. This takes place via the perceptible, or put differently, experientiable, appresentation (*Mitvergegenwärtigung*) of the symbolic practice's referent. This appresentation points to extra-ordinary experiences and realities, which may, for instance, find themselves endowed with eschatological interpretations, and likewise to mediated experience of a close, intense connection to a community, or to immediate experience of remembering the past or planning the future. It may indeed occur as presentation, in which instance symbolic practice itself becomes reality and is conceived of as such (Soeffner 2004, 42).

There have doubtless historically been boundaries, drawn in the context of ecclesial canonisation, between the faithful and those without faith. These notwithstanding, taken-as-read experiences of rootedness or incorporation into a community, proceeding with little or no awareness of self and unfolding via mimetic practices in communicated action, without knowledge of a meaning to this expression founded in religion or theology and without the powerful transcendental experience of *communitas* (Turner 2003), but accompanied by a community or group experience, belong to the category of the religious.

Approaches that foreground the aesthetics of religion are gaining traction in work on religion from cultural anthropology and ethnology. These approaches place emphasis on a sensory anthropology which seeks to explore the use of the senses, sensory perceptions, the interpretive horizons of what subjects see, hear, taste, and touch, mindful of their mediated character and their historicity. In its mimesis of the interpreted narrative of salvation via the employment of the physical mode and the Church calendar, Christian *praxis pietatis*, particularly in its pre-Reformation traditions, has made use of the constitutive function that attaches to human physicality in engagement with things accessible to experience via the senses and their

embodiments as extensions of human embodiedness. And at an early stage, what is known as Jesuit anthropology had recognised that the presentation, the making present, of the transcendental requires the deployment of the senses and the generation of an emotional mode of expression, and that the sensory embodiment of a *religio carnalis* is what creates religious experience (Lundberg 1966; Daxelmüller 2000, 221).

Post-Reformation traditions of teaching in Protestantism, with their emphasis on a direct personal relationship to God and on self-responsibility, are reticent towards or actively reject the use of expressive practices with bodily character and material objects as media of the transcendental. This said, these traditions, too, render religion tangible or palpable in materialised expressions of a field of discourses and things, to which end they employ communicable, mediated repertoires of forms and practices, passed down through the generations. Practices, such as Bible study, which revolve around internalisation and self-examination, are core expressions of 'Protestant inwardness'. The attention to the appropriateness or otherwise of emotional states reveals itself as a process of the 'cultivation of emotions', which, experienced as mediating the experience of the divine, find expression in emotional concepts and practices learned in the context of the traditional body/soul dichotomy. This tradition cultivates a critique of the bodily aspect of religious sensibility and embodies it in the subject's physical disposition and habitus, their gestures, and expressions. The particular emotionality found in the religious practices of the Pentecostal and charismatic movements are no exception to this; they turn the body into the core medium of the transcendental in the form of the 'Holy Spirit', of its presence and immediacy (Scheer 2014, 2015).

3.2 Ambiguities

The onward march of modernisation in the European setting has increasingly weakened the social normativity of religious symbols, images, rituals, and their use and has increased the scope of their ambiguity, their significative plurality. Encounters between people with divergent cultural and religious orientations and in many instances clashing sets of attitudes and expectations are no longer limited to the exceptional contexts of regionally specific urban settings. In our day, acting in concert with the occurrence and accessibility of heterogeneous bodies of religious knowledge from a wide range of interpretive contexts on the multimedia stage, people find themselves increasingly challenged to live with ambiguities and multiple potential interpretations of cultural, religious, and attitudinal factors. What positions do they take up relative to one another in these settings, and what positions are assigned to objects? We are called to pinpoint the cultural techniques and strategies which people employ to fill the space opening up through religious plurality and ambiguity for new standpoints and identifications. Likewise, we seek to explore people's responses to this emergent situation; do we find tolerance, a search for certain-

ties and an associated rejection or indeed violent repudiation of the ‘foreign’ and new, or an assumption of cultural ambiguity?

In a striking ‘alternative history of Islam’, specifically of Islamic culture of the post-formative but pre-modern period, Thomas Bauer, a researcher on literature and on Islam, has applied the term ‘cultural ambiguity’ to the phenomenon, of unperturbed attitudes to vagueness and ambiguity, among scholars as well as elsewhere, and indeed of the conscious generation of ambiguities as a cultural technique. “Where one social group simultaneously draws norms and attributions of significance for specific areas of life from opposed or highly divergent discourses, or when differing interpretations of a phenomenon find acceptance at one and the same time within a particular group, without either or any of these interpretations gaining exclusive primacy” (Bauer 2011, 27; o.t.).

In this, Bauer is referring to a concept, originating in psychology (Frenkel-Brunswik 1949), termed ‘tolerance [or intolerance] of ambiguity’. Later work in this area identified a connection between intolerance of ambiguity and feelings of psychological discomfort, such as fear and threat, alongside characteristics of ethnocentrism, dogmatism, authoritarianism, and rigidity. These authors came to the conclusion “that religiosity, as a dogmatic attitude, is typically concomitant with increased intolerance of ambiguity” (Reis 1997, 112; o.t.). People with a synthetic one, by contrast, tend to remain calm even in situations that to them appear unfamiliar, unstructured and difficult to exert control over, thereby managing the situation, and show attitudes characterised by circular thought patterns that rather than falling into an ‘either/or’ scheme, will tend to prefer both.

The ethnologist Dieter Narr formulated similar ‘diagnoses’, or, put differently, characterisations of lived religion. He refers to undividedness/decidedness as a conspicuous characteristic of popular piety, explaining “that it neither seeks to achieve a balance of ideas, eliminating contradictions, nor attempts a timid severance between the sacred and the profane spheres” (Narr 1959/60, 70; o.t.). The historical anthropologist Carlo Ginzburg characterised the idiosyncratic ‘theology’ proposed by the sixteenth-century miller Menocchio, who fell victim to the Inquisition, as an ‘imbroglio’ in an attempt to illuminate that which was flamboyant, ambivalent, new and striking, *un-decided*, about his ‘simplified religion’ (Ginzburg 1979, 84, 163–164). Ginzburg reads this phenomenon of ‘religious living’ as a “plebeian reduction and correction of official theology”, implying that a counter-cultural tendency attaches to it (Scharfe 2004, 226; o.t.). This is also the context in which the sociology of religion, drawing on Bourdieu, characterises ‘popular religion’ as ‘heterodox’: “It does not align itself with an orthodox worldview, but diverges from it, indeed may at times oppose it” (Knoblauch 2009, 240; o.t.).

Likewise, the type of religious practice which, defined as popular, spiritually based religiosity, has emerged on the scene in recent decades places people’s “conscious, emotionally experienced individual concept[s] of meaning, translated into real-life action”, at its centre (Polak 2008, 98; o.t.). This conceptualisation is one way in which people seek to express themselves in antithesis to the reified character

of their everyday lives and to religious practices defined and determined by others, dominated by 'experts', similarly in opposition to the radical practical concept of dominion over nature embodied in science and academic study (Heimbrock 1998, 33). Read thus, popular religion and spirituality resist academic (or, more precisely, scientific) and rationalist worldviews as well as those founded in rationalist theology, along with their orthodoxies of perception.

Similarly oriented perceptions have emerged from the sociology of religion in relation to everyday religiosity as it manifests itself in our day. In this context, Armin Nassehi refers to the figure of the 'composer' of religion, which an ethnologist would term 'bricoleur' ('DIYer'); this denotes a type of religious experience "which is accustomed to living in an inconsistent world", living a form of religiosity which "can get along with inconsistencies"; this attitude renders inconsistencies simultaneously a problem and a solution (Nassehi 2007, 119; o.t.).

Studies on migration have shown that people employ diverse individual coping strategies in response to the emergent awareness of their socio-cultural religious socialisation that is concomitant to the self-alienation inherent in the migration process. These strategies may range from re-arrangement, adjustment, and re-orientation to the taking of a completely new direction and/or conversion of their prior religious identification. In some instances, such developments may bear definition as distinct spiritual paths, as 'process-based religious doing' or 'religioning' (Nye 2000, 21; Jaciuk 2019, 48), which pushes the matter of a specific, actual location within a particular tradition into the background or renders it redundant. We might well describe this manner of engaging with religion as a strategy revolving around psychologically balancing out deficits or limitations in societal participation.

We may conceive of cultural ambiguity as part of the human condition; we find it ubiquitous as we go about and manage our daily lives, for the things and the norms we encounter require our interpretation and we may find ourselves in metaphorical battle around contradictory sets of values. The setting of the everyday is a distinctly rich source of situations which call for action beyond the routine. The space a culture creates for the 'undecided', for ambiguity, provides a potential path to a solution. One of the central properties of cultural ambiguity is a lack of exclusive claims to the definition of an unambiguity within a particular group or society; instead, the group or society includes and encompasses divergent interpretive patterns stemming from competing norms and accepts them. This means that there is no description of norm versus deviance at work; instead, an instance of cultural ambiguity in this context may be conceived of as the result of strategies of boundary-drawing and exclusion between historically established religious fields. Such results include the "genealogy of the distinctly modern, secular category of 'religion'" and the "classifying taxonomy of religion" (Casanova 2009, 91; o.t.), likewise the various, historically located variations on the images of self and other produced by professionals (theologians and scholars in the humanities) and also laypeople whose classifications gravitate towards unambiguity, in terms of popular piety, vernacular religion, superstition and magic (Treiber 1996).

This means that, for an ethnographic approach within cultural anthropology, and for analysis from the perspective of historical, social, and cultural studies, there is a need to explore the terminological structures determining these disciplines, to seek to identify how, on a socio-cultural level, religion becomes visible as the object of communication. We would also do well to retrace the boundaries drawn – where they are drawn at all – around defined ‘reality’ via the oppositions religious / secular, sacred / profane, and rational / irrational in each relevant socio-historical context.

3.3 Forms of Speeching about Religion

Paul Mecheril and Oscar Thomas-Olalde (2011, 38) have turned a spotlight on the binary way of speaking about religion within academia, with one type of speech rooted in a ‘model of appropriation/adoption’ (*Aneignungsmodell*) and the other proceeding from the ‘model of religious identity as destiny’. The first of these conceptions of religion appears to relate more substantively to the ‘native population’ of the society the migrant enters; it describes individual subjects’ religiosities “as dynamic, hybrid and contingent elements of identity, [or,] better still, as preferences” (Mecheril and Thomas-Olalde 2011, 36).⁴ By contrast, Mecheril and Thomas-Olalde continue, numerous studies around migration resort ‘in a reductive manner’ to the concept of ‘religion’ in order to present, explain and position the Other as they see fit. A focus on concepts of diversity and ethnicity, on the specific groups of migrants in question, and a funnelling of the relevant issues down to religious organisations and institutions will lead to the attribution of a central role to religion alongside and in this segment of society and the subliminal application of an ethno-cultural label. In this way, the praxis of hegemonic discourse effectively produces a group via “essentialisation, attribution and representation” and in so doing posits a religious identity (Mecheril and Thomas-Olalde 2011, 45; o.t.), with the effect that research on religion often finds itself perpetuating ‘religion’ as a popular topos without realising it.

The layers of interpretation of ‘religion’ and ‘culture’ outlined here and emerging through competing discourses call for us to make clear distinctions in our academic use of the terms. We need to distinguish the concept of religion as a “part or specific form of human-created culture”, alongside the notion of religiosity/spirituality as particular modes of subjectively lived religion accessed by communicable, ‘traditional’ forms of practice, from the deterministic equivocation of religion with/as culture, which turns religion into culture’s sole determinant or, conversely, in the perceived relativity of a coherent field of interpretation, makes religion appear as culture (Nas-sehi 2007).

⁴ We are unable here to explore more closely the theoretical concepts of hybridity (Bhabha 1994), creolisation (Hannerz 1987) and transculturation (Ortiz 1940).

In day-to-day reality, the categories, of course, are blurred; these academic constructs nevertheless require analytical distinction from concepts and strategies around categorising culture and religion that draw on everyday manifestations of these phenomena and which serve to aid individuals' self-positionings in their specific lifeworld within their societal surroundings, satisfy their spiritual needs and, in so doing, generate an individual sense of self-identification or self-stabilisation. For instance, people may participate in religious traditions consciously estranged from the spiritual/transcendental significance they carry; this participation serves instead as a strategy for the individual to lay down roots in the tradition's specifically located function as a repository of cultural memory. Alternatively, the separation of religion from culture, that is, from religious traditions, may become part of a distinct spiritual stance, what we might term a practical, everyday cultural technique of differentiation between culture and religion.

3.4 Final Review: 'to Find a Language in Difference'

When academics use the category of 'religion', they, like non-academics, very often do not mean the same thing as their peers. Culture and religion are dynamic fields of reference and significance within a world of things, which structure people's perceptions and experience. Merely speaking the same language carries no guarantees; we must be aware of the position from which the act of speaking is taking place. Every encounter, then, calls for translation from one cultural/linguistic field of reference into another. The sociologist Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez describes the encounter of conversation as a transcultural space, an interstice between the divergent socialisations that shape language. Connotations of linguistic expressions that are specific to particular cultural or group-based settings or contingent upon specific situations or that emerge from the individual's sets of associations give birth to semantic lacunae which hinder decoding (Enzenhofer and Resch 2011). Gutiérrez Rodríguez observes in this context: "The translation project that emerges from this encounter does not pursue the goal of articulating a universal commonality but rather attempts to find a language in difference." (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2008, 3) Similarly, when we encounter one another across academic disciplines, we need to act in the spirit of interpretive understanding in cultural anthropology, recognising and reflecting upon the cultural codes that arise through our academic and general socialisation and determine our perspective on the world and the ways of speaking we have adopted and assimilated – including our own. In so doing, we bring to light our implicit, heterogeneous prior conceptions of religion and religious practice. If we are to comprehend one another and perhaps reach consensus, we need to accept and tolerate the polyphony and hybridity of academic discourse and its practices.

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