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CONTENTS

Editorial Note

With six full articles, this issue of *Temenos* is an unusually rich one. Appropriately, we begin with Lauri Honko, one of the founders of *Temenos* just over fifty years ago, and his theoretical model in which culturally shared narratives about supernatural elements affect personal experience narratives ('memorates'). In this article, Vladimír Bahna argues that Honko's findings are largely consistent with current cognitive psychology, but moreover, that Honko's pairing of psychology and narrative folklore raises important methodological questions, particularly relevant in the context of the study of 'false memories'.

Since its very beginning, the Nordic countries have been the primary focus of *Temenos*. Using Gramsci's concept of hegemony, Sofia Sjö and Andreas Häger take a look at how Laestadians in four recent Scandinavian films have been constructed as the 'other', helping to show contrasting views as normal and unproblematic. Nevertheless, the authors argue that a balanced understanding of any such 'othering' in film must take into account the innate needs of the film medium. What we need, therefore, is greater religious media literacy.

Matti Rautaniemi and Liina Puustinen continue this focus on media by taking a look at presentations of yoga in four Finnish women's magazines. While they find the yoga in these magazines thoroughly integrated into consumer culture, they also find an exciting undercurrent that critiques it or actively goes against it.

Moving on to Norway, Berit Synøve Thorbjørnsrud examines the concept of conversion (e.g. as understood by Meredith McGuire) in relation to people from the former East Bloc countries who have come to the Orthodox Church after decades of socialization into an atheist worldview, by comparing them with (primarily) ethnic Norwegian converts. Why are eastern Europeans then so seldom called 'converts', particularly by the Orthodox clergy? Comparing the several individuals' conversion stories, Thorbjørnsrud highlights some important differences, but perhaps even more interestingly, their commonalities, arguing that the concept of conversion is indeed applicable to both groups.

Next, in his empirically rich article, Stefano Bigliardi looks at how a potentially obscure subject – the construction of Islam within Scientology – can nevertheless function as an introduction to more general and very interesting questions, such as the ways in which a new religious movement can frame itself in relation to established traditions, vicariously enjoying the antiquity and exotic wonder projected on the other.

Finally, Martin Hoondert takes us back to the classics of *Religionswissenschaft* through a discussion about the concepts of 'religion' and 'religiosity' in the context of comparing musical and religious experience. The commonality between the two is primarily due to the centripetal nature of music – in contrast to words, music need not differentiate between the signified and the signifier, but can simply refer back to itself.

Such a methodologically and empirically varied issue as this reflects the custom at *Temenos* of one thematically fixed special issue per year and another freer one, but it also shows how varied and exciting the field of religious studies is, even within the Nordic countries. As the new editor of Temenos, I stand by this policy of combining the highest academic standards with a celebration of the richness of our field of study.

This issue of *Temenos* is also the first to be issued exclusively as an open-access online publication (please make sure to register as a 'Reader' on this website to be notified of new issues!). My engagement in the world of cultural and scientific journals has shown me that 'going online' is often the last gasp of a financially struggling journal before going under. The case of *Temenos* is different. As my esteemed predecessors Dr. Ruth Illman and Dr. Tiina Mahlamäki wrote in their editorial note to the previous issue (50/2), this change in publishing style in Temenos is not motivated by financial concerns but by ideology: 'We want to contribute to the free sharing of knowledge, so that our articles can be available also outside academia, and accessible for scholars whose universities cannot afford costly journal subscriptions.' I concur whole-heartedly. Whether we like it or not, it is not only the new students who look for their information on the internet: much of the academy has gone online. Our duty as scholars is not to quixotically fight this development, but rather to contribute to raising the quality of online material. I am simultaneously honoured and humbled by having been given the task to help *Temenos* in this undertaking.

After all, knowledge is no small thing. As an anonymous Sanskrit poet says,

न चोरहार्यं न च राजहार्यं न भ्रातृभ्राज्यं न च भारकारि ।
व्यये कृते वर्धत एव नित्यं विद्याधनं सर्वधनप्रधानम्॥

It cannot be stolen by thieves, it cannot be taken by kings,
Brothers do not divide it, it does not weigh you down,
Spending it will only increase it –
There is no treasure comparable to the treasure of knowledge.

Måns Broo

Memorates and memory:
A re-evaluation of Lauri Honko's theory[1]

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Abstract

This paper deals with the phenomena where culture and society influence the content of personal experiences. It confronts psychological knowledge about autobiographical memory and folkloristic theories associated with the concept of *memorate* – a personal experience narrative which is built upon a supernatural belief. Autobiographical memory is not a vessel in which static information is deposited and later recalled; rather, it is a dynamic process of repeated construction and reconstruction of memories, which is subject to many internal and external influences. Ideas and concepts, widespread in society, dreams and beliefs, stories and experiences of others, can be, and often are incorporated into autobiographical memories. Similarly folklorists have shown that memorates (personal experience narratives) often consist of traditional elements. This paper argues that the theory formulated by Lauri Honko (1962, 1964) regarding the formation and transmission of memorates is largely coherent with psychological understanding of autobiographical memory. This kind of social contagion of memory suggests the possibility of a specific form of experientially-based cultural transmission of beliefs and concepts.

Keywords: *Lauri Honko, memorates, autobiographical memory, cognitive science of religion*

A *memorate* is a term used mainly in folkloristics for a type of narrative based on the speaker's personal experience. Memorates are often studied together or as a subgroup of legends. Both memorates and legends are characteristically mono-episodic stories, the content of which is built upon a belief, and which is presented as a real happening. The difference between these two narrative types is that whereas legends are shared by a wider group of people in a relatively typified and fixed form, memorates take the form of

personal experience stories. This specific feature was first addressed by Carl Wilhelm von Sydow, who also introduced the term *memorate* (Sydow 1934). The crucial distinction between memorates and legends or other narrative types is the personal experience at their core.

Experience vs. culture

Carl von Sydow posited that memorates were unique, strictly individual stories (Sydow 1934). That is what we normally expect of personal experiences in general, but can we in such a case speak about folklore or even culture? Personal experiences appear to be the very opposite of the collective phenomena that we understand under *tradition* and *transmission* - the two crucial terms regarding folklore. Von Sydow himself did not assign much importance to memorates for the study of folklore, but later many folklorists have noticed that the ethnographic material itself shows the opposite. Although the actual texts, the formulations and many of the details of memorates were idiosyncratic, the narrative structures often contained many or even exclusively traditional, culturally shared motifs (Bennett 1999; Honko 1964).

The focus of attention in the discussion therefore turned to the relationship between experience and tradition, the processes by which individual experiences become part of a narrative repertoire shared by the wider society. Memorates thus emerge as a possible precursor of legend. By definition, every legend is presented as a real happening, and therefore implicitly assumes a first-hand testimony at its inception (Dégh & Vászonyi 1974). Moreover, the relationship between story and event is seen as reciprocal, and as working in both directions (Bauman 1986; Bennett 1999). To quote Gillian Bennett:

> By listening to, collecting and studying memorates, … one can study tradition at work shaping discrepant experiences and giving meaning to meaningless perceptions. It is sensible then in a study such as this to make no distinction between 'the experience of the supernatural' and the 'tradition of the supernatural'. Memorates will have to be considered on a par with legends - just as 'traditional' but exhibiting tradition in an alternative way. (Bennett 1985, 25–6.)

Story tellers' and audiences' knowledge of what constitutes a proper supernatural event, helps to create the final shape of the stories that are told on the

subject; conversely, knowledge of stories is part of the shape we give to our supernatural experiences. They give meaning to meaningless perceptions, shape private experiences into cultural forms. (Bennett 1999, 5.)

The idea that cultural context can shape individuals' personal experiences is the main claim of this article. But it is a nontrivial claim, which requires more theoretical and empirical support than merely the recurrence of traditional elements in personal testimonies. Lauri Honko, in his book *Geisterglaube in Ingermanland* (1962), and the article *Memorates and the study of folk beliefs* (1964), formulated a theory which involved a process of how traditional themes can penetrate personal experiences,[2] in which he was far more specific than most other authors. The schema [figure 1] represents his theoretical model of how a memorate about a barn spirit could come into existence. To simplify the explanation I have divided the schema into three parts. The section on the right (C) refers to a possible further transmission and standardization of the narrative in a society - i.e. to the possible formation of a legend. I will not deal with that here, as I want to focus on the opposite processes, where culture and society influence experiences. These are covered by the rest of the schema. The far left section (A) refers to the initial experienced event and the creation of a memory, and the middle section (B) is about its subsequent verbal formulations and the social negotiation about its content.

According to Lauri Honko's theory, a vision (e.g. when a spirit is seen) emerges (section A) when several conditions are met. First there has to be some perceptual input: a trigger stimulus (e.g. a strange or unexpected sound), possibly combined with some perceptual constraints (e.g. darkness). Second, the person has to be in a specific psychological condition (e.g. tiredness, fear); and third, he or she draws on some tradition that they have adopted (e.g. legends, other people's memorates, previous personal experience) as experiential models for the event. Honko also mentions social values and norms, which may cause internal conflict and stress. Social norms and values are also part of the learned tradition, although of a different kind than stories. However, although the schema sets out to describe some general mechanisms, it was designed for a specific category of memorate, arising from experiences relating to norm violations. In other cases (e.g. ritual-based experiences), social norms and values might not play any role, whereas other cultural aspects may have an impact (Honko 1964).

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2   In several later publications focused on the folklore process, Honko refined his model and located memorates within a broader context of narrative genres (e.g. Honko 1979, 1989)

Although Honko does not make such a distinction, there are clearly three interconnected but separate domains which influence the emergence of such an experience – (1) the perceptual input, (2) the individual's psychological conditions, and (3) the cultural input.

The second section (B) of the schema refers to a further influence of the learned tradition and the society. Honko suggests that a memorate can emerge immediately after the event, but the initial unspecified supernatural experience[3] often acquires its specific cultural label only after some time has passed. In many cases 'interpretation follows only as the result of later deliberation', and 'the supernatural meaning becomes evident only after weeks or even months' (Honko 1964, 17) which opens it to the impact of social influences.

> A person who has experienced a supernatural event by no means always makes the interpretation himself; the social group that surrounds him may also participate in the interpretation. In their midst may be spirit belief specialists, influential authorities, whose opinion, by virtue of their social prestige, becomes decisive. […] The group controls the experiences of its members, and if the most authoritative and influential person happens to be a skeptic, the supernormal character of the experience can afterwards be refuted. (Honko 1964, 18.)

Honko formulated the problem in a way that can be investigated from the cognitive point of view. Most of the schema can be addressed in cognitive terms: perception (the stimulus), learning (the tradition), emotions (fear, stress), reasoning (later interpretations), and social cognition and communication, but at the very center is memory. In its general features, this model is similar to memory phenomena which psychologists more than a decade after Honko's article started to call 'false memories'. I will return to this later, but at this point this is the reason why I see the recent psychological understanding of human memory, especially autobiographical memory, as important for the study of folklore, religious narratives and religious transmission in general.[4]

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3 Honko uses for this the term *numen*, which he borrowed from von Otto, but in the more recent context, this (together with the releasing stimuli) could be interpreted within the framework of a Hypersensitive Agency Detection Device (see Barrett 2004; Guthrie 1993).
4 Lauri Honko's work has already previously been linked to the cognitive paradigm (see Pyysiäinen 2000; Kamppinen & Hakamies 2013).

Memory and narratives

In contemporary cognitive psychology, there is general agreement that human memory consists of several interconnected but independent memory systems. Cognitive psychologists have identified five main systems of human memory: procedural, perceptual, primary (working), semantic and episodic, which are divided into two main types: explicit, which consists of semantic and episodic memory, and implicit memory, which consists of procedural, perceptual and primary memory (Schacter & Tulving 1994). The difference in content and mechanisms between these memory systems has become a crucial theoretical point in a number of cognitive approaches to culture and religion, and has been used to explain differences in ritual forms and their transmission and social dynamics (Whitehouse 2004; McCauley & Lawson 2002).

A similar memory-based approach could also be relevant for narratives. While story reproduction is a matter of explicit information, the recall of stories is related mainly to semantic and episodic memory. Semantic memory makes possible the acquisition and retention of factual information about the world in the broadest sense: it involves encyclopedic information which represents the world as it is or as it could be. On the other hand, the episodic memory system enables individuals to remember happenings (events) they have witnessed in their own personal past (Schacter & Tulving 1994; Tulving 1999; 2004).

The recall of a story employs both systems, but the core memory system deployed in recalling diverse categories of stories might vary. When recall of a story is connected with a learned sequence of happenings, or even with a concrete text, semantic memory dominates. On the other hand, when the recall of a story is connected with personal experience, and depends on the recall of an audiovisual representation of an experienced event, the dominant system is the episodic memory. This difference could well also apply to the recall of memorates and legends as defined and used by folklorists.

When the story of a personal experience of the narrator is told, it changes from a story stored in episodic memory to a story stored in semantic memory. The very first transmission, when a personal experience is presented to an audience, changes the memorizing and recall mechanisms of the story. This is what happens when a personal experience enters the process of cultural transmission. It is not surprising that we are able to formulate our memories verbally, and to understand such utterances of others, and remember their content; what is, however, surprising, and somewhat controversial, is the possibility of the opposite process, when stories about experiences of oth-

ers or learned information influences the emergence or triggers changes in individuals' own memories.

Social contagion of memories

Autobiographical and episodic memory are sometimes used as equivalent terms, but autobiographical memory does not designate a separate memory system in the way that semantic and episodic memory do. It is constituted by those memories which form a personal representation of our life story. Autobiographical memory is closely related to episodic memory, but by no means all episodic memories are autobiographical; and it is characterized by our ability to link information to clusters relating to significant aspects in our personal past (Nelson 1993).

Even very young children have episodic memories, but they do not yet have autobiographical memory. This is developed gradually, and does not depend solely on the ability to remember personally experienced events. Children have to learn the appropriate way of recounting those events, which is to a large extent a social process. They need to learn to describe experienced events in the form of stories. The formation of autobiographical memory depends on our ability to think in stories, and this ability is formed only gradually, and through social interaction (Fivush et al. 1995; Nelson 1993).

The influence of the social environment on human autobiographical memory can be seen not only on the level of the general character of our autobiography and its development, but also on the content level of particular memories. Using library, hard-drive or any other container-like metaphor for human memory is rather misleading: human memory is not a simple and passive information storage and recall device, but an active process of repeated construction, including the construction of memories of our personal past. Human memory is prone to many internal and external influences. Ideas, concepts and beliefs, widespread in society, stories and experiences of others, can be, and often are incorporated into an individual's autobiographical memories, without being aware of it. Psychologists speak about 'false memories', a term which refers to cases in which people remember events differently from the way they historically happened, or remember events that never happened at all. False memories can be very vivid, and held with high confidence (Loftus et al. 1996; Loftus 1997; Loftus & Pickrell 1995, Loftus et al. 1978). It is necessary to keep in mind that vividness and confidence neither supply nor guarantee the accuracy of memories (McCauley 1999; Schmidt 2012, 60–2).

In general, false memories arise from two categories of causes: internal causes, like fantasies or dreams, and external causes, when the core of the memory is taken from others – from an individual, or from literature, media etc. Psychological experiments and real-life studies (such as eyewitnesses reports in criminal investigations) have demonstrated both the integration of information from one or more external sources into memory, and the use of that information to reconstruct a 'memory' that was never actually experienced (Loftus 2001, 1997).

False memories are not pathogenic memory malfunctions. In a mild form, they are a usual side-effect of normal memory reconstruction, and everyone produces dozens of them. Bold changes of memories require specific social and psychological conditions to occur, but are still produced as a byproduct of normal memory recollection. The extensive research on false memories shows that false memories are the result not only of inappropriate, suggestive or manipulative methods sometimes used by therapists or criminal investigators, but also of normal everyday life situations and social interactions. It is actually a frequent phenomenon, so it is reasonable to think that it enables a specific form of cultural transmission. At this point, to avoid misunderstandings, I need to emphasize one thing. People sometimes struggle with the term 'false memories' as if it refers to lying. I agree that 'falseness' sounds rather strong, but we have to keep in mind that the term first appeared in forensic psychology and within a legal context. Later research, however, has revealed it as a much broader and everyday memory phenomenon, which is in some sense actually the opposite of lying. To take false memories research into account in the study of folklore and other sociocultural phenomena does not mean that we are judging our informants, as to whether this or that really happened, but exploring how tradition and society influence our memories about particular events.

The social context of false memories

People do not adopt all the information with which they are confronted, and obviously not all adopted information is used to build false memories. Which beliefs and ideas participate in false memory formation depends heavily, due to deeply embedded cognitive biases, on the social context in which they occur. By 'social context' I mean the individual or the group of people who are the source of the incorporated information. The relevance of information depends on its content, its form and its social context. Robert Boyd and Peter Richerson argue that cultural transmission is determined

by our predispositions to prefer (within the process of social learning) ideas with certain social contexts. They speak about biases based on frequency (e.g. conformism), and model-based biases, which depend on the characteristics of those who are the potential models for adoption of ideas or behaviors (e.g. success, prestige, similarity) (Richerson & Boyd 2005).

The impact of these predispositions is not limited to the level of general cultural transmission. The social context of the source of information is one of the most important aspects which have impact on the emergence of false memories. Authority, positive relationships, and trust were all found to increase the rate of success in experimental implanting of false memories, or were identified as a key factor in real-life cases (Loftus & Ketcham 1994; DeGloma 2007; Roediger et al. 2001). Similarly, collective agreement (consensus) increases the probability that information will be incorporated into individual memory. Meade and Roediger claim that this happens not as a result of a reflected and public conformism, but because the untrue information becomes spontaneously, through implicit memory processes, a part of individuals' beliefs (Meade & Roediger 2002). Another very important aspect is whether the person who was the source of information was presenting it as a personal testimony. People are not only biased to have a positive stance toward information presented as a testimony, but are more likely to insert information presented in this way into their own memories (Basden et al. 2002; Reysen 2007).

As noted earlier, Lauri Honko posited that an unspecified supernatural experience becomes clearer in profile and related to specific beliefs once the society participates in its interpretation, and cultural explanatory models are introduced. The influence of social authorities and experts may cause either the rejection or the further elaboration of the experience (Honko 1964). Honko's assumption about the role of society in the formation of personal-experience memories is in broad outline in agreement with current psychological knowledge. Honko speaks about the individual's interpretations, which might suggest that memorate formation is a conscious and explicit process, but false memories research shows that even when the incorporated information is verbal and further social negotiation about the content of the experience is explicit, the incorporation itself is characteristically not reflected and recognized by the individual concerned.

The role of social context in memorate formation is supported by ethnographic data from my own fieldwork in a rural region of northern Slovakia. The research was focused specifically on memorates and experiences of traditional supernatural agents, and was based on detailed autobiographical

interviews, collections of narrative repertoires, and on identifying the social networks and relationships of individuals involved in the transmission of these narratives. I found that in the surroundings of those individuals who reported an experience with an supernatural agent, other similar stories were in circulation, telling of similar experiences by a person socially relevant to these individuals: close relatives, best friends, important family friends, and persons seen as authoritative on the basis of institutionalized office or professional expertise. Moreover these memorates were supported within the immediate community by a positive stance toward the experience, frequent occasions of collective remembering, or by mutually supporting testimonies of individuals with similar experiences. On the other hand, in those parts of the local society where personal experiences of this kind did not occur, the knowledge of traditional narratives and beliefs was fragmentary, and on the edge of social interest, mostly triggering a negative attitude among the local majority and influential individuals. These findings support the hypothesis that memorates are more frequent where the source of the tradition is associated with the kind of social contexts which have been seen in experimental research as increasing the probability of false memories formation (Bahna 2012).

The emotional content of false memories

Emotions are another important domain related to false memories. Negative emotions seem to be positively related to false memories formation (Brainerd et al. 2008). Most of the real-life false memory cases that have been studied were related to traumatic or distressing experiences (Loftus & Ketcham 1994; Loftus 1979). False memories are significantly more frequent under conditions of high arousal than under conditions of low arousal (Corson, Verrier 2007). Memories of high arousal events are more vivid and detailed, which can generate a feeling of their reliability, but at the same time these memories are more liable to misinformation (Porter et al. 2003).

This fits well with Lauri Honko's theory. As mentioned above, Honko assumed that fear and stress caused by violating the social norms is one of the key factors within the process of memorate formation. In other categories of experiences, e.g. ritual-based ones, this role might be influenced by other cultural aspects (Honko 1964, 1962). This could be supported by recent findings on a high-arousal fire-walking ritual from San Pedro Manrique, Spain. Dimitris Xygalatas and his colleagues found that immediately after the ritual, participants' reports had limited recall, low confidence and high

accuracy, but two months later the same ritual participants reported more inaccurate memories but higher confidence (Xygalatas et al. 2013).

My own ethnographic research on experiences with supernatural agents, mentioned above, supports this assumption as well. In this case all recorded memorates which involved elaborated audiovisual representations of the supernatural agent referred to emotionally arousing experiences, and in a the majority of cases, to traumatic experiences and intense fear, which was associated with characteristic physiological symptoms (strong sweating, paralysis, inability to breathe or speak, etc.) and behaviors (avoidance of related places and situations). In contrast, stories which involved no direct audiovisual representations of a supernatural agent, and did not incorporate traditional motifs, or were only interpretations of sudden events as caused by supernatural entities (e.g. sounds, doors opening/closing, breaking of things or other coincidences), mostly did not report any emotional arousal (Bahna 2012).

Conclusion

As an explanation for the observed recurrence of traditional motifs in personal testimonies, Lauri Honko formulated a theoretical model in which culturally shared narratives about supernatural elements affect personal experiences. A decade later, Elizabeth Loftus started an influential research program on misinformation and false memories, which brought empirical evidence for what Honko had posited when studying narrative folklore. Honko's model has many aspects (social context, emotions) which fit perfectly with subsequent psychological findings.

After nearly forty years of research on misinformation, suggestibility and implanting of memories, the field is too extensive to be covered by this article. Honko's theory covers only a part of it, but recent psychological findings suggest that his approach could be extended and applied more widely. For example, Honko assumed that there is a real event (section A of the schema in figure 1), the experience and memory of which is influenced and extended by the learned tradition and society. But this is only one small aspect of possible false memory emergence (the misinformation effect). Completely new memories, with no real event in the background, can also be implanted. A big subfield within false memories research called the Source Monitoring Framework refers to a category of memory errors where thoughts, images and feelings from one source are attributed to another, e.g. when the content of a dream or a learned story is mistaken as a memory of a perceptual event (Lindsay & Johnson 2000; Brainerd & Reyna 2005). This goes as well for the

emotional content of the experience, where emotional elaboration plays a significant role in false memory creation (Drivdahl et al. 2009).

I think that it is the plasticity of human autobiographical memory discussed in this article which enables a specific form of cultural transmission and personal experience narratives like memorates. I would argue that false memories create a kind of socio-cognitive niche for specific experience-related beliefs and concepts.

The connection between psychology and narrative folklore which I have tried to address, opens up a big field of potential methodological questions. One possible way forward could of course be an adaptation of experimental false memory research towards themes known from real cultural and religious transmission. It seems to me more problematic, however, to apply it to field research and ethnographic data. Even when the psychological explanations seem promising, there would be always the question: how could we know if the particular memorate, or which part of it, is a false memory, when we probably in the majority of cases have no accesses to the actual trigger event? We cannot know (unless, contingently, the event itself or the relevant life period of the informant had been followed by researchers). There are three possible ways to cope with this issue:

1. Interpreting the supernatural elements in memorates as inserted items. This is a very naturalistic claim, which assumes that the supernatural or bizarre elements of the narrative are not possible; there must therefore be an alternative, naturalistic explanation of their origin rather than perception. False memories are of course not tied exclusively to supernatural beliefs and ideas, and in cases where false memories involve a supernatural element, other parts too could be the result of misinformation or implantation. Carl von Sydow, who invented the term *memorate*, never made such a specific claim (1934). It was mainly Lauri Honko who made the supernatural an integral part of the definition of memorates. The Russian folklorist Kirill V. Chistov suggested that a memorate designates a phenomenon which under certain conditions may appear in any thematic group of narratives, and should not be seen as a distinctive narrative genre, but as a communicative variant (Chistov 1967); memorates should therefore be seen as independent of supernatural beliefs. But even when we get rid of the supernatural from the memorate definition, it is still helpful to focus on this special thematic group of narratives incorporating a perceived supernatural element. Let me illustrate it with an issue from false memories research. When the early experiments managed to implant new memories, critics argued that the im-

planted memories were trivial, events which in any case occur frequently or are even highly probable (e.g. a child getting lost in a shopping mall), so the experiment could not guarantee whether this was a successfully implanted or in fact a genuine recovered memory. Researchers then started to implant impossible and implausible memories involving themes such as demonic possessions (Mazzoni et al. 2001).

2. Recognition of the tradition present in experiences. As mentioned above, memorates were in the beginning disqualified as not belonging to folklore, since they are idiosyncratic memories. But memorates are not as idiosyncratic as one would expect of personal memories. The very fact that memorates include specific motifs, audiovisual images, or even whole episodes known from other stories current in the society suggests that these are more probably adopted from the society rather than repeatedly re-experienced by multiple individuals. To be able to identify and track recurrences and potential transmission channels, an ethnography focused on memorates therefore needs not to be satisfied merely with memorates in isolation, but is also heavily dependent on a detailed record of local narrative repertoires, especially in the immediate social environment of the individual reporting his or her own memorate. Even if no similarities are found to other stories in the wider population, we might still find specific micro-traditions spreading over several generations within families or other small social groups.

3. Exploring congruencies with experimental findings. This is actually the kind of research program I would like to promote. Experimental research on false memories has managed to identify many aspects and conditions of the false memory formation process, which can be traced to real-life settings. Psychologists, including forensic psychologists, have been able to identify them in methods used by criminal investigators, as well as therapists, which has led to false memories in witnesses and patients. Similar phenomena should also be traceable in normal social interactions involving narrative transmission. What is the relationship between the individual with a memorate and the one who was the source or/and the object of a similar story? What is his or her prestige or authority? What are the opinions of the immediately socially relevant people and authorities? Are there any specific transmission occasions, such as collective remembering, or performative narrative meetings? What emotions are associated with the remembered event? All this can be investigated in real-life settings and compared to experimental findings.

Personal experiences are not as idiosyncratic as people usually assume. To use the words of Steven Schmidt, '[…] we are all susceptible to false memories. The recall of culturally significant events often occurs in context of cues likely to support the creation of false memories' (Schmidt 2012, 62). This fact opens up our autobiographies as a field for cultural transmission. and personal-experience narratives like memorates are one possible form of this. The point of this approach is not to judge informants' experiences, but to identify possible influences of narrative tradition on individuals' memories, and the social, cultural and psychological conditions of this phenomenon. Lauri Honko's ideas about memorates from the 60s, despite not having had access to more recent research findings in memory studies, nevertheless provide a basis both for appreciating earlier work and for drafting ways to amend it in terms of the knowledge of cognitive processes we now have.

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Appendix. Figure 1.
Lauri Honko's scheme illustrating the emergence of a memorate (Honko 1964, 16–17). Division into sections A, B, C and vertical dashed lines are added.
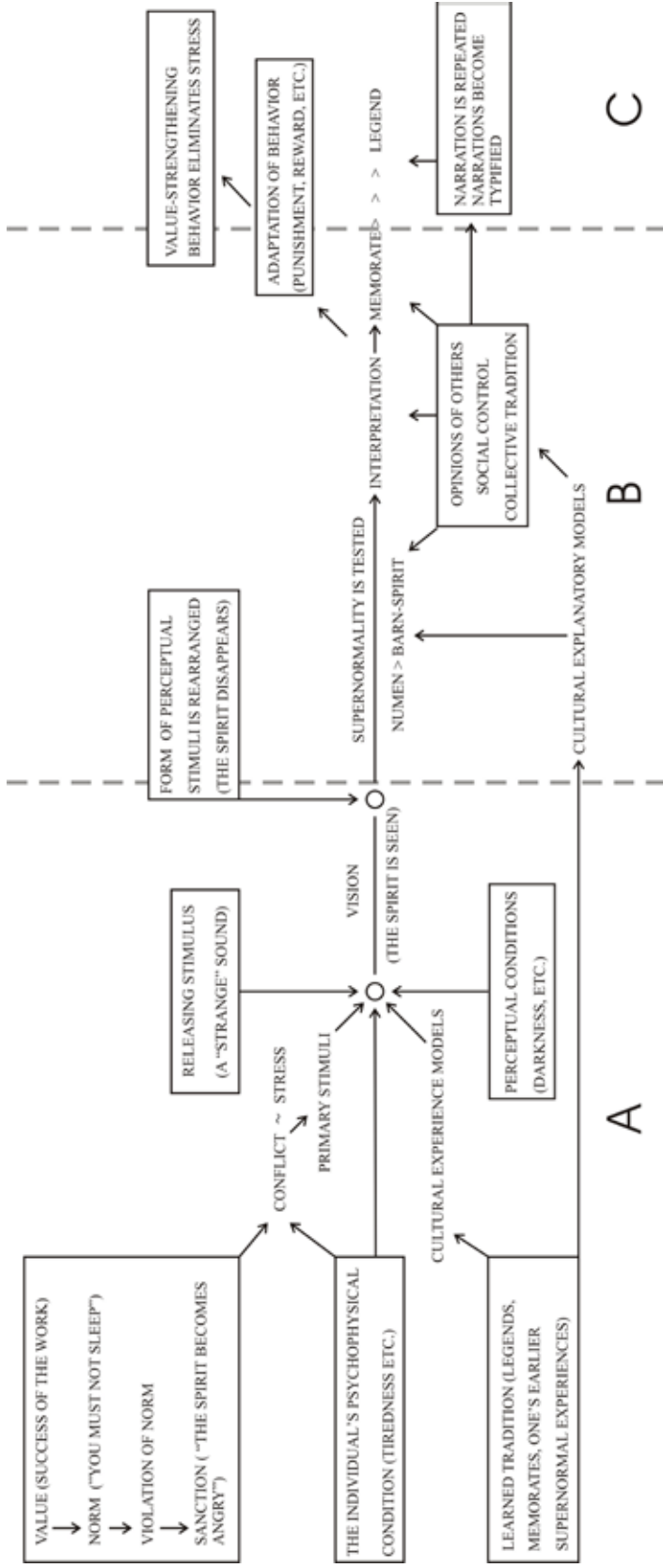
Filmic constructions of the (religious) other: Laestadians, abnormality, and hegemony in contemporary scandinavian cinema

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Abstract

Religious themes and characters have lately assumed center stage in a number of Scandinavian films. As with films from other parts of the world, so also in Scandinavian films a suspicion of certain religious traditions can be observed. In Scandinavian films this is not only true of traditionally foreign religions, but for some domestic religious groups as well, among them the Laestadian revival movement. In this article we analyze how this movement and its members are constructed as Other in four Scandinavian films. We theorize this 'Othering' with the help of Gramsci's concept of hegemony and argue that the 'othering' of Laestadians helps present the contrasting views as 'normal' and unproblematic. In the final section of the article we discuss the findings from the perspective of media and religion in a post-secular society, arguing that the media are today central to our understanding of religion, but at the same time shape religion in accordance with their own logics. We suggest that what is needed in order to understand how religion and groups such as the Laestadian revival movement are constructed in the media is religious media literacy.

Keywords: *Scandinavian film, Laestadianism, Other, hegemony, religious media literacy*

Identifying difference

An interest in religion is noticeable among many Scandinavian filmmakers. Several successful contemporary productions have dealt with religious themes and characters. Religion in Scandinavian film is no longer represented merely by some films by Ingmar Bergman or Carl Th. Dreyer – though these giants still inspire. Compared to Bergman and Dreyer, however, many contemporary filmmakers seem to have a more positive outlook on religion. Bergman's anti-clerical perspective is still prevalent, but many affirmative representations of religious characters are also found, and the attitude to

religious experts is diverse (Daníelsson 2009). Nonetheless, a fairly obvious divide between an affirmatively constructed model of religion characterized by being open to change and to the needs of individuals, and a religion constructed as problematic and focused on power and rules, is easily recognizable (Sjö 2012; Sjö & Daníelsson 2013). Though religious affiliation does not always determine how a character is portrayed in films, it is common in Scandinavian cinema, as in films from other parts of the world, to bestow certain religious characters with somewhat standardized functions in film narratives. This has inspired a number of studies and also provides the background for the present study.

Not all religious stereotypes are negative, and the portrayal of religious individuals has changed over time, but many problematic representations prevail. This is true, for example, of Hollywood productions, where Muslims, in particular, have often been allotted the role of bad guy (Sjö 2013). Historically, however, the representations in Scandinavian films have often been similarly condescending, and ethnic and religious minorities were long portrayed pejoratively (Wright 1998). Contemporary portrayals are more nuanced, but here too adverse stereotypes prevail. The young male religious fanatic, usually Muslim, is one such example (Tigervall 2003). In Scandinavian films of late, however, it is not just traditionally foreign religious groups that are sometimes constructed as a problem; the same is true for some domestic groups. The focus in this article is on one of these: the Laestadian revival movement.

Below we present four Nordic films with characters identified as Laestadians: *Pahat pojat/Bad Boys*, *Populärmusik från Vittula/Popular Music*, *Kautokeino-opprøret/The Kautokeino Rebellion* and *Kielletty hedelmä/Forbidden Fruit*. Our analytical approach is constructivist and our focus is on the strategies used in the films – narrative constructions, characterization, editing, visual effects etc. – to create a specific image of the Laestadian Movement. Theoretically we build on ideological studies of popular culture, arguing that what is striking in the representation of Laestadians in film is a clear 'othering' of members of the movement. We argue that Laestadians in the films studied are both directly and indirectly constructed as standing in sharp contrast to what is presented in the films as society at large. We theorize this 'othering' with the help of Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony, arguing that the 'othering' of Laestadians helps certain ideas and behaviors to come across as normal and unproblematic. In the final section we relate the findings to current understandings of a post-secular society, tying into debates about the role of media in shaping religion, which forms of religion are offered

(media or other) space today, and the need of religious media literacy for a better comprehension of the role of religion in the media.

Representing the Other

Otherness and difference have always, consciously or unconsciously, interested filmmakers. This can be understood from several different theoretical perspectives. In short, thinking in terms of difference would seem to be typically human. We need difference to structure our world, and by representing the different as different we make sense of ourselves (Hall 1997). Thinking of some people as different and other to oneself can thus be argued to be in many ways natural, but this is not to say that it is unproblematic. In meeting the other, we easily turn to stereotypes. Though not all stereotypes are negative, stereotyping is still a question of ideology and power. As Richard Dyer has argued, stereotypes make the invisible visible and the unstable stable, drawing a clear line between *them* and *us*, making *them* the problem and *us* the norm (Dyer 1993, 11–18).

In contemporary society, the media have often been considered central to processes of 'othering.' Film has long been criticized for helping to support a certain view of the world and for its many negative representations of ethnic and sexual minorities in particular, but also of women and other 'others' excluded from what can be argued to be the traditional societal norm, that is to say, white, heterosexual men. Critics have pointed out the atrocities of past films and argued for alternative representations, but they have also exposed the less obvious ideology of more positive representations and discussed the need for a plurality of representations to counter hegemonic structures (see for example Friedman 1991; Thornham 1997). Research today is far from interested only in critiquing stereotypes in films, but rather in questioning what the various inclusions and exclusions suggest about current ideologies. However, as Jude Davies and Carol R. Smith (1997, 150) argue, in filmic representations the structuring paradigm of margins and center prevails, leading to someone always having to play the role of the Other, though this Other is nowadays perhaps more seldom represented through obviously one-sided stereotypes. The margins, in other words, clearly still fill a central symbolic function and are in many ways used to base and structure ideas of normality. In analyzing who ends up as the Other today, gender, ethnicity and sexuality are central. However, in much current research, religion too has been brought into the debate as a feature of both 'normality' and otherness (Sjö 2013).

There are many theoretical perspectives that can be of use when approaching the subject of 'othering' in films. In discussing the 'othering' of people from the margins in Swedish films in relation to the center of Stockholm, Madeleine Eriksson (2010) has chosen to talk of internal 'othering' and internal orientalism, that is to say a form of discourse that leads to the stereotyping of people from the margins as more primitive, violent and uneducated, promoting by contrast the center. This is a process that, as we shall see, is taking place in the films discussed here too, but the theoretical base for this study has been more specifically inspired by Marcia Landy's (1994) work on film and politics and Paul Thomas' (2009) study of New Religious Movements in films. In their film analysis, both Landy and Thomas use Gramsci's theories and particularly his notion of hegemony. Gramsci argued that culture and religion legitimate and preserve the position of dominant groups in society: via culture and religion, a particular view of the world is presented as normal, and whatever is different is presented as abnormal, and in some sense wrong or even evil (Hoare & Smith 1999). The Other is in other words used to underscore the views of the dominant classes. Regarding religion and film, Thomas (2009) argues that in the case of New Religious Movements in film we can see how these forms of religion are constructed as different and wrong in a way that presents more traditional religious ideas and values as unproblematically right. We in turn argue that in the films discussed here, the values associated with Laestadianism are to a large degree constructed as the problem, leading to the views held in the surrounding society coming across as unproblematic and taken for granted.

This study focuses on questions of ideology, stereotyping and power. However, it is worth pointing out that in film stereotypes that lead to 'othering' of some groups are also used for effect ,and are then also, as Sharon Willis (1997) has illustrated, a question of esthetics. This is not to say that they are not simultaneously ideological, but their functions as markers of for example esthetic contrasts must not be overlooked. Here genre conventions enter the picture as an explanatory framework, a framework that is central to the films we will be discussing too.

The Laestadian movement

Before we turn to Laestadians on film a short introduction to the Laestadian movement is in order. The Laestadian movement takes its name from its founder, Lars Levi Laestadius (1800-1861), who worked as a pastor within the Lutheran church in the north of Sweden and among other things propa-

gated abstinence from alcohol. The movement is most strongly represented in the Northern parts of Sweden, Norway and Finland, but also exists in for example North America. In Finland, at the turn of the millennium, the number of Laestadians was estimated to be approximately 175 000, or just over 3 per cent of the population (Talonen & Harjutsalo 2001, 18). The Laestadian movement is a Lutheran revival movement, and its members in the Nordic countries to a large extent continue to belong to the national Lutheran churches, which makes estimations of how many belong to the movement difficult. Although Laestadians have largely kept their ties to the national Lutheran churches, they are in many ways a separate group, with their own meeting halls. It is a movement led by lay preachers, with a strong emphasis on the confession and forgiveness of sins (Wentin 1986).

The Laestadians are often, particularly in smaller communities, a very distinct group. People in the community know who belongs to the movement and who does not (Häger 2010). The Laestadians have a norm system which in some respects clashes with the majority. The temperance preached by Laestadius is still a central tenet of the movement. Other lifestyle aspects that are well known, to the point of cliché, are the high birthrate due to abstention from the use of contraceptives, and the critical view of the modern media and culture, particularly television. However, there is a recurrent perception from the outside not only that Laestadians often break these internal norms, but also that their young men in particular have a low regard for the rules of society at large (Suolinna & Sinikara 1986, 145; Häger 2010). The distinct character of the Laestadian group makes them prone to prejudice, stereotyping and labeling in media discussions of the group (Ihonen 2000). The Laestadian group is thus often constructed as separate and marginal both in society and in the media. As we shall see, this is largely true for film as well.

Bad Boys

The Finnish film *Bad Boys* (*Pahat pojat*, Aleksi Mäkelä, 2003) is one of the most-seen Finnish films ever. In retrospect its popularity may seem somewhat surprising. The script was by many reviewers considered weak, and by today's standards the whole film seems rather simplistic. However, upon release, *Bad Boys* was something quite new in the Finnish context, with its use of the action genre format, fast editing and an emotionally charged score. The film is an action crime drama loosely based on real events. It tells of the criminal career of the four Takkunen brothers, who are in their

teens and early twenties. The brothers start out small, end up attempting to break into a bank vault, and are finally charged with 94 robberies. Apart from the four brothers, the main characters are their father, Jouko, who is in a mental institution from which he escapes; Pirjo, the girlfriend of Eero, the youngest brother; and the chief of police, who is in charge of the investigation, and is also Pirjo's father.

The four brothers are in the film early on identified by other characters as Laestadians. They are from the start represented as very different from the surrounding society and from their peers regarding values and lifestyle. This is summarized by the headmaster of Eero's school who says that the brothers 'do not drink, do not swear, not even fight, but still you are always in trouble.' The youngest brother Eero is constantly bullied by kids at school who evidently identify him as other, but Eero refuses to fight back. Differences in sexual norms also become obvious in the depiction of Eero's and Pirjo's relationship. Eero is very uncertain of how to act around her in contrast to the other guys in school. However, the greatest conflict between the values of the brothers and of the surrounding society is the brothers' choice of a life as criminals, something which despite their strict upbringing they do not see as inherently wrong. It can be argued, however, that in the world of the film there does not seem to exist any unified system of values outside the brothers' family and religion.

Despite this, a line is obviously drawn in the film between the normal and the abnormal or the Other, where the Laestadians are placed in the latter category. This is done both directly and indirectly. Eero, in particular, repeatedly refers to a distinction between 'normal' and 'abnormal', and comments that he and his family are not 'normal'. When the brothers get electricity, once they are able to pay the bill, and have bought a television set, all for stolen money, one of the brothers comments that they are becoming like normal people, but the others claim that they have a long way to go. In another scene, Eero gets beaten up by Pirjo's former boyfriend and his friends. To his brothers, he acquits this with the statement that 'If I was normal, I would beat us up too'.

More indirectly, it is through the brothers' upbringing and the ideas and behavior of their father that Laestadians and Laestadianism are represented as Other. The brothers' father has forbidden the brothers to use violence, and this is why they do not fight back when attacked. However, the father does not think that the rules apply to him, and the film offers recurring scenes of the extreme violence the father inflicts on the boys. Though the film has a lot of comedic features, the scenes with the violent father use a

visual language more familiar from horror films. For example, Jouko is in one scene portrayed from the point of view of one of the boys who is hiding under a bed, trying but failing to escape the monster that is his father.

An essential theme of the film and the way the film turns Laestadianism into something different is also money. Money seems to be the central value for the father, and he constantly tries to get money from his sons after he finds out about their criminal activities. Money also becomes a value in itself for the boys, which is emphasized in the recurring robbery scenes. The first scenes of the brothers successfully opening a safe is depicted in slow motion, accompanied with schmaltzy string music and the boys laughing happily at bills floating around in the air. These scenes also set the brothers' world apart visually. In several of the robbery scenes, the fast cutting used highlights the excitement and un-everydayness of the event, while the slow motion sequence also reinforces the idea that this is a different world. However, although the brothers in the film do not have a strong regard for the norms protecting property, both they and their father affirm the idea of pursuit of economic gain and the naturalness of being a member of consumer society.

The father-character in particular can be argued to normalize certain actions and to underline the difference between him and his faith in contrast to the rest of society. In short, Jouko takes everything to its extreme, making his actions much worse and unacceptable in contrast to other characters' choices, even when they are not that different. Eero's bullies beat him up, which is clearly represented as unacceptable behavior, but Jouko chases his children with a sickle, beats them till they bleed and kills their dog. Everyone wants money, but Jouko is so desperate to get it that he turns in his children to the police and gets himself blown up by mistake when hunting for the money he is convinced is hidden somewhere. Finally, Jouko's misogyny – he is portrayed as beating his wife, and it is suggested that he might have killed her, calls her a whore when he visits her grave, and physically abuses a prostitute – makes every other attitude towards women, no matter how degrading, seem relatively harmless.

The actual depiction of religion in the film, that is to say depictions of actions and events that directly link to traditional religious themes, is quite simplistic and would mostly seem to have been included for effect. Laestadianism is mainly described as a set of rules – rules that the father character, said to be a preacher, does everything to break. In one scene, at his wife's grave, the father makes the sign of the cross, which suggests that the film makers were not greatly bothered to present an accurate representation of this form of religion, but rather used an element they recognized from Hol-

lywood crime films. However, what is also noteworthy is how representing Laestadians as dysfunctional in many ways normalizes the rest of the world of the film. The image of Laestadianism in the film is thus not good, but the brothers do help balance the picture somewhat: they are mostly supportive of each other, yet this does not compensate for the extreme evilness of their father. Jouko is moreover not the only violent Laestadian father in Scandinavian cinema; a very similar character is shown in *Popular Music*.

Popular Music

The Swedish film *Popular Music* (*Populärmusik från Vittula*, Reza Bagher, 2004) is based on the best-selling novel by Mikael Niemi. Due to the popularity of the book, the film was eagerly awaited, and newspapers in both Sweden and Finland followed the filming process with great interest. The interest in Finland had a lot to do with the Finnish influence in the story and the many Finnish actors who had parts in the film. As with so many films based on books, the film did not live up to expectations, but was still quite successful commercially.

Popular Music is a coming-of-age story that follows two boys, Matti and Niila, from their first encounter as young children to their teenage years. As in many stories of this kind, being different is a recurrent theme, but the film also highlights the 'otherness' of the whole world of the film, in comparison to the rest of Sweden. Pajala in northern Sweden, where the story takes place, does not, as Matti puts it in voice-over, really seem to be a part of Sweden: their home has become a part of Sweden 'by chance. A northern appendage where there just happened to live people that only partly managed to be Swedish'. However, as the film begins, the rest of the world is slowly starting to influence Pajala too. The difference between Pajala and the rest of the world is part of the humor of the film. The theme of Laestadianism, on the other hand, is used to contrast the lives of the two main characters, and to explain the character development of Niila.

Both visually and narratively, Matti's and Niila's worlds are constructed as each other's opposites, with the good on one side and the bad on the other. Two scenes are particularly telling. In the first Matti is portrayed with his loud and laughing family, as they joke with each other and the parents hug lovingly. The setting for the scene, the family home, is full of light and colors. The soundtrack too is lively and highlights the warmth of Matti's family. In a scene soon after this, Matti goes to visit Niila. Whereas the scene in Matti's home was bright and joyful, the house Matti now enters

is in shadow and completely silent, despite being full of children. Everyone seems to be on edge, and the reason for this tenseness is revealed when Niila's father Isak enters. When Niila's brother is caught doing something forbidden, the father takes him outside, and through the window Matti sees Isak beating his son until he bleeds, but without anyone, not even the boy being beaten, uttering a word. Both sound and mise-en-scène are thus used to contrast the worlds of Matti and Niila.

As with the Laestadian characters in *Bad Boys*, it is others who again identify these characters as Laestadian. In voice-over, Matti comments that Isak's form of Laestadianism is the worst there is, 'a Laestadianism without God.' This would suggest that there are also better kinds of Laestadianism, but these are not seen in the film: the only version of Laestadianism that the audience is offered is thus that of Niila and his family, with the brutal father again taking center stage. As is the case with the father in *Bad Boys*, Niila's father too is often presented using a visual language familiar from horror cinema, hovering threateningly over his children and pursuing them when they try to escape. Defining features for this frightening form of Laestadianism thus include having a large number of children and controlling them with religiously-motivated violence. In contrast, Matti's family – which has just two children, who are allowed a fair amount of freedom, and does not have much to do with religion – comes across as the ideal.

In terms of the relationship between the sexes, in *Popular Music* as in *Bad Boys*, Laestadianism is constructed as different and 'wrong.' Isak is not depicted as such a misogynist as the father in *Bad Boys*, but Niila's mother too appears oppressed and silenced. When Isak beats their children, for example, she does not react. The ideal, by contrast, becomes the relationship between Matti's parents, though this too is presented as traditional, with the mother doing the domestic work and the father providing for the family; since the Laestadian alternative is so much worse, however, the traditional structures in Matti's family do not come across as much of a problem.

As with the depiction of Laestadianism in *Bad Boys*, Laestadianism in *Popular Music* is very much played for effect. There is, in short, no interest in presenting a multidimensional portrait of the movement; instead the repulsive characteristics associated with the Laestadian characters are used to create contrast, and most importantly to create a drive for the character Niila to want to break free. Is Laestadianism, then, not granted any redeeming features in *Popular Music*? In a way, Laestadianism is allowed to bring 'salvation' to Niila. What makes Niila fight for a different life is his encounter with popular music. The first encounter comes when Niila

trades the family Bible he was given by his grandmother on her deathbed for a music record. The first time Niila and Matti play the record, the room starts to spin, visually expressing the impact the music has on them. The symbolic word of God provided by Niila's grandmother is thus converted into the currency with which Niila purchases the insight into a different life.

Like the brothers' quest for money in *Bad Boys*, Niila's wish for a career in music can be read as an assent to the norms of a commercially and fame-driven society. However, Niila's brutal upbringing makes his choice seem rational. This 'natural' need to break free of the constraints of Laestadianism, and to exchange the rural for the city, is also central in the following film to be discussed, *Forbidden Fruit*.

Forbidden Fruit

The Finnish film *Forbidden Fruit* (*Kielletty hedelmä*, Dome Karukoski 2009) is, like *Popular Music*, a coming-of-age story, but in contrast to the two previous films the focus in this film is on young women rather than on young men. Perhaps because of this, gender relations can be argued to be one of the keys to the story and the presented 'otherness' of Laestadians, but the film also includes many of the divisive aspects present in *Bad Boys* and *Popular Music*.

From the very beginning of *Forbidden Fruit* the main characters are identified as Laestadians. The film starts with two frames with information about the subcategory known as Old Laestadianism, giving the viewer a background about their beliefs and traditions, including what is forbidden in the movement – alcohol, popular music and premarital sex – and the group's annual meetings. Like the other films in this study, the world of Laestadianism in *Forbidden Fruit* is mainly constructed as rural. In both *Bad Boys* and *Popular Music*, the Laestadian families live in the countryside, in contrast to other characters who live in the more urbanized centers of the small communities portrayed. At the opening of *Forbidden Fruit*, we are introduced to Raakel and Maria and their life in a small village in Ostrobothnia in northwest Finland. Life in the village comes across as communal, but also divided. In the first scenes Raakel is shown getting out of bed, praying, and then waking up her twelve siblings and helping them with the morning routine. The following scenes take place in a crowded church, where a wedding is being celebrated. While the preacher talks about the sinfulness of the flesh, the girls are checking out the boys in the congregation. This pattern of a dichotomy between right and wrong, but also a challenge of this dichotomy, continues in the following scenes, when the bride's sister

is refused entry to the wedding celebrations because of her way of life – it is revealed that she has broken with the community and chosen a different life in the city.

Laestadians in *Forbidden Fruit* are thus constructed as communal, but as a community with strong boundaries. The character of Maria is shown as longing to break through these boundaries, for a summer, and experience a different life. She therefore leaves the village for Helsinki, and Raakel is sent to guide her back. In the city, the contrast between Laestadians and others becomes even clearer. Not only are the two settings captured very differently, with the countryside presented as peaceful and close to nature, while with the use of faster cutting and more rhythmic music the city is given a much faster pace; in the city, the girls often seem quite simply 'lost'. They have no experience of alcohol, makeup or popular music, not to mention sex, and a local's description of a regular night out at a popular club – 'Get drunk, mess around with boys, dance, get pregnant, have an abortion. The usual' – is very disturbing, for Raakel at least.

At first, *Forbidden Fruit* seems to be built around a clash between two norm systems: the traditional life of the village and life in the city. While the traditional life of the village is governed by rules and norms, is structured around the community and focused on the avoidance of popular culture and, despite frequent references to sex, not giving in to bodily temptations, life in the city at first comes across as a form of freedom where the individual can thrive, popular culture rules, and sex is something everyday. It seems obvious that city life is to be regarded as the norm and the natural choice. However, in contrast to the two worlds of Matti and Niila in *Popular Music*, city life is not constructed in *Forbidden Fruit* as completely unproblematic. At first, everything seems exiting and new, and the elders' warnings seem irrelevant. However, with time darker aspects of city-life also appear, and particularly some scenes set at night introduce a sense of threat. Maria's experimentation with sex leads both women into trouble. When Maria finally decides to have sex for the first time, she is overcome by guilt and religious angst, illustrated visually with shadows on the wall that take the shape of the devil.

Maria's fate expresses a recognition that the wild life of the city is not in fact the ideal. Sex should not be seen as a sin, but that does not mean that the ideal is to sleep around. Popular culture is not dangerous, but not all of it is equally good. The community should not be allowed to regulate you, but that does not mean that you are better off alone. These are the insights and the side of city life that Raakel experiences, and which eventually emerge

as the real ideal of the film. By accident, Raakel ends up in a movie theatre that is showing old black-and-white films and she is moved to tears. At the movie theatre she meets Toni, who introduces her to both alternative films and music. They slowly get to know each other, and when they finally have sex the act comes across as something positive, filmed in a bright space in contrast to the shadowy room where Maria loses her virginity. Raakel eventually returns with Maria to the village, where Maria gets married and Raakel tries to go back to her old life; but this she can no longer do, and finally decides to leave.

Raakel's choice to turn her back on village life, like Niila's departure in *Popular Music*, is presented in the film as a natural choice. The options seem to emerge as being between this or Raakel denying who she is, which would go against the theme of individuality in the film. Despite the fact that Raakel leaves, religion as such is not completely abandoned: Raakel does not give up her faith, she just breaks away from the strict regulations. For Laestadianism, however, this outcome is not positive: the movement comes across as controlling and judgmental. The gender dynamic is also problematized; although the male leaders in this film are far from the brutality of the fathers in *Bad Boys* and *Popular Music*, the Laestadian movement is clearly depicted as having abusive aspects. Maria's sister accuses her family of physical abuse, and the way the male leaders are often filmed from a high angle and portrayed as looming over the young women and pressing them to do as the movement wishes does not allow for a positive reading.

On the other hand, although the girls come across as somewhat damaged due to their upbringing in the community, Laestadianism is not constructed here as thoroughly evil. The world of the movement is constructed in ways that do not fit with contemporary society, but it does come across as an option for some who cannot handle this society. Though the members are often represented as judgmental, they are also recognized as wanting what they see as best for their own.

The Kautokeino Rebellion

In the Norwegian director Nils Gaup's *The Kautokeino Rebellion* (*Kautokeino-opprøret*, 2008) we at first glance come across quite a different image of Laestadianism from that in the films analyzed above. This film is based on a Sami rebellion which occurred in the town of Kautokeino, Norwegian Lapland, in 1852, and making a film based on the event was long a dream of the director, himself a Sami from the region. This incident has been a

very sensitive subject in the Sami community, and arouses questions both of guilt and of injustice. *The Kautokeino Rebellion* awakened a long overdue discussion of the event and the treatment of the Sami at that time. The film was well received, not least in Norway, and the importance of telling the story has been widely acknowledged. As Cato Christensen and Siv Ellen Kraft (2011) have shown, many religious themes and dimensions are present in the film. Gaup presents a religious revival inspired by Laestadius as the trigger behind the tragic events of the uprising, whose driving force for the Sami is not rebellion, but the hope for change in their social and economic situation.

The Kautokeino Rebellion has a fairly classical structure and feels very much like a western set in the north. As in the traditional western, the story is built around a clear dichotomy. On one side we have the Sami (or the natives) led by the young woman Elen. The Sami wish to be rid of the merchants who have driven many of the men into alcoholism and financial trouble; and inspired by the teachings of Laestadius they break with both the merchants and the official Norwegian Lutheran church. On the other side we find the merchants (the settlers), represented by the Swede Ruth, and the official church, represented by the pastor Stockfleth, who is sent to guide the Sami back to the store and the Church. The main struggle is between Elen and Stockfleth, who are represented as mutual opposites: woman vs. man, young vs. old, Sami vs. Norwegian, insider vs. outsider. The worlds they represent are also constructed as opposites, even though they are both religious: revivalism vs. official church, community vs. hierarchy, spirit vs. law.

For a long time, the official Norwegian account of the rebellion in Kautokeino put the blame on the revival movement. However, in Gaup's version of the events, blame is placed instead on the church and the state, and this has nowadays generally been accepted as a more honest reading. The religion practiced by the official church causes serious personal and social conflicts, whereas the Laestadian revival is seen as strengthening the Sami and offering them hope. In this film, then the hegemonic stereotypes are in several ways reversed. The Lutheran pastor is represented as a violent hypocrite, while the Laestadians are constructed as true believers, whose social action is not only communal, but also women-centered, with a female leader.

There are several different dimensions to this very different representation of Laestadianism. As Christensen and Kraft (2011) argue, Gaup's goal was to present what he saw as a more honest version of the historical events.

It was also in his interest to make a film that portrayed Laestadians positively, because of the influence this group still has in the region. His portrayal highlights the positive influence of the movement at the time, particularly in relation to alcohol. What is noteworthy, however, is the way that here too the Laestadian movement becomes something exotic and Other, at least when one comes to the film from a non-Sami perspective, and indeed no doubt partly from a modern Sami perspective too. The audience can easily identify with the Sami, but the Sami and their beliefs are at the same time represented in a way that, as Christensen and Kraft (2011) argue, links them with ideas of a universal native spirituality where nature plays a major part. The Sami are depicted reading texts by Laestadius, but their spirituality is for the most part constructed visually and in a way that incorporates many aspects other than traditional Christian ones. Several scenes offer views of the vast, majestic landscape of Northern Norway provides the backdrop to many of the Sami's religious meetings, giving a nature-driven character to their spirituality.

Though the spirituality presented in the film no doubt speaks to many modern viewers, it is nonetheless represented as disconnected from the world at large. In contrast with the tragic events that follow, the scenes of the emerging spiritual movement seem almost dreamlike, set as they are in an idealized summer landscape. It is also a spirituality that is not allowed to survive. The responsibility for this is placed in the film on Stockfleth's brutally-constructed official Lutheranism, but the ideal would not really seem to be the religion offered by the Sami Laestadians either. Again, some kind of a middle way comes across as the norm. This middle way is defined by a young bishop who comes on a visitation, and who tries to help the Sami. The bishop is portrayed as sympathetic to the Sami, and aware of their problems. He emphasizes that it is important that religious and secular interests should not be mixed, something he accuses Stockfleth of doing. The ideal religion would thus seem to be a private religion that can help and support those in need but does not take sides.

Dealing with difference

To summarize, as we read the films studied here, the films all construct Laestadianism and Laestadians as in some sense different and Other. Laestadians are repeatedly represented as guided by norms and as focused on community. These norms and communities seem to offer what some characters need, and in this sense constitute an asset. However, several members of the

movement, particularly those who exercise authority, are also represented as violent, abusive, and hypocritical, while others are seen as controlled, beaten and subjugated. With the exception of the Laestadianism presented in *The Kautokeino Rebellion*, Laestadianism is never represented as a sensible choice, and even in *The Kautokeino Rebellion*, Laestadianism comes across as in many ways different, connected as it is to an ethnic minority and Sami indigenous spirituality.

Four films can of course not on their own be argued to represent a general view of Laestadians. However, the way the films tie into representations of Laestadians in other contemporary media suggest that these films do capture a widespread perception. As Laestadians are a relatively distinct group in Finnish and Scandinavian society, they get their fair share of media exposure. In his overview of the media coverage of Laestadianism, Markku Ihonen (2000) notes that in the Finnish media Laestadianism is regularly depicted as something strange, and the same clichés – for example regarding large families – are often repeated. One example of recent news media coverage has been the extensive and ongoing discussion of sexual abuse of children in the Laestadian movement (Häger forthcoming). One novel about Laestadianism worth mentioning is Hannu Raittila's *Ei minulta mitään puutu* (['I shall not want', 1998) which tells of a Laestadian Summer Meeting (the Summer Meetings are a very characteristic and central feature of the Laestadian and other Scandinavian revival movements).

Taken together, we argue, that these representations highlight a hegemonic Scandinavian view of how life should be lived and what religion should look like. According to this view, the individual in many ways comes first, and communities, though not evil as such, should be there to support individuals, not to impose restrictions. Religion should be restricted to the private sphere, while secular values should guide life more generally. Focusing on love relationships and a professional career consequently emerges as the right thing to do.

Seen from the perspective of an academic understanding of religion today, it is not surprising that a religion represented as strongly governed by norms and a focus on community is constructed as problematic, while a religion focusing on the individual and not trying to restrict comes across as the ideal. It has often been argued that religion today is becoming more and more individualized; that is to say, it is seen as something that should be shaped in accordance with the needs of the individual. As among others Gordon Lynch (2007) and Sofia Sjö (2012) have argued, this is the form of religion we often encounter in films, and such a religion is often represented

in a positive way. However, where this construction of religion is given credence, this entails, arguing from the theoretical perspective of hegemony, that those that do not fit in will become the Other and the problematic. When these processes take place in a medium such as film, religious representatives have very little to say in the matter, and the representations are instead guided by the interests of the media.

Building on Jürgen Habermas' theorizing (2008), contemporary Scandinavian society has been argued to be post-secular (Moberg & Sjö 2012). This entails that religion is again considered to be on the agenda, as something that must be taken seriously for a thorough understanding of society. The 'post-secular turn' does not imply greater numbers of people identifying as religious, but it does point to a renewed awareness of religion and to some extent a greater religious presence in the public sphere. As several studies have argued, it is via media and popular culture that we can see the post-secular turn taking place (see for example Moberg & Granholm 2012). In other words, the media are central to the renewed interest in religion. However, this also means that much of the religion we encounter in contemporary society is mediatized, or shaped according to the needs and interest of the media (Hjarvard 2013). This is also true for the representations of religion we have studied here, which are constructed in accordance with the logics of the film medium. Our study further highlights a central aspect of religion in a possibly post-secular Scandinavian society: an interest in religion does not imply a noncritical acceptance of all forms of religion; on the contrary, it would seem to entail an obvious 'othering' of those forms of religion that do not fit the norm. Despite the interest in religion in these films, and the post-secular turn in society more widely, the films studied support the notion that the hegemony today is still predominantly secular (Casanova 2009), and that religion overall will therefore always be questioned, but some forms more so than others.

Building on the current discussion of a renewed awareness and interest in religion, Michelle Dillon has posed the central question whether our post-secular society can deal with religious difference. She argues that the answer to a large degree is No (Dillon 2010). The films studied here point in the same direction, and illustrate that even a domestic religious tradition can be constructed as different and problematic. Even when films are made which incorporate a serious interest in religion, this does not displace the secular worldview and a default perception of religion as Other. Looked at over time, Scandinavian filmmakers are perhaps attempting to build a better understanding of Laestadianism, but negative stereotypes still prevail,

and filmmakers continue to represent those who choose a more traditional religious worldview as Other. While the filmmakers' aim is probably not to take an ideological stand, but to tell an intriguing story, the political side of representation and the perhaps unintentional processes of 'othering' still lead to the films offering an ideological perspective.

One could argue that what is needed is that if we really want a society that is open to religious difference, both viewers and producers of films need to demand different stories and allow for different representations. However, this is to simplify the notion of how hegemony works and the power relations involved in representations. It is not easy to challenge what is taken for granted and constantly presented as the norm. What might help us better identify these processes of 'othering', and understand the construction of the Other in the media at large, is greater media literacy, and more specifically a religious media literacy (Graham 2012; Lövheim 2012). Religious media literacy offers an understanding of how the media work in relation to religion; among other things, this means recognizing the fact that not all religions interest media equally, and that religion in the media is always constructed with media-driven needs in mind. A post-secular mediatized society is thus a society where the need to understand who sets the agenda and why is vital.

In the case of Laestadianism in film, religious media literacy could enable recognition of the way movements such as this are constructed to meet the needs of the film medium to tell an intriguing story, and realizing that filmic representations, though they might not be entirely untrue, are always in some sense constrained by what is demanded by genre and narrative. If one wants to tell a story about growing up and breaking free, a religion that binds works a lot better than a religion that promotes the individual, whether this is an honest representation of the religion in question or not. This recognition could in turn suggest that in order to achieve an adequate understanding of religion in general or certain religious groups in particular, we need to look for alternative perspectives and voices, but it therefore also entails taking the media seriously when trying to fully understand prevailing views on religion today.

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Wellbeing for sale:
Representations of yoga in commercial media[1]

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Abstract

This article focuses on how spirituality and commercialism are inter-
twined in the representations of yoga in the media. For this study,
articles on yoga were collected from seven Finnish popular magazines,
and analyzed using qualitative close reading guided by sensitizing
concepts of subjective wellbeing spirituality and prosumerism. The
results show that looks, wellbeing and health are found to be the main
selling points of yoga, whereas spirituality is used as a distinguishing
device and a tool for constructing a consumer identity associated with
'spiritual' values. The material also raises questions on the possibility
of anti-consumerist trends within contemporary yoga.

Keywords: *yoga, spirituality, wellbeing, consumer culture, media repre-
sentations*

According to a recent survey there are roughly 100,000 – 200,000 practition-
ers of yoga in Finland (Gallup Ecclesiastica 2011). Another survey gives an
estimate of 62,000 active practitioners and 64,000 potential practitioners
(Suomen kuntoliikuntaliitto 2010). In 2008, the national broadcasting cor-
poration YLE ran a headline on their website: 'Finns are yoga enthusiasts'[2]
commenting on the high interest in yoga in proportion to the country's
population of five million. Yoga's current global popularity is evidenced, and
likely also produced, by the fact that it is often featured in various types of

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2 YLE online news (23.10.2008). 'Suomalaiset ovat kovia joogaamaan'. http://yle.fi/uutiset/
suomalaiset_ovat_kovia_joogaamaan/6116323 http://olotila.yle.fi/mina/hyvinvointi/
suomalaiset-ovat-kovia-joogaamaan.

media, especially magazines. The current popularity of yoga is often linked with the rise of non-institutional religiosity, popularly referred to as 'spirituality'. The aim of this article is to study how spirituality and commercialism are intertwined in the representations of yoga in the Finnish print media.

Most popular forms of yoga in Finland fall into the category of modern postural yoga (henceforth MPY), referring to forms of yoga which focus on physical postures (*asanas*) and breathing exercises (*pranayama*) (De Michelis 2004).[3] Many MPY practitioners also ascribe some degree of spiritual significance to the practise (Hasselle-Newcombe 2005; Langøien 2012; Nevrin 2008). Most forms of MPY can thus be located within the context of non-institutional and subjective religiosity that has gained popularity since the mid-twentieth century (Heelas & Woodhead 2005, Heelas 2008, Taira 2009).

Several authors have convincingly argued that the proliferation of non-institutional religiosity is connected with spread of capitalism, neoliberal policies and the rise of consumer culture (Lau 2000, Possamai 2003; Carrette & King 2005; Rindfleish 2006; Taira 2006; Dawson 2013; Gauthier, Martikainen & Woodhead 2013a). While the relationship between different types non-institutional religiosity and consumerism is well-documented (e.g. Rindfleish 2006, Possamai 2003, Carrette & King 2005, Lau 2000, Taira 2009), only a handful of studies have focused specifically on the relationship between MPY and consumerism. These have concerned, for instance, copyright issues in transnational commercial yoga (Fish 2006), the re-appropriation of yoga among Indian consumers (Askergaard & Eckhardt 2012), branding of popular schools of yoga in America (Jain 2012), and the connection between environmentalism, capitalism and yoga among the transnational cosmopolitan middle class (Strauss & Mandelbaum 2013).

Our study participates in this emerging discussion on MPY and consumerism by looking at empirical representations of yoga in seven Finnish popular magazines *(Cosmopolitan*, *ET*, *Hyvä Terveys*, *Kodin Kuvalehti*, *Me Naiset*, *Sara* and *Sport*), mainly aimed at female audiences, or, in the case of *ET*, at senior citizens. Modern postural yoga is known in particular as a female activity (Newcombe 2007). Also, in general in the consumer society, where women are seen as the principal consumers, femininity has a cultural connection to consumption (Fisher & Bristor 1993; Bowlby 2002). We focus

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3 Yoga styles, which emphasize (sitting) meditation, are usually referred to in the media simply as 'meditation'. While meditation is central to most pre-modern yoga styles, nowadays it is customary to speak of 'yoga and meditation' as distinct practises even among the practitioners themselves. Bhakti Yoga, a form of ritual worship, is rather marginal in Finland, and is seldom discussed in the mainstream media.

especially on how 'spirituality' is defined in the representations of yoga, how it is used as a marketing device and how the themes of spirituality and commercialism are intertwined.

Modern postural yoga as spiritual prosumption

MPY is largely a product of late 19th and early 20th century, differing from earlier interpretations of yoga with regard to its methods and aims of practise. It is heavily influenced by modern ideas of health and wellbeing, as well as an interplay of Indian and Western gymnastics, medicine and psychology (De Michelis 2004; Alter 2004; Singleton 2010; Jain 2014; Strauss 2005). Its recent popularity is intimately connected with the rise of non-institutional spiritualities (Heelas & Woodhead 2005; Heelas 2008; Davie 1994) and the 'therapeutic ethos' (Lears 1983; Wightman Fox & Lears 1983), which emphasizes this-worldly self-actualization and the importance of individual psycho-physical health.

The connecting factor between different types of non-institutional spiritualities and associated wellbeing practises, such as MPY, is the emphasis on subjectivity (Heelas 2008). Taira (2006) emphasizes the importance of 'affect' and 'interest' rather than creed and commitment, as important characteristics of what he calls 'liquid religiosity', with reference to Bauman's concept of 'liquid modernity' (Taira 2006; see also Bauman 2000; Speck 2013). This type of religiosity is also often exemplified by the rhetoric of being 'spiritual, but not religious', or what Grace Davie has called 'believing without belonging' (Davie 1994).

Tuomas Martikainen, François Gauthier and Linda Woodhead (2013b) have recently argued that the spread of subjective spiritualities is intimately connected with the implementation of neoliberal economic policies in Western societies, and to the spread of consumerism as a cultural ethos. Neoliberalism is defined as an economic and cultural ideology which involves reducing the role of state and securing the unimpeded function of the market economy (e.g. Harvey 2007; Braedley & Luxton 2010; Read 2009; Springer 2012).

In neoliberal societies, social life is increasingly mediated by acts of consumption of a range of different products and services. The mechanics of consumer culture have also affected religiosity, as is evident, for example, in the proliferation of subjectivism discussed above, as well as in the increasing commodification of religious and spiritual practises. Like commercial brands, religious affiliations have become ways of constructing and

expressing selfhood and of forming social networks (Gauthier, Woodhead & Martikainen 2013b; Rindfleish 2006).

In the case of MPY, commodification is particularly evident in the emergence of innumerable different yoga brands or styles, which are constituted by the selective appropriation of some but not all of the features found across the yoga features found across the yoga market, as well as the development of bodily practises that are marketed as tools for health, wellbeing and personal transformation (Strauss & Mandelbaum 2013; Jain 2012; De Michelis 2008). In addition to well-known styles derived from acclaimed teachers, such as Iyengar Yoga, Ashtanga Yoga, and Sivananda Yoga, there has been a surge of novel fusion styles such as yoga rave, yogabeats, Dru yoga dance, yoga ballet, iiyoga, yogawalking, Hi-Ki yoga, Chi yoga, hormonal yoga, and so on (Brown & Aspasia 2010).

In addition to the seemingly boundless variety of paid yoga classes, yoga accessories are a multi-million dollar business, which has led yoga to become an effective brand in its own right (Fish 2006; Philp 2009). Unsurprisingly, yoga has recently also been used to brand make-up, perfumes, tea and even detergents. Certain visual motifs related to yoga, such as the lotus position, have become strong and recognizable symbols in themselves, and are sometimes used in advertising to sell products not in any way connected to yoga, such as beer.

While some authors see MPY as inextricably tied to consumer culture (see Jain 2014; Fish 2006; Strauss & Mandelbaum 2013), others have seen the commercialization and commodification of yoga as the corruption of an 'authentic' spiritual practise (e.g. Carrette & King 2005; Lau 2000). The hybridized and 'westernized' forms of MPY are also seen as Foucauldian technologies of the self, which support the neoliberal system (Askergaard & Eckhardt 2012; Strauss & Mandelbaum 2013). Certain Hindu groups have voiced their opposition against the popularization and associated commodification of yoga, arguing that yoga is an integral part of Hindu religiosity, and should not be separated from that context (see Jain 2014).

Within the MPY community, criticism has been directed, for example, against Bikram Choudhury, the founder of the extremely popular Bikram Yoga, who has sought to patent a series of 24 postures and is known for having taken legal action against many small yoga entrepreneurs who have taught his sequence of yoga postures without the required license (Fish 2006; Philp 2009; Jain 2014).[4] Many practitioners have argued that yoga and

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4 According to a court order given in December 2012 it seems that Choudhury is losing his right to the trademark. However, the case is still not settled. (Bloomberg 2012).

money cannot and should not be mixed, as this is seen as jeopardizing the 'spiritual' nature of yoga.

Instead of accepting this black and white dichotomy, where MPY practitioners are seen as either passive consumers or active proponents of anti-capitalist spirituality, an alternative way can be sought.[5] One tool for this is the concept of *prosumption,* which conflates the notions of production and consumption into one single action (Ritzer & Jurgenson 2010; Ritzer et al 2012; Zwick et al 2008)*.* Andrew Dawson (2013) has recently applied the concept of prosumption to subjective spirituality, differentiating five aspects of 'spiritual prosumption': *agency*, *site*, *benefit*, *repertoire* and *modality* (Dawson 2013).

Agency refers to the idea of the individual subject as both the actor and final authority in matters of spirituality. As many forms of subjective wellbeing spirituality include bodily practises, the *site* of spiritual prosumption is the human body as a psycho-physical unit. The *benefit* of spiritual prosumption is then directly experienced as a wellbeing of body and mind. These benefits are gained through a *repertoire* of techniques, such as yoga postures, which in the context of subjective wellbeing spirituality are often hybrid and flexible. Finally, Dawson calls the *modality* of spiritual prosumption 'inner-worldly aestheticism', which again refers to the self as both the active agent and the beneficiary of the practise. Viewed thus, the wellbeing practises associated with spirituality appears neither as passive, meaningless consumption nor as an abstract pursuit, detached from economic and cultural realities (Dawson 2013).

The concept of spiritual presumption thus offers a middle way between the criticism directed against the 'consumer takeover of religion' (Carrette & King 2005; Lau 2000), of which subjective spiritualities are sometimes accused, as well as against claims for purity and authenticity, which ignore the commercial aspects integral to subjective spiritualities. It provides valuable insight into the complex relationship of commercialism and spirituality in the representations of MPY in the Finnish media. Before looking at how these themes are manifested in Finnish magazines, a little attention must be paid to the wider relationship between women, wellbeing and the media.

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5 Taira (2009, 239) gives the following advice: '[I]t is useful to try to avoid the two extreme alternatives that are reminiscent of the study of fandom—one which sees every kind of politically correct dimension in the discourse on spirituality as progressive or anti-capitalist and the other which deems every kind of reference to spirituality or Eastern wisdom as a surrender to consumer culture or neoliberal ideology.'

Women, wellbeing, and the media

As in other wellbeing practises, an overwhelming majority of MPY practitioners are female (Newcombe 2007). According to Sointu and Woodhead (2008), the women taking part in wellbeing activities in Great Britain are predominantly white, well-educated, and involved in humanitarian causes. The consumer segment of 'holistic wellbeing', or 'LOHAS' - Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability (Strauss & Mandelbaum 2013) – is thus clearly defined. In general, female and feminine are signifiers often defined in relation to consumption in marketing language, whereas the masculine has been customarily associated with the marketer or producer, or established religious institutions (Fisher & Bristor 1993; Bowlby 2002; Gauthier Martikainen & Woodhead 2013a).

Sointu and Woodhead (2008) explain the predominance of women in holistic activities by arguing that they simultaneously affirm and challenge the traditional discourses of femininity: nursing is traditionally associated with womanhood, but in holistic activities the attention is shifted from others to oneself. This, in turn, is seen to benefit others as well. Holistic activities thus act to justify focusing on one's own body, health, looks and experiences. Suzanne Newcombe (2008) writes of the British women practicing yoga that they described yoga classes as having improved their ability to perform social duties and responsibilities at home and work (Newcombe 2008, 114.).

Women may also be induced to care for and modify their bodies by cultural standards of beauty and looks. Women's magazines persistently define the ideal body: while there may be articles which emphasize the importance of loving one's body as it is, the pictures typically show an unattainable, ideal body (e.g. Bordo 1993; Markula 2001; Impett et al. 2006; Kyrölä 2014). Conforming to the prevailing ideals, the models featured in the magazines are usually lean and muscular. Additionally, many MPY practitioners associate a healthy, lean and strong body with spiritual progress, viewing it as a sign of bodily and mental discipline (Langøien 2012). On the other hand, yoga and holistic thinking can be argued to offer a healthy balance to the objectification of women, as they advocate taking responsibility of one's own body and wellbeing (Impet et al. 2006).

Middle-class women have been active in health and wellbeing activities such as yoga since the early twentieth century (Newcombe 2007 & 2008). Although yoga in its pre-20th century Indian contexts was exclusively a male activity, in Europe and the US its audience has from the beginning mainly consisted of women. This had to do with associating yoga with 'exotic dance' and popular forms of female gymnastics: whereas men were supposed to

train for strength and endurance, yoga was marketed as a way to achieve health and beauty (Singleton 2010; Newcombe 2008). In the light of our research material, we can note that these ideals are still dominant, and that their influence has impacted pervasively on the holistic wellbeing culture.

The study: yoga in the Finnish magazines

We analyzed the representations of MPY in seven Finnish popular magazines: *ET* ['Senior's Magazine'], *Cosmopolitan* [Finnish edition], *Hyvä Terveys* ['Good Health'], *Kodin Kuvalehti* ['Illustrated Home Magazine'], *Me Naiset* ['We Women'], *Sara* [a woman's name] and *Sport* [Fitness magazine for women; unrelated to sports magazines in other countries with the same name]. All editorial content including the search words 'yoga' and 'meditation' during the years 2008, 2009, 2010 and the first half of 2011 were collected from each magazine's archives. These seven magazines were chosen to represent a sample of commercial lifestyle magazines which often cover stories concerning subjective wellbeing and exercise. Three of them, *Cosmopolitan*, *Me Naiset* and *Sara*, are profiled as women's magazines focused on fashion and human interest. The others are targeted for a general audience of broad age range, but, according to the publishers' own media information, their readers are mostly females (Sanoma Magazines 2012). *Sport* magazine is concerned with sports, 'aimed at women who love to keep fit', and *Hyvä Terveys* is focused on issues of health and wellbeing. *ET* magazine was chosen to represent a popular publication targeted at the senior population (over-50s). *Sara*, too, is aimed at 'mature' women. Over all, these magazines aim to reach the widest possible audience in the given public market segment. They are therefore significantly dependent on advertisement income, and appeal to an audience favorable to consumerism.

Applying the method of qualitative close reading, the material was read several times, advancing from the phases of data reduction to data display and finally to drawing conclusions and verification (Miles & Huberman 1994, 10–11; see also Silverman 2000). The analysis was directed by sensitizing (Bulmer 1979) the concepts of spirituality and commercialism. To manage the material, we used the Atlas.ti software, which is designed for the purposes of qualitative analysis.

Firstly, in the data reduction phase, an inductive quantitative approach was utilized. The term 'yoga' was mentioned in altogether 155 articles; yoga was also twice featured on the magazine cover, referring to a story inside. The articles were divided into seven categories according to the

genre and the role of yoga in the text. On the following readings (data display), we started to delineate and analyze the material thematically with the coding function of Atlas.ti. This made it possible to find similar themes from different parts of the material. After this, we verified the internal coherence of the themes and the way they appeared in different article types. Finally, we selected the articles where spirituality was mentioned in connection with yoga, as well as those about services and yoga-related products.

Overview of the qualitative material

While the sample of 155 articles in which the term 'yoga' was mentioned is not sufficient for a quantitative research or for drawing statistical generalizations, a quantitative classification was useful in giving an overview of the data and to give direction to the qualitative analysis.

The material was divided into categories (A–G) according to the genre and the role of yoga in the text (table 1). The occurrence of each category in the selected magazines is shown in table 2.

Yoga was most often mentioned in columns (category E): for instance, starting a yoga practise or discussing its effects. Almost half of the columns were found in the magazine *Sport*, where the journalist Virpi Melleri reported on her experiences of practicing yoga in India. The second largest category (G) consisted of articles where yoga was mentioned in another context, for example as a treatment for insomnia, back pain or loss of weight.

The third largest category of articles were interviews with yoga teachers (Di & Dii). Yoga was also often referred to in interviews (A), as a part of the lifestyle of the interviewees, who included both public figures and ordinary yoga practitioners. Public figures and celebrities have been instrumental in popularizing yoga not only in Finland, but also in other Western countries. In other instances yoga was mentioned only in passing, for example as a hobby or in the horoscopes (G). Following the common demographic of yoga practitioners, most of the interviewees and models mentioning yoga were white and female.

Close reading spirituality and commercialism

The overview of the magazine material shows that yoga was mentioned in a wide range of contexts. The word 'spirituality' was explicitly mentioned only in 17 out of 155 articles, but spiritual ideas and symbols are often present in

the text and imagery. In the majority of the stories, yoga was represented as a form of physical exercise. The articles dealing with yoga-related services, such as yoga classes, retreats and holidays, were classified as commercial in nature. In addition to these, reviews and presentations of accessories, such as clothes, shoes and mats, or books and DVDs, were also classified as commercial (category F). First we explore the theme of spirituality in the research material, then the links between spirituality and commercialism, and finally the rare anomalies featuring critical or hostile reactions to the commercialization of yoga.

Not just exercise

In the research material, yoga is often categorized as a 'Body & Mind' exercise, in which the connection between body and mind, proprioception and listening to one's body, are emphasized. Breathing is central to this type of exercise, as it is seen to connect the body and the mind. The emphasis is often on the immediate benefits of the practise: 'Should you choose Ashtanga, Asahi or even Bikram Yoga, what you achieve is a tranquil mind and a healthy body' (Eklöf 2008, 26; all translations are by the authors). Also, yoga is said to enhance the psychological and physical balance, concentration and peace of mind.

This experience of psycho-physical wellbeing is often described in the research material as 'spiritual', and this spiritual aspect of yoga is differentiated from and contrasted to the concept of 'religion'. An article in *ET* magazine contains an interview with a university lecturer in Comparative Religion, Dr. Måns Broo, who is known for his translations and commentaries of classical yoga texts from Sanskrit to Finnish:

> According to Måns Broo, most people look to yoga for health and relaxation, that is, completely secular things.
>
> 'If that is what you are after, that is all you are going to get. You cannot accidentally turn Hindu while aiming to get a tighter butt. Yoga is not a religion, although it has a religio-philosophical base. In ancient times, it was mainly a spiritual practice, but nowadays it is thought of first and foremost as physical exercise.
>
> However, if you practice yoga, you will soon notice that the body and the mind are very closely linked. Even if yoga is used merely to treat the body, it will affect the mind as well. All forms of yoga aim at preventing modifications of the mind. Then the mind is at rest, and one can attain a state of pure consciousness. (*Ojansivu* 2011, 64.)

In this passage, several interesting points are made. 1) The aim of yoga is defined in an extremely subjective and open-ended way ('If that is what you are after, that is all you are going to get'). 2) Yoga is distinguished from religion, but said to have 'a religio-philosophical base'. 3) The connection between body and mind is emphasized with a reference to 'pure consciousness'. The practitioner is thus presented as a 'sovereign self', who has the freedom to construct a 'hybrid repertoire' best suited to his/her subjective needs. Further, yoga is presented as a way for achieving a qualitative change in consciousness.

Another example emphasizing the difference between religion and spirituality – albeit in an internally contradictory way – is found in the following excerpt from an interview with a yoga teacher:

> Yoga is associated with a strong religious aspect. Although mantras are not sung in a Hot Yoga class, Harriet feels that the spiritual side of practise is important. – Yoga is not about practicing a religion, but it is something more than a form of exercise. (*Stellan* 2008, 44.)

First, yoga is stated to have a 'strong religious aspect'. However, this is immediately countered: 'yoga is not about practicing a religion'. The softening remark, 'but is something more than a form of exercise' is important, as it recurs elsewhere in the material. This can be read as an open-ended reference to the 'spiritual' aspect of the practise, again leaving the 'sovereign self' free to construct a subjective interpretation of its ultimate meaning.

These examples reflect a characteristic rhetoric about spirituality in relation to corporeality in the research material. Plenty of attention is given to the immediate benefits of physical yoga practise, but yoga is often said to be something 'more' than mere physical exercise. This 'spiritual' aspect of yoga is defined in contrast to religion, but otherwise described in an extremely open-ended way. This may have to do with potentially negative connotations associated with religion typical of modern public discourse (Mäenpää 2006; Taira 2006). On the other hand, they can also be seen as typical characteristics of spiritual prosumption, where the agency of the self, the body as the site of prosumption, and hybrid repertoires (including the freedom to construct one's own meanings and methods) form important aspects of the process.

Commercialism and spirituality

Although the spiritual aspect of yoga is a recurring theme in the interviews with practitioners and teachers (figure 1: categories C and D), it does not feature prominently as a selling point in the more overtly commercial representations of yoga. These include yoga-related product demonstrations, most commonly yoga mats, books and DVDs (categories B and F), using yoga as a background to illustrate the context of a product, or to mark a lifestyle segment (categories A, C, D, E and G).

For example, the magazine *ET* invites yoga consumers into 'discussion' with a direct question:

> Does your body need gentle stretching, a sweating workout, or both? Nice clothes and good gear give inspiration to your exercise. Yoga wear is soft, warm and flexible. Workout wear needs to be durable, practical and needs to breathe. (*Karmila* 2008, 73.)

The text gives an impression that soft and flexible clothing is an integral part of the repertoire of yoga, and the clothes are represented as part of the identity of the yoga practitioner, closely linked to the cultural ideals of appearance. As Strauss & Mandelbaum (2013) have noted, identity plays central part in the current yoga consumerism.

The variety of branded yoga styles is well illustrated in the research material, especially in stories where a reporter is testing a yoga class in a fitness center (category B). For example, Hormonal Yoga is presented as one of the latest ways to package yoga. The term 'hormone' helps not only to brand a specific yoga practice, but also to direct it at women at the age of menopause. For instance, in *Sara* magazine (*Järvinen* 2011, 86), 54-year-old Päivi Johansson is interviewed about 'having a sabbatical year and deciding to dedicate it to taking care of herself'. This discourse can be seen as consistent with the 'inner-worldly aestheticism' modality of spiritual prosumption, according which the adopted practises aim at immediate and subjective benefits (Dawson 2013).

An interesting example of using the 'spirituality' associated with yoga as a branding device comes from *Me Naiset* magazine (*Jäntti* 2008, 52-53), which encourages the reader to identify her own style of exercise: the reader is asked if she is 'a dancing exerciser', 'a tough plodder' or 'a spiritual mover'. The magazines divide reader segments so that they can find the 'right' product suppliers to advertise in the magazine and fund its contents, since the commercial media function, crucially, by selling audiences to advertisers

(e.g. Ang 1991). This can also be seen as further evidence of the centrality of identity construction, which in neoliberal societies is characteristically done via consumer choices (Strauss & Mandelbaum 2013; Gauthier, Woodhead & Martikainen 2013b).

A list of the sports for the 'spiritual mover' includes various forms of Yoga, Tai Chi, Pilates, Shindo, Asahi stretching, Chi Kung and Feldenkrais. The spiritual mover is described as 'a peace-loving exerciser' who is interested in 'the philosophies behind the sport'. An accompanying illustration features a pair of socks with fitted soles (suggesting the yoga posture *Baddhakonasana*) under a shining halo, a Christian symbol associated with sainthood. Here it can be understood to connote the 'spiritual qualities' of equanimity, purity, and devotion.

Identity construction aside, the effects on the body and looks dominate the interview excerpt with a 35-year-old female 'spiritual mover'. As if in a yoga advertisement, she testifies to the way her life has changed. Notably, while the story aims at giving tools for constructing 'spiritual identity' among yoga practitioners, no reference to 'spirituality' is made in the interview:

> When I started yoga I noticed a new kind of relaxation in my body. My shoulders literally dropped away from my ears. In the yoga poses, my flaccid biceps became firm. The push-ups made firm and slender muscles in my spaghetti arms. The standing poses effectively trim the lower body. Also, some cellulite has done, due to the physical exercise. Woman 35, dynamic yoga. (*Jäntti*, 2008, 53.)

A story in *Sport* magazine (*Eklöf* 2008, 26) utilizes the 'ancient Indian roots' of yoga and spirituality as branding tools: 'yoga, developed thousands of years ago in India, has always taken several different forms. They all have a common goal: spiritual growth and holistic health.' This discourse is repeated in the reviews of yoga books. The *Sport Reads* column reviews a yoga instruction booklet called *Easy Yoga Workbook*, by Tara Frazer, persuading the reader that yoga brings instant relief from anxiety and stress:

> Get rid of anxiety with yoga.
> Rushing and trying to live your life with a tense neck due to stress just does not work in the long run. No way, this has to stop. A shortcut to Nirvana can be achieved with a three-minute relaxation program, which helps enormously. The other exercises in the Easy Yoga Workbook are also accessible to a beginner yogi. (*Filpus* et al 2008,16.)

Interestingly, the word 'Nirvana', connoting the metaphysical liberation from suffering in Buddhism, is used here to refer simply to stress reduction. Moreover, the author doesn't seem to be bothered that yoga and Buddhism represent two distinct traditions. A similar conflation of yoga and Buddhism is found in *Me Naiset* magazine (*Jäntti* et al 2010, 65): A column on Solar Yoga depicts a winter morning in a yoga studio. The story describes the ambience of the studio and the good after-feeling following the session. The accompanying image shows a woman sitting cross-legged with her fingers in a *mudra*, a symbolic gesture associated with meditation. (See figure 1.) In the background we can see a statue of the Buddha. Rather than a religious reference, this can be read as using 'spirituality' as a branding device, appealing to the popular associations of relaxation and equanimity with Buddhism.

In another article in *Me Naiset* (*Luhtanen* 2010, 40), female practitioners of various sports are recommended specific make-up and skin care products. (See figure 2.) For instance, yoga practitioners are advised to use talc and organic skin creams. This purely commercial text is illustrated with an image of a woman with her palms joined in the *atmanjali mudra* position, and her head turned toward her heart. This pose expresses a spiritual salutation, and is related to the Hindu belief in the divine nature of each human being (Fuller 1992). Like the image of the halo earlier, this image is being used here to conjure up associations of calmness, purity and devotion.

The most important selling points for yoga thus emerge as looks, wellbeing, a state of relaxation, stress reduction and health. In some rare cases, 'spirituality' is used either as a branding device or a tool for identity construction, mostly through visual motifs associated with religious traditions, which are used as devices to evoke associations with qualities generally perceived as 'spiritual', such as calmness, purity and devotion. Moreover, the imagery and vocabulary associated with spirituality are used to distinguish yoga from other forms of exercise.

A reaction to consumer culture?

While in the majority of the research material yoga is represented in a commercial context, occasional but clearly recognizable criticism of consumer culture and capitalist society can also be found. For example, a story in *Sport* magazine (*Jalkanen* 2009, 18-27) tells the reader about various fitness activities 'which do not require a penny after you have got the gear'. Yoga is represented here as an alternative to commercial sports, especially when

practiced at home, as it does not require expensive accessories nor classes. The story also presents a few home exercises for the readers.

Critique of consumerism can also be found in rather unexpected places. For instance, *Sport* magazine (*Kokko* 2008, 98-101) presents a 'Guide to the sports stores of Helsinki' with celebrity interviews. The introduction encourages the reader: 'Ready, steady, shop!' However, later in the article the well-known Finnish actress Minna Haapkylä comments:

> I do my yoga practise at home wearing long johns and a worn out t-shirt. The flea markets are the most important places for me to buy my yoga wear. I do dream about a brand new outfit designed for this activity, but they are so expensive that the long johns will have to do for now. I bought my yoga mat from the Yoga Store on Eerikinkatu. (*Kokko* 2008, 100.)

Haapkylä's comment clearly stands out as a criticism of consumerism. Although she does admit to 'dreaming about a brand new outfit', and thus returns (or is returned) to the consumerist discourse offered by the journalist, she then reaffirms her disregard for consumerist values by commenting that nice yoga apparel is too expensive and that she is going to stick with her old long johns. Nevertheless, she reveals where she had bought her yoga mat, and the address of the Yoga Store is given at the end of the article to specify a good place to enact one's consumer identity. However, this example raises the question to what extent all modern postural yoga can be approached through the discourse of consumerism. While yoga is certainly presented in the magazine in a commercial manner, Haapkylä's anti-consumerist approach breaks out – or attempts to break out – of this discourse.

Similar sentiments can be found in interviews with other celebrities. In *Terveys* (*Helasti* 2008, 18), a well-known Ashtanga Yoga teacher, Juha Javanainen, suggests that the interest in yoga represents a reaction against hard commercial and competitive values. Similarly, a singer and actress, Vuokko Hovatta, says that she loves yoga because – unlike work – you cannot overdo yoga (*Hytönen* 2010, 90). And in a different perspective, a reportage in *Sport* (*Melleri* 2010, 30-33) introduces a commercial yoga studio which engages in charity work by allocating ten percent of its profits to funding an orphanage in India.

In these magazines, yoga is often linked with personal growth and changes in lifestyle. Yoga is represented, for instance, as a way to free oneself from addictions and bad habits. Yoga is shown to have given support in rehabilitation after accidents or illnesses, and to be used as relief for

menopause, insomnia and asthma (e.g. *Juusola* 2010, 88-94; *Järvinen* 2011, 86; *Rajala* 2008, 50-51). Strauss and Mandelbaum (2013) report many similar stories in their media representations research material. Although they are quantitatively rare, these views also constitute an important segment within the totality of the research material.

Finally, therefore, let us examine an example where MPY practise is presented as leading the practitioner into diametrical opposition with consumer culture:

> After Leena Weckström had practiced Ashtanga regularly over several months, she began to feel the changes. These occurred in the body and the mind. As she carried on with yoga practise, her values in life started to change as if by themselves. She became vegetarian, and no longer desired meat or fast food. She also almost completely stopped drinking alcohol.
> — My life is nowadays mainly work and yoga. I do not need much more than that. I am not hoarding possessions, and I try to help others. Spiritual values are guiding my life, not money. (*Ojansivu* 2011, 63.)

Anti-consumerist ideas such as these are rare exceptions among the MPY practitioners interviewed, and break away from the mainstream of commercial representations of postural instructions, yoga clothing, and tips for a beauty regimen, represented in a happy marriage with spirituality. However, in the case of MPY, it can be argued that the crucial core commodity is the experience of transformation that follows from following the suggested practises. Dawson (2013) suggests that this transformation is a central feature of the prosumptive process, and indeed, for subjective spiritualities, the central selling point. This perspective also opens up a discussion about the role of yoga as a 'technology of the self' and its inherent ambivalences (Strauss & Mandelbaum 2013; Askegaard & Eckhardt 2012; Rindfleish 2006).

Conclusions

Both scholars of consumption studies (e.g. Wernick 1991; Wightman Fox & Lears 1983, xiii) and sociologists of religion (e.g. Gauthier, Woodhead & Martikainen 2013b) argue that consumer culture has invaded all the spheres of social life, including religion, the media, literature, the social sciences, politics and government. Consumption has come to define late-modern selfhood, the modes of social interaction, and the articulation of meanings. Consumerism also forms an integral part of the practise of subjective spirituality, such as MPY.

However, instead of therefore reducing spirituality to a passive act of consumption, as some critics have suggested (Carrette & King 2005, Lau 2000), or arguing that consumerism has nothing to do with 'authentic' spirituality, as some practitioners have done, we suggest that the relationship between spirituality and consumerism can be approached with the aid of the conceptual tool of *spiritual prosumption* (Dawson 2013). In this article we have analyzed the spiritual prosumption, the intertwining of spirituality and commercialism, in representations of yoga in Finnish magazines.

In the magazine representations of MPY, the dominant emphasis, as we would expect, is on the physical practise and its immediate benefits. However, these benefits, such as the experience of the connection between body and mind, are often defined as 'spiritual'. Spirituality is further defined in contrast to 'religion', while its exact meaning is left open. This can be seen to be in accordance with emphasizing the 'sovereign self' as the *agent* of spiritual prosumption, as well as the utilization of hybrid *repertoires*, which posit the consuming subject as the final authority on the meaning and form of the practise (Dawson 2013).

Health, wellbeing and beauty are the most common selling points for MPY, but spirituality is sometimes used to differentiate yoga from other forms of exercise, as well as a tool for constructing a particular type of consumer identity. Strauss & Mandelbaum (2013) have argued that identity plays a central part in the current popularity of yoga. Similarly, visual motifs borrowed from religious traditions may be used to create further associations of yoga with 'spiritual' qualities, such as calmness, equanimity, devotion and purity.

Finally, yoga is presented in the research material as a tool for life change, for example, enhancing health, reducing stress and getting rid of bad habits such as alcohol and smoking. Viewed through Dawson's (2013) definition of spiritual prosumption, this promise of 'transformation' can then be said to be the main 'commodity' associated with commercial representations of yoga. This also links yoga with Foucauldian 'technologies of the self', ways of constructing neoliberal selfhood and of internalizing governance (Strauss & Mandelbaum 2013; Askegaard & Eckhardt 2012; Rindfleish 2006).

The stress-reducing and health-promoting effects reported by many yoga practitioners can also be seen from the point of view of optimization of performance. Calling yoga 'a Hindu version of the Protestant ethic', Askegaard and Eckhardt (2012) argue that yoga is not simply a way of relaxation, but also enables its practitioners to take part in capitalist society more efficiently. This also echoes the philosopher Slavoj Žižek's criticism

of Western Buddhism as the 'perfect ideological supplement' to capitalism, because it provides the practitioner with a sense of relief and detachment while fully participating in the capitalist culture (see Taira 2009). This kind of presentation would also be in line with the commercial nature of the research material.

However, the representations of yoga are not uniformly consumerist. Although extremely rare, the 'transformation' reported by some MPY practitioners in the interview stories is also presented as producing identities and lifestyles that turn away from the values of consumer culture, for example by rejecting a consumer-identity, simplifying one's needs, reducing consumption and engaging in humanitarian causes. Although we acknowledge the rarity of such voices in the material, we find their presence significant, as it conflicts strongly with the overtly commercial nature of the magazines studied.

This leads us to an interesting dilemma: on the one hand, our analysis has shown that in this environment yoga is thoroughly commodified, and works to establish neoliberal selfhood through a process of spiritual prosumption. At the same time, there is some, albeit scarce, evidence that the selfhood produced by yoga might break out of the consumer identities offered by neoliberal discourse. As Askegaard and Eckhardt (2012) also point out, technologies of self may have an ambivalent role in neoliberal societies: on the one hand they embody and promote the central values of neoliberalism such as self-management, flexibility and individual responsibility; at the same time, however, there is some evidence that they can provide tools for using these same values for purposes other than capitalist profit-seeking. Similarly, Strauss and Mandelbaum (2013) have argued that the globalized, commercial nature of yoga has enabled the growth of communities that aim at changing that very same system, for example through ecological activism. While it is impossible to draw any definite conclusions based on this limited material, our study of the representations of yoga in the Finnish print media seems to offer support for this line of argumentation.

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Appendix.
Table 1. Classification of the articles mentioning 'yoga'.

A) personal interview
B) presentation of a certain type of exercise
        Bi) yoga is presented as an aspect of the whole
        Bii) yoga is the main focus
C) interview of a practitioner
D) interview of a yoga teacher
        Di) as a part of a larger context
        Dii) as a separate article
E) column
F) product review (e.g. accessories, mats, books and DVDs)
G) yoga as part of a wider context.

Table 2. Occurrence of the categories in each magazine.

Magazine	Story category									Total
	A	Bi	Bii	C	Di	Dii	E	F	G	
Hyvä Terveys	2		2	5	4			1	5	19
MeNaiset	5	3			5	1	8	1	7	30
KodinKuvalehti				3			2		4	9
Sara	3	1		5			2		4	15
Cosmopolitan		1	1	1	1	1	9	1	7	22
ET	1			1		1	8	1	1	13
Sport	5	1	2		5	2	20	6	10	47
Total all magazines	16	6	5	15	15	5	49	10	40	155

Figure 1. 'The sun came to the yoga shala.' *Me Naiset* magazine's 'Good Feeling' column on Solar Yoga (Jäntti et al 2010, 65).

Figure 2. 'Fresh to the track. When you choose beauty products the match your activity, sports are much more fun.' Article on sport activities and cosmetics in *Me Naiset* magazine (Luhtanen 2010, 40).

Who is a convert?
New members of the Orthodox Church in Norway

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Abstract

Due to its recent major revival in the post-Soviet period, the Orthodox Church can today be described as a church of new believers. While this seems to be acknowledged at a general level, there is a strong tendency to avoid speaking of new members with an Eastern European background as 'converts'. Although they have often gone through much greater transformations – from atheism to Orthodoxy – than those with a Western background, who generally seem to have a Christian past, the term convert is generally reserved for the Westerners. 'It is not our custom to call them converts', one of the priests in Norway commented. Conversion stories which gain international publicity are generally about Westerners, and even the few academic studies on converts to Orthodoxy have focused solely on those with a Western background. Based on fieldwork among the Orthodox in Norway, I will compare newcomers with a Western background with those with an Eastern European background, and I will argue that convert as an analytical concept may be equally useful in relation to members of both groups. This concept covers, however, a wide range of transformations, and it is thus important to identify precisely what kinds of converts there are among the many new Orthodox believers.

Keywords: *Converts, The Orthodox Church, Norway, independence*

'I am so grateful for the chance to atone,' says Tatiana, who once excelled in refuting God's existence scientifically. 'I used to speak against God, but now I speak up for God!' Like millions of Eastern Europeans who were socialized into the atheist worldview of the former communist regimes, Tatiana discovered religion in the 1990s, and joined the Orthodox Church. The transformation from atheist to devout Orthodox involved, she says, having 'to learn everything anew,' a task which Tatiana enthusiastically embraced.

In the diaspora, Eastern European new believers like Tatiana are continuously being joined by a steady trickle of Western newcomers. In fact, due to a recent major revival in the post-Soviet period, the Orthodox Church can today, to some extent, be described as a church of new believers. While this

seems to be acknowledged at a general level, there is a strong tendency to avoid speaking of people with an Eastern European background as 'converts'. The term convert, commonly used about newcomers with a Western background, is in fact rarely used about Eastern Europeans. Conversion stories which gain international publicity are generally about Westerners (for example Mathewes-Green 2006), and even the few academic studies on converts to Orthodoxy in the West have focused solely on those with a Western background (Hvithamar 2006, Denmark; Slagle 2011, USA; Kapalò 2014, Ireland).

'It is not our custom to call them [Eastern Europeans] converts', one of the priests in Norway commented, when asked about this tendency to distinguish between new believers according to their geographical background. He would, in other words, not categorize Tatiana as a convert. But why isn't Tatiana, who changed her worldview quite drastically, perceived as a convert? Why is her transformation perceived as different from the transformation of those with a Western background?

Based on fieldwork among the Orthodox in Norway, I will compare newcomers with a Western background with those with an Eastern European background.[1]

Although the Orthodox themselves tend to reserve the term convert for Westerners only, I will argue that *convert* as an analytical concept may be equally useful with reference to both groups. This concept covers, however, a wide range of transformations, and it is thus important to identify precisely what kinds of converts there are among the new Orthodox. Why have they decided to join the Orthodox Church? To what extent has their choice affected their everyday lives? Do they remain Orthodox over time, or do they, as many contemporary converts do, after a while move on to another faith?

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1 During 2006 and 2007 I visited various congregations extensively, particularly in Oslo, where the majority of the Orthodox live. I participated in various activities, engaging in informal conversations, and carried out semi-structured interviews with approximately 80 people (clergy, laity, and high level church leaders). My initial focus was on the jurisdictional pluralism in the diaspora, but as many of the interviewees turned out to be newcomers to the Church (38), I included questions on when, how and why they had become Orthodox. Generally such initial questions were sufficient to make them recount the stories of their conversions. Then I followed up with questions about the reactions of their families and friends; to what extent they were practicing Orthodoxy (praying, fasting, attending liturgy, etc.); and whether they had ever regretted their decision and considered 'moving on'. Generally people responded positively to such questions. Belonging to a small 'invisible' minority, many embraced the opportunity to talk about what they considered an important aspect of their identity. All names are however pseudonyms. Since 2007 I have kept in touch with some of the congregations and I have met with several of the converts interviewed.

In contemporary society a great number of people seem to be on the move religiously/spiritually. Danièle Hervieu-Léger notes that there is a sharp increase in conversions in Western societies (2008). Globally, millions of people convert (Roy 2013, 177). The fact that so many people convert has, in turn, had an impact on what conversion nowadays involves. As Marzouki points out, there is often a significant difference between past and present conversions (2013, 2).

What is a convert?

Traditionally conversion was understood in terms of St. Paul's sudden and dramatic transformation on the road to Damascus. Although this model of an extreme, externally initiated transformation of an unprepared, passive individual may always have had only an approximate relationship to the experience of actual people embracing a new faith, today, at least, such a perception of conversion is widely contested. Contemporary scholars agree that the term conversion includes a wide range of kinds or degrees of transformation (McGuire 1997, Hervieu-Léger 1999, Ahlin 2005, Marzouki & Roy 2013). They speak of conversion more in terms of a process than in terms of a single dramatic event, and they describe converts more as active seekers making individual choices, than as passive objects played upon by external forces. They also emphasize contemporary converts' tendency to convert several times, developing what may be described as *conversion careers*, and they argue that the once-and-for-all aspect of St. Paul's conversion has become rare.

Scholars like Thomas Luckmann, Peter Berger, Paul Heelas and Lars Ahlin even question whether it is meaningful to apply the concepts *conversion/convert* to people who may move between faiths as they wish, and who may establish private belief systems based on independently selected components from available faiths (in Ahlin 2005). Inspired by Zygmunt Bauman, Lars Ahlin claims that the typical pattern today among those recruiting into religious movements are 'religious tourists', in constant movement towards greater fulfillment, while 'religious pilgrims', choosing to adopt and adhere wholeheartedly and permanently to a new coherent belief system, have become a minority (ibid,17). Additionally, Ahlin distinguishes a third category, of 'refugees', i.e. people ashamed of being relegated to the periphery of their societies, who seek refuge in fundamentalist kinds of religion (ibid). In order to avoid diluting the concept of conversion too much, Ahlin, Luckmann and Helaas are in favor of reserving the term *conversion*

for distinct changes which involve people committing to an exclusive canon establishing the truth about this world and the next (in Ahlin 2005,36).

Scholars like McGuire (1997), Hervieu-Léger (1999), Marzouki (2013), and Roy (2013) also distinguish between various kinds and/or degrees of transformation which contemporary conversions involve, but this does not discourage them from retaining the concepts. McGuire distinguishes, however, between conversion which involves 'a transformation of one's self concurrent with a transformation of one's basic meaning system', and 'denomination switching', which involves 'a change of affiliation from one organization to another' mainly for pragmatic reasons without any evident changes in worldview (1997, 71).

The concept of 'religious pilgrim' fits well with the Orthodox Church's understanding of conversion; what it wants are committed new believers who will remain Orthodox. Whether such religious pilgrims are what they actually get is however another question. In the case of Norway, are the converts truly 'pilgrims', or possibly 'tourists' passing by?

As noted, Ahlin claims that religious pilgrims only represent a minority of those adopting a new religious allegiance in contemporary society. In a global perspective, his claim may seems questionable, but in relation to Western Europe it seems valid. Grace Davie argues that Western Europe represents an exceptional case; it is far more secularized than the rest of the world, and the prevailing religiosity is characterized by people 'believing without belonging' or 'belonging without believing' (2002). In other words, some people may believe without committing to one belief system and one community, while others may remain members of their traditional religious communities without sharing their beliefs.

Orthodox converts, however, are expected to be religious pilgrims, believing and belonging. As such, then, in Western Europe they will belong to a minority among religious recruits. But who are these converts who supposedly constitute an exception within the exceptional case? How do they explain their decision to become Orthodox? And are there any fundamental differences between the narratives of Eastern European and Western newcomers?

How does one become Orthodox?

Access to Orthodoxy is protected by clergy, who serve as gatekeepers protecting the theological and social boundaries of Orthodox Christianity (Slagle 2011, 63). In order to be allowed to pass across the ecclesial border, potential

converts must, in principle, prove themselves worthy. Initially one must be formally accepted as a *catechumen*, i.e. 'one receiving instruction in the basic doctrines of Christianity before admission to communicant membership in the Church' (Andrews n.d.). Catechumens are required to attend services regularly, socialize with other Orthodox, study, and gradually integrate Orthodox praxis into their everyday life. When they feel ready and the priests in charge agree, they may proceed to admission into the Church.

First, the converts make a full confession. Afterwards they are ritually led from the church entrance towards the sanctuary while they make specific promises and perform specific prayers. Then they are baptized and anointed with the oil of chrism, and finally they are allowed to receive Holy Communion. Generally the converts are given an additional Christian or Saint's name, but they don't change their names legally.

Most Orthodox Churches don't re-baptize those who have already received a Trinitarian baptism. Roman Catholics who have already received the chrism in the sacrament of confirmation are not re-anointed. What the conversion ritual involves depends, in other words, on the converts' religious past.

The cathecumenate is however not always practiced in the prescribed way. While priests in Greece and in Eastern Europe apparently often receive new believers without demanding any such instruction period, in Western countries it seems to be obligatory for converts *with a Western background*. New believers with an Eastern European background appear however to be accepted without.

In Norway the priests tend to postpone accepting anyone as a catechumen until they are certain of their seriousness. Then they expect Westerners to spend at least a few months, sometimes as much as a full year, as catechumens, since they want to ascertain that the converts understand what being Orthodox involves. None of the priests demand in-depth theological studies, but they do want to ensure that the desire to convert is not merely a result of a holiday infatuation with Greece or Russia. 'There are too many who want a quick fix,' according to one of the priests. Some come with 'fancy demands for when and where their conversion is to take place', demonstrating what he considers a 'know-it-all-attitude'.

'Be aware of those running away,' Father John Garvey, in the USA, advises his colleagues, i.e. Christians fleeing from, for example, the introduction of female priests (1996). To Fr. Garvey it is clearly important to distinguish between conversion *from* something and conversion *to* Orthodoxy, and it is of course the latter that the Orthodox Church favors. In principle, the only

acceptable reason for converting to the Orthodox Church is that 'you are convinced that it is for your personal salvation.'(Anon. 2001.)

The role of the clergy in protecting ecclesial borders, and enforcing demands on potential converts, emphasizes that Orthodoxy is only for those 'certified' as worthy. This adds, of course, to Orthodoxy's spiritual capital (Slagle 2011, 63). However, as noted, newcomers with an Eastern European background are regularly allowed to pass across the border without this 'certification'. They seem to be considered as already *inside*, as if they are intrinsically Orthodox.

The Orthodox Church in Norway

The Orthodox Church was established in Norway by refugees from the Russian revolution in the 1920s. From the 1960s onwards, Orthodox from Greece and Yugoslavia arrived in search of work, and the Greeks quickly established an independent congregation. After the fall of communism, an increasing number of Eastern Europeans began immigrating, and during the civil war in former Yugoslavia many Serbs arrived as refugees. Gradually the Serbs, the Bulgarians and the Rumanians established separate congregations, and finally a group mainly of Russians established a second, distinct 'Russian' congregation. While the number of Orthodox have increased from approximately 1000 (in 1990) to 12–13 000 (2014), the number is still small.

In Norway more than 80 per cent of the population belongs to a religious group (2013). The majority, 75.2 per cent, belong to the Norwegian (Lutheran) Church, which until 2012 was a state church. Among the other Christian denominations too, the Catholic and the Pentecostal are the most numerous. There are also Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Jewish and New Age inspired denominations. In spite of such religious pluralism, Norway may be described as predominantly secular/Lutheran.

Converts to Catholicism and to Islam are relatively often portrayed in mainstream media, but converts to Orthodoxy are rarely mentioned outside the media catering to Christian audiences. Few Norwegians seem to be aware of the Orthodox Church's existence in Norway, and the term Orthodox is often confused with other terms like fundamentalist/fanatic. Consequently, when someone decides to become Orthodox, they join a marginal church, which suffers from the 'usual' problems of the Orthodox diaspora: divisions, lack of cooperation, etc. (Chaillot 2006, Thorbjørnsrud 2015). Still, there is a continuous stream of new converts finding their spiritual home in the Orthodox Church.

When I raised the topic of converts, both laity and clergy seemed to take it for granted that I wanted to know about newcomers with a Western background. When I asked some of the priests why, they explained that it was their custom to do so, or rather it was not their custom to describe new members with an Eastern European background as converts. When I kept asking why not, and why they didn't test Eastern Europeans the way they do with the Westerners, they argued that this was because 'it is easier for Eastern Europeans originating from Orthodox countries to understand and integrate Orthodoxy in their lives.' While the Westerners were described as having 'no previous experience with Orthodox culture, and no Orthodox support system in their social environment,' the priests seemed to take it for granted that those from Eastern Europe, i.e. from '*Orthodox countries*', all have such support systems. They explained that those from the West 'will have to look everything up in books; they will have to study, to reflect and make choices all the time,' while the others apparently 'will know much more intuitively what to do.' They have 'another starting point belonging to an Orthodox culture', and thus, it will be 'easier for them to adapt to Orthodox requirements.'

Although the Eastern Europeans may have been convinced atheists, like Tatiana, raised in atheist families during the communist era, these clergy still believe that they will have 'something under the skin': people from Eastern Europe don't need to be tested like Western-background converts, since they are perceived as somehow intrinsically Orthodox. However, while it is easy to identify objective social and cultural differences in the conversion accounts of those from the East and the West, these differences do not seem to correspond to those cited by the priests.

When people explain why they have embraced a new faith, they will often construct their stories 'drawing on a socially available set of plausible explanations or rhetoric', and they may reinterpret 'past experiences in relationship to the new meaning system' (McGuire 1997, 74). Moreover, suggests McGuire, religious groups often encourage one preferred rhetoric for the construction of conversion accounts (ibid). In other words, such accounts must be analyzed as precisely *accounts*, and as such they may differ from what actually happened in the past. What I present in the following are thus the accounts people have chosen to convey to me, an outsider, several years after they became Orthodox, and these accounts are very likely influenced by the way they have since integrated Orthodoxy into their own lives.

I will present the accounts of six people: three with an Eastern European background and three with a Western background. These have been

selected from among the 38 newcomers I have interviewed, and although it is with great caution, I will argue that these six accounts legitimately represent recognizable trends, in the sense that they illustrate the variation I have identified.

Why Orthodox?

'I learnt to prove that God does not exist'

Tatiana, who is Russian, was baptized as a child, but 'only as a kind of traditional thing'. From a very young age she was taught that God didn't exist, that religion was forbidden, and that 'there will be problems if you're seen visiting a church'. Later, she studied atheism, and while at university she wrote an essay on the scientific proofs against God's existence. Tatiana was apparently rewarded with much praise for this essay, and although she admits having expressed pride at the time, she now insists that she 'didn't feel good inside.'

In the 1990s she married a non-religious ethnic Norwegian man and moved to Norway. Tatiana was still a committed atheist, and she was 'only thinking about materialistic values'. She found a good job and she was content. 'It was a quiet period and finally I had time and energy to consider more than survival'. Then Tatiana found a book on how to cleanse the body and mind through meditation, and she suddenly

> discovered that there is something above, and that is God. […] In the begin-
> ning it was intellectually confusing, but I believe God then intervened in
> me. Imagine, I had to come all the way from Russia to Norway and I had to
> become 40 years old before I returned to the faith in which I was baptized.
>
> When I studied philosophy at the university it was so confusing with the
> different truths. Even then I said to myself, this is impossible. There has to
> be only one truth! When I found that truth, I had to learn everything anew;
> how to live and how to seek salvation. You know, previously I had used my
> mouth to speak against God, but now I can use my mouth to speak up for
> God. I have been allowed to atone!

Tatiana is now divorced, but she is still content because '*God guided*' her to her new church. She does not consider Norway a truly Christian country: like most of the world, says Tatiana, Norway is increasingly dominated by

anti-Christian, i.e. satanic forces, as Russia was during the communist era. She believes there is an existential struggle going on, and she is fearful of accepting changes which may weaken the Orthodox Tradition and thus make the Orthodox more vulnerable. Consequently she resists all changes that she suspects constitute an innovation.

'There was no way out….'

Although her family was not religious, Miljana was baptized as a child. In Yugoslavia, at that time, the Church was 'almost forbidden', and Miljana herself rejected religion as 'nonsense.' For her, the atheism she was taught in school represented the truth, and she considered religion as meaningful only for uneducated people. Miljana received a higher education, found a good job, married and had children. Until the civil war started, she was apparently content, but then everything changed dramatically. Miljana and her family lived in Sarajevo, and she describes the years of war as terrible. It was precisely at this time, however, when 'there was no way out', that Miljana started thinking about God, and eventually she became a believer. When she and her family arrived in Norway as refugees, she immediately joined the Serbian congregation in Oslo. Miljana describes herself as a believer, but as she emphasizes 'a sensible believer, not an extremist'.

Although Miljana's husband and children haven't embraced her faith, they reacted positively to her desire to have them baptized in the famous Ostrog monastery in Montenegro.

Miljana loved the old multicultural Sarajevo, and she has yet again developed relationships with some of the Bosnian Muslims and Croatians who like herself fled to Norway. She has re-visited Sarajevo, but 'now it is their [the Muslims'] town; we [Serbs] don't belong any longer.' Miljana and her family were previously proud of their identity as Yugoslavs, but when Yugoslavia disappeared, they started identifying as Serbs.

They now visit Serbia every year, and Miljana has become a firm believer in the need for Serbs to stick together. She accepts all Orthodox Churches as equal parts of *The* Orthodox Church, but she strongly believes that all Serbs should join the *Serbian* Church. Unlike Tatiana, Miljana is not very concerned about what constitutes correct Orthodoxy; her concern is to make all Serbs in Norway join the Serbian congregation.

'Life is a continuous prayer'

Nataliia was raised as an atheist in Bulgaria, and she was 30 years old when she was baptized. Her parents were not religious, but her grandparents were 'perhaps a little religious'. Fearing the communists, this had apparently never been mentioned in front of the children. In the turmoil after the fall of the communists, Nataliia describes how Orthodoxy became very popular, and she too, started for the first time reflecting on spiritual questions. Visiting Orthodox churches, she was fascinated by the liturgical singing, and she began experiencing 'inner calm', though she was still confused by the liturgical rules, and she felt uncomfortable having to kneel in order to pray. Then something happened to her, and she suddenly realized that she was 'kneeling in front of God.'

Nataliia continued, however, searching for inspiration within other religions too, and she says she can experience 'the same, deep warm feeling in Buddhist temples as in Bulgarian monasteries. It doesn't matter to which religious tradition a holy place belongs, but because we are humans we need specific material expressions. And to me as a Bulgarian, the expressions of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church are of course the most familiar'. Nataliia prefers the Bulgarian Church for linguistic, cultural and social reasons, and because she wants to support the Church which 'helped save the Bulgarian nation throughout centuries of oppression'.

Nataliia has now studied the liturgical texts, and in Norway she sings in the church choir. She claims to have 'a spiritual relationship to life', and to her 'life is a continuous prayer'.

'A church which is truly the church of Christ'

Harald grew up in a small town in the Norwegian Bible belt. His parents were believers, and he was baptized in the Norwegian Lutheran Church. Harald went to Sunday school, and later he joined one of the Free Churches. Due to political disagreements, however, Harald later left this church and began 'searching, but for what?' Leaving Christianity was apparently never an option, as he felt Christianity had 'a claim on' him. He was interested in theology and church history, but finding a new church was difficult. Increasingly frustrated, Harald began questioning whether there was any 'church which is truly the church of Christ?'

Converting to Catholicism was never an option, as he was unable to find support in early sources for the Catholic teachings on the infallibility of the Pope. Nonetheless, it was through an intellectually rewarding

friendship with a Catholic priest that Harald was introduced to the Orthodox Church.

Vacationing in Greece, Harald started reading Bishop Kallistos Ware's books on Orthodoxy, and as he developed an interest in icons he contacted one of the Orthodox priests in Norway. As he felt warmly received, he asked about the procedures for becoming Orthodox. At the time there was no procedure for catechumens in place in Norway, and the priest simply told him to buy a prayer book, attend the Liturgy, and start fasting.

When asked why he finally decided to convert, Harald refers to Orthodox ecclesiology and dogmatics, the ritual cycle, and the Orthodox idea of 'a god who is truly God'. Although Harald speaks about this at length, he also emphasizes having had mystical experiences during the Liturgy as important. And as he integrated the ritual cycle in his everyday life, he discovered 'another kind of life behind the formal aspects of the rituals', and thus he began feeling closer to 'what life is about'. Gradually he developed an attachment to the Orthodox Church and has since remained faithful.

'In the Orthodox Church there are loads of traditions, but – there is always a but…'

Gunnar was baptized in the Norwegian Lutheran Church, but his parents were not very religiously active. As a young man he converted to the Mormon Church and he spent time at a Mormon college in USA. Realizing that 'everything wasn't according to the idealized descriptions', he returned home and later he converted to Catholicism.

Gunnar describes the atmosphere in his Catholic congregation in the 1970s as open and inspiring. However, when a number of highly vocal conservatives, opposed to the liberalization within the Norwegian Lutheran Church, converted to Catholicism, this changed. Being gay, he no longer felt at home.

Vacationing in Greece, Gunnar and his partner made friends with a family who introduced them to the daily life in an Orthodox congregation. Gunnar was fascinated by the relationship between laity and clergy, and by the Orthodox attitude to authority. 'In the Orthodox Church there are loads of traditions, but the Orthodox are quite laid back concerning how they practice them. There is always a but, and that makes the Orthodox more humane.' Thus Gunnar started reading books on Orthodoxy.

It was important to Gunnar how he and his male partner were received. Although some Orthodox Church leaders are very outspoken against homosexuality, the bishops in the Russian Orthodox archdiocese for Western

Europe, to which their congregation belongs, have, according to Gunnar, 'never been anti-gay.' The local priest told them the Orthodox Tradition 'does not support a homosexual lifestyle', but they were still warmly welcomed. After 15 years as a Catholic, Gunnar converted again.

'The liturgy is like a cosmic drama, it speaks to all senses'

Trine's family wasn't religious, but she was baptized in the Norwegian Lutheran church and she describes herself as 'a religious child'. Around the age of ten, she started painting icons, and she developed an interest in Russia. Trine went to a 'good' Christian (Lutheran) high school, but she disliked the kind of Christianity dominating the school. She was in contact with the Catholic Church, but it was to Orthodoxy she was attracted, and she started attending the Liturgy when she was 14–16 years old. When she was nineteen she converted.

While Trine considered the preaching she had been exposed to previously 'banal', she experienced Orthodoxy as challenging – and satisfying. Orthodox Christianity was 'mystical', not something 'one could grasp intellectually'. 'It was not explained to pieces', and thus its spiritual message never became banal. Trine was fascinated by 'the holistic Orthodox theological understanding'. It is 'like a building in which every detail has its specific meaning; it resembles a Gothic cathedral.' And 'the Liturgy is like a cosmic drama speaking to all the senses.'

Trine says, 'The Church means a lot to me, but I am perhaps not a typical convert; I am too sloppy. I cannot stand having to perform, and thus I react negatively to all the instructions about what the Orthodox should and shouldn't do. To me it is more important to learn about sacralization.'

In social terms, Trine describes herself as an outsider, unconcerned about social status and materialist values. She wants to avoid a career which 'may damage my soul', and she feels Orthodoxy has inspired her to search through prayer for the best way to use her own capabilities. As she has periodically lived far away from Orthodox congregations, she has sometimes felt lonely. Still, while praying the ancient prayers by herself, Trine sometimes experiences 'a deep feeling of attachment to the Christian community'.

Are they all converts?

All the 38 people I have interviewed have made the same decision to (re-) join the Orthodox Church, and they are all, to varying degrees, commit-

ted to Orthodoxy. Except for Trine, who converted at the age of 19, and another Bulgarian girl, who was baptized when she was 18, they have all joined the Orthodox Church in their late twenties or older. Among the thirteen Eastern Europeans there are five men and eight women. Among the 24 Westerners there are fifteen men and nine women. With very few exceptions they are all highly educated. Other studies of (Western) converts to Orthodoxy indicate that this represents a wider trend (see for example Hvithamar 2006, Slagle 2011). It is of course highly unlikely that this is the case in Eastern Europe, where the new believers represent a mass phenomenon. In Western countries, however, the Orthodox Church is still marginal, and thus, people have to make a particular intellectual effort to find it.

Although the Eastern Europeans and the Westerners in my sample share features like age, gender and level of education , there are some important differences between them.

Western Christians/Eastern European atheists

While all the Westerners have a Christian background, and the majority of them had been active Christians prior to their conversion, this is only the case for one of the thirteen Eastern Europeans. All the 24 Western converts were baptized as babies, and the majority were raised in religiously active families. [2] A few were not, and like Trine, they somehow decided to follow a path different from their parents. Among those raised within a Christian environment, a few have apparently had shorter '*anti-religious*' periods, before they again returned to Christianity and embarked on a spiritual search for better *Christian* answers.

The Westerners had previously been affiliated with a wide range of Christian groups: the Norwegian Lutheran Church, the Catholic Church, the Pentecostal movement, the Methodist Church, charismatic Christian groups, Youth with a Mission, and the Mormon Church. A few of them passed through several denominations in their search for a new spiritual home, but whether their different 'stops' actually involved conversions, varies. While Gunnar developed a 'conversion career', others may better be described as having merely 'visited' other denominations.

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2   In Hvithamar's study of Danish converts, the majority were likewise baptized as babies, but they were apparently raised in religiously passive families (2006). The majority of the American converts to Orthodoxy studied by Slagle, however, were raised in families in which 'personal religious conversion and change were well-established features' (2011, 43–4).

A few have visited non-Christian groups, too, for example Buddhist. Such people may still to some extent argue against the importance of religious boundaries, but generally they too strongly identify as Christians.

Among the Eastern Europeans, on the other hand, only one was raised as a Christian. He converted to the Orthodox Church simply because he perceived its teachings on homosexuality as less harsh than the Catholic. Being gay, he preferred the Orthodox idea of homosexuality as a 'disease' rather than the Catholic idea of a 'sin'.[3] All the others were raised as atheists. Although three were baptized as infants, they strongly emphasize that this was only done as 'a traditional thing'. When growing up they had apparently nothing but contempt for those in need of religion.

In Christian theology, however, having been baptized one cannot become unbaptized; from a theological perspective, Tatiana and Miljana thus remained formally Orthodox, in the sense that they could return to the Church without any initiation rituals. The question is however, on what level it is meaningful to describe them as having been Orthodox all the time. Aren't they better described as converts, or perhaps *reverts* or *reconverts*?[4]

Taking a closer look at Tatiana's and Miljana's accounts, it is notable that they emphasize their *transformation* from atheism to Orthodoxy. What this transformation actually involved may vary, and it is obvious that Tatiana is more concerned about remaining on what she considers a correct Orthodox path than Miljana (or Nataliia). For Tatiana, it would be unthinkable to compare Buddhist temples with Orthodox churches, as Nataliia does. However, both Tatiana and Nataliia emphasized how much they needed to learn. Nataliia spoke of the confusing liturgical rules and her initial discomfort at having to kneel while praying. Tatiana explained that she had to learn 'everything anew'. Obviously these women did not feel that they had Orthodoxy 'under the skin'; neither did they have any Orthodox support systems in their backgrounds to rely on.

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3 According to this informant, the Catholic Church in his home country described homosexuality as 'a sin which has to be punished', while the Orthodox Church considered it 'a sin caused by disease and as such it must be treated with understanding'. To him it was much preferable to be described as sick, and thus he converted. His priest has subsequently helped him come to terms with his homosexuality, and he is presently living with a partner.
4 Both terms refer to people returning to their original faith, and have mostly been used by Muslims: a *revert* is someone who discovers that he/she is (as all people are) meant to be a Muslim. The term *reconvert* has been used about nominal Muslims who become active believers (Roy 2012, 180). The same term is presently being used about Copts in Egypt who have converted to Islam and then later want to reconvert to the Coptic Church (UNCRIF 2013, 10). Both terms are sometimes used by scholars, see for example Slagle (2011, 11).

Tatiana discovered Orthodoxy after she had moved to Norway and had married into a non-Orthodox family. Miljana's parental family was not religious, neither was – or is – her own family. The fact that her grandparents were somewhat religious was hidden from Nataliia when she was younger. In other words, these women grew up as content atheists, unfamiliar with Orthodox beliefs and practices, in countries where the Orthodox Church had been suppressed for decades and open religiosity represented a risk.

Like the Westerners, many of the Eastern Europeans started by searching through books and the internet,[5] and a few in each group likewise passed through various religious groups until they found the Orthodox Church.[6] The circumstances for their quests were however different. While the Westerners may have experienced personal crises, none of them mentioned this in relation to their spiritual quest and final conversion. All of the Eastern Europeans, however, related their conversions to their experiences of the political, social and economic crises in their home countries. It was during or after these crises that they started searching for a new system of meaning. It was only when there was 'no way out' that Miljana started thinking about God and the Church in which she had been baptized. Tatiana didn't start until she could relax from the pursuit of survival. Nataliia started after the fall of the Communist regime, when the Orthodox Church regained immense popularity in Bulgaria.

In their accounts, on the other hand, the Westerners, who were already Christians, emphasize their search for more satisfying *Christian* answers. Apart from Trine, who found her way to Orthodoxy alone, through a fascination with Russian culture, the others had mainly searched through texts. Rewarding personal encounters were emphasized, and vacations in Greece appear to have inspired some. Although they were religiously dissatisfied, none was desperate, and thus they spent much time pursuing their quest for what they describe as a Church in which God is truly God; the most authentic Church; a Church for both body and soul; a Church focusing on the individual as part of the collective; a mystical Church which doesn't at-

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5   A Bulgarian woman describes how she started reading spiritual books in Norway. 'I was reading continuously; searching for answers. Then I came across a book by a Bulgarian Archimandrite and while reading I knew this was the right thing! I felt the presence of a mature, spiritual man, and it was as if he was speaking directly to me. Then I felt safe, and gradually I began feeling inner peace'. Then she asked to be baptized.

6   A Moldovian woman, baptized as a child, grew up as an atheist. Before returning to Orthodoxy she was interested in astrology and theosophy, and she 'visited' the Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and various New Age inspired groups. The turning point came while she was listening to a cassette recording of the sermons of a Russian preacher.

tempt to explain the unexplainable, etc.[7] 23 of the 24 Westerners were highly informed about Christianity, and they were very articulate when explaining their views on ecclesiology, rituals, etc., and why they prefer the mystical aspects left unexplained. Converts are often challenged and interrogated by family and friends, and therefore have to learn how to rationalize and justify their choices (Roy 2013, 184). In the case of these Orthodox converts, their Christian past and their educational level naturally increased their ability to do so.

Since the Eastern Europeans are rarely considered converts, they are not so much asked *why* they have chosen the Orthodox Church as *when* and *how* they became religious, i.e. rediscovered their 'inherent' Orthodoxy. Apart from the gay man who left the Catholic Church and joined the Orthodox for specific theological reasons, and who was very well able to put this into words, none of the other Eastern Europeans interviewed responded to my questions by putting forward their views on theology or ritual practices. Their concern was to communicate *how and when they found Orthodoxy*, or how they experienced that *God actually intervened in them*. When the Westerners were speaking of experiencing inner change, for example when Harald explained how he gradually discovered another reality behind the rituals, their transformations were described as part of a *process*; the Eastern Europeans, however, tended to emphasize an abrupt change, making the before and after vastly different. In this sense, the Eastern Europeans appear to fit even better into McGuire's concept of conversion as entailing 'a transformation of one's self concurrent with a transformation of one's basic meaning system' (McGuire 1997, 71). Although there may be variations concerning what their transformations actually involve – there is for example a big difference between Tatiana who fears going astray yet again, and thus attempt to do everything correctly, and Miljana who more than anything emphasizes that she is not an extremist, they all talk about having gone through an important change.

Though the Westerners generally accept being called converts, they may sometimes question whether they should actually be categorized as such, since they have been Christians all their lives. In other words, they perceive their choice to become Orthodox as involving a development of their Christian faith, rather than a break with their past or a radical transformation. One referred to Orthodoxy as having existed within him as a latent belief, arguing that he had never converted, but 'had only pursued

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7   These reasons are also mentioned by the American converts to Orthodoxy studied by Amy Slagle (2011, 84ff).

the faith I received as a child'. They tend however to be quite outspoken on the deficiencies of the beliefs and rituals in their previous denominations, and they tend – naturally – to argue quite strongly in favor of Orthodoxy.[8] Thus, when explaining why they became Orthodox they indirectly confirm that important aspects of their beliefs and practices have in fact been transformed. They have also passed through a more or less formal catechumenate and they have been formally initiated into the Orthodox Church, and consequently, it seems unproblematic to categorize them as converts, as the Orthodox themselves tend to do.[9] But what about the Eastern Europeans: how should they best be categorized?

To describe the gay Catholic who became Orthodox, as a convert, and not Miljana and Nataliia, because they were baptized as babies, seems odd. From their accounts, it is obvious that their transformations involved a lot more than his did. They may of course be categorized as *reverts* or *reconverts*, but the point is that these women, and the ten others who grew up unbaptized, have – to various degrees – transformed their worldview and their perception of themselves, and thus, they too fit the analytical definition of a convert.

As mentioned above, the Orthodox Church wants a particular kind of converts, i.e. 'religious pilgrims', who will adhere wholeheartedly to its beliefs, rituals and practices. But is this what it gets?

Religious pilgrims: the exception within the exceptional case?

Converts are often described by their co-religionists as zealous, i.e. as too obedient and too concerned about correctness. This is also the case among the Orthodox in Norway, who may criticize (other) converts for 'dressing and acting as if they are monks or nuns', and diagnose them as 'suffering from convert-disease'. When Trine described herself as 'perhaps an untypical convert', she seemed to take it for granted that other Orthodox converts are willing 'to perform', which she is not, and that they are not 'sloppy' as she is. In other words, by emphasizing how she is different from the others, Trine too, confirms the prevalent assumption of what converts are

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8   In contrast to some American and British converts, none of the converts in Norway referred to liberal attitudes concerning female priests and/or homosexuality as reasons for their own conversions. Interestingly the only two who referred to such debates were the two gay men who had left the Catholic Church because of its negative attitude to homosexuality.

9   They may also be placed in the subcategory which Hervie-Léger calls '*converts from within*', i.e. converts who redefine what they perceive as an existing latent belief (Kaoues 2013, 25).

like. Based on my data, I will however question this assumption, and I will argue that although Trine's way of describing herself seems untypical, her independent way of practicing Orthodoxy is more or less typical among the converts in Norway.

The 38 converts I interviewed constitute a very diverse group, but what they seemed to share was a strong attachment to the Orthodox Church *and* a strong will to make independent decisions on how to be Orthodox. As they had all made their own decisions to join the Orthodox Church on the basis of their own evaluations, they valued their independence, and they were clearly not going to passively wait to be told what to do. Although they were attracted to the Orthodox Church because of its authenticity, its unwillingness to 'discuss everything to pieces', they apparently felt free to evaluate what is correct Orthodoxy and to decide what is obligatory and what isn't. As Trine put it, 'it is the goal, sacralization, which is important, not all the instructions about what an Orthodox has to do!'

Orthodoxy constitutes a complex system, with a strong emphasis on *oikonomia*, i.e. the need for understanding and compassion, and this provides space for individual considerations. This combination of conservatism and oikonomia is obviously attractive to some, for example Gunnar, who described the Orthodox as 'more humane', because 'there is always a but…'. And clearly, not only Trine, but most Orthodox converts appear to relate to such 'buts'; they are not willing to perform for the sake of performing. In principle, exemption from duties should be discussed with their priests; it is the priests who have the authority to exercise oikonomia in their guidance for the laity. Orthodox converts, however, often make such decisions themselves. This does not imply that they aren't wholeheartedly Orthodox; on the contrary, they appear precisely to be searching for the most suitable way – for them – to be Orthodox.

Tatiana, who is scared of 'going astray once again', would of course never describe herself as 'sloppy', but since she is very concerned about doing everything the correct way, she is constantly struggling to decide what this actually involves. She has great respect for her local priest, but she is by no means willing to listen to him if she isn't totally convinced that his interpretation is correct. When her congregation discussed changing the calendar in order to adjust its Christmas celebration to the 'Norwegian' celebration, the priest was prepared to accept this, but Tatiana was not, and she searched for other authorities to support her resistance towards this change. Fearing that members like Tatiana would leave the congregation ended the debate.

The Orthodox are supposed to attend the Liturgy every Sunday if possible, and they are supposed to confess before receiving communion. Not everybody agrees with such rules. Disliking having to confess 'when there is nothing to confess', one very dedicated convert decided to transfer from his original congregation to another, which agreed to allow him to decide for himself when confession was necessary. Although her priest is less than content, another convert sometimes decides 'to enjoy God's own nature' rather than attending the Liturgy on Sundays, since she feels that 'encountering God in the woods may sometimes be of equal value.'

Although the Orthodox are supposed to fast during the prescribed periods, if not exempted by their priest, quite a few converts appear to decide for themselves whether to fast or not. While they may consider the fasts as important in defining the Orthodox, and connecting them to the ancient Christians, not all of them always participate. When I asked Miljana whether she fasted, she simply said no. Although firmly attached to her new identity, fasting apparently wasn't part of what she considered obligatory. Another convert with little enthusiasm for fasting defended his view by referring to the Bible, saying: 'what goes out of the mouth is more important than what goes in!' In other words, refraining from speaking ill of other people is more important than abstaining from certain kinds of food at specific times. Others referred for example to health problems, personal problems, and/or problems at work. While their priests most probably would have agreed to exempt them from the fasting requirements for at least some of these reasons, they obviously didn't feel the need for clerical approval.

The Orthodox are supposed to perform daily prayers and veneration of the saints, read the Bible, and attend the Liturgy every week. However, while some converts, like Tatiana, attempt to fulfill these requirements, others, like Miljana, don't.

For Miljana, being Orthodox is all about her belief in God and her attachment to the Orthodox Church. She goes to church most Sundays, perhaps as much for social as for spiritual reasons; she celebrates the major feasts and she visits famous monasteries because it makes her proud and it makes her feel good. Naturally she prays and read the Bible sometimes, but she hasn't established a regular routine as she is supposed to. Miljana participates however in the running of her congregation, and she puts considerable effort into encouraging all Serbs to come together and celebrate their membership in the Serbian Orthodox Church.

Believing, belonging – with independence

Although describing herself as 'sloppy', Trine emphasized that 'the church means a lot to me!' And clearly, the Orthodox Church is important in these converts' lives. In spite of their independence, they all participate actively in their congregations. The unwillingness *to perform* expressed by some converts should perhaps be understood as conveying a deeper desire to be *truly* Orthodox. By rejecting what they consider empty words and empty performances, they emphasize that they want to be *sincere*: to go beyond the formalities towards the *true* reality.

All these converts have been Orthodox for some years, and have already proven themselves as catechumens; they have been certified, and they have passed the first phase (during which even Trine admits to having been concerned about formalities). In a sense they are passed beyond *becoming* Orthodox; they *are* Orthodox and they do *belong*. Thus, they may feel able to move on to a deeper level behind the formalities, and/or they may simply feel free to relax a bit.

While there may be differences in regard to how Eastern Europeans and Westerners speak about their way of practicing Orthodoxy and/or how they relate to clerical authority, the similarities regarding what they actually do are striking. They all care deeply for their Church, but they are also openly critical, and they do all make independent choices concerning their practise. They cannot, in other words, be categorized as *religious tourists*, people in constant movement towards greater fulfillment, whom Bauman and Ahlin claim are typical of the conversion phenomenon today (Ahlin 2005, 17).

One prominent convert has left to become Catholic. Apparently he didn't question Orthodoxy as such, but became tired of the intra-Orthodox conflicts in the diaspora, and decided to move on. Another has stopped coming to church for reasons unknown. The other converts are still practicing Orthodox, and I will argue that they may be categorized, more or less, as *religious pilgrims*, who adhere wholeheartedly to a coherent belief system (ibid). Although 'wholeheartedly' is a strong term, and it is obvious that these converts relate to Orthodoxy in a variety of ways, it is equally clear that Orthodoxy constitutes for them an important system of meaning. While they may sometimes criticize the Orthodox Church and its leaders, they still maintain their attachment to this Church. Perhaps precisely because they consider it *their* church, they may consider it important, and their right and duty, to express independent views and critique. Doing so may thus actually be seen as a confirmation of their belonging.

According to Grace Davie's line of thought, these converts' desire to both believe and belong makes them different from the majority of converts in Western Europe. Davie argues, as cited above, that Western Europe presently is dominated by people 'believing without belonging' and/or 'belonging without believing' (2002). In this context the converts to Orthodoxy, both those with a Western and an Eastern European background, constitute an interesting exception.

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What would Ron choose from the Islamic basket? Notes on Scientology's construction of Islam[1]

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Abstract

Two theological claims characterizing Scientology are its continuity with older religions, and its support for religious freedom and pluralism. This article, focusing on two articles that appeared in the magazine *Advance!* in the 1970s as well as other pieces authored by L. R. Hubbard, analyses Scientology's narrative about Islam following Jan Hjärpe's 'basket theory'.

Keywords: *Scientology; Scientology and Islam; L. Ron Hubbard and Islam; Scientology and other religions; Jan Hjärpe*

In 'What Will Be Chosen from the Islamic Basket?' (Hjärpe 1997) the Islamologist Jan Hjärpe defines religion as fulfilling a psychological-cognitive role: it offers 'quietude in crises' and 'perceptional patterns' through which experience is filtered (Hjärpe 1997, 267); he states that a religious identity is shaped within a major tradition and/or in contrast with other religions by using a selection among the different 'items' of a 'basket' or '[...] the set-up area of traditions in the specific religion or ideology, as we can find it in its activities, i.e. all the rituals, narratives, historiography, categorizations, terminology and observances.' (Hjärpe 1997, 267.) Such a 'basket' can be used blindly and passively, and can refer both to the construction on part of those who belong to a religion or by external observers. Doctrine and theology, suggests Hjärpe, 'have very much the function of a 'border defence'

[...] which uses material from the basket' (Hjärpe 1997, 268). In other words Hjärpe invites us to see the pragmatic and social function of the concepts used in characterizing a specific religion, and points out that a creative intellectual enterprise such as the development of a theology is not immune to such functionality. Finally, with the image of different 'items' Hjärpe teaches us that a specific religion's (self-)narrative should not be taken as a monolithic whole; the function of each and every element composing it should be individually analysed, while not losing sight of the fact that all the 'items' are placed in one and the same 'basket'.

This article employs Hjärpe's theory to analyse a special case: the construction of Islam within Scientology. This is mainly examined with reference to two issues of the magazine *Advance!* that hosted pieces about Islam and pictures authored by the founder of Scientology, as well as other texts of his that touched upon Islam. Reference is also made to Scientology's more recent relationship with Islam and Islam-related events and institutions.

The theological relationship, past or potential, between Scientology and Islam is an almost un-investigated topic. My interpretation addresses three interrelated questions, two of them more historical in character: what perception of Islam could the founder of Scientology have, and what representation of Islam could he promote? The third question is more related to the present: if they are not to invent theological doctrines *ex novo*, but rather draw upon the claims of Scientology's founder, how can Scientologists found and justify a compatibility or friendly relationship with Islam? Such necessity might arise for instance for an individual with a relationship to Islam who self-identifies with Scientology, or for Scientology taken as an organization, while presenting themselves as credible partners in interreligious dialogue or trying to recruit new members in a community influenced by Islam.

Dianetics and scientology

Hugh B. Urban describes Scientology as a 'controversial movement' with a 'complex, tangled, and often tortuous history' (Urban 2011, 3). The purpose of this paper is neither to solve controversies nor to reconstruct Scientology's history in detail, but to contribute to the analysis and evaluation of a fragment of its theology from a viewpoint neither complacent nor polemical towards Scientology's self-narratives. For this purpose it will suffice to recall only the most general aspects of its development and doctrines.

The initiatives and teachings that founded and are still constitutive of Scientology stem from the creativity of a prolific science-fiction author, the

American Lafayette Ron Hubbard (1911–1986), still lovingly referred to by Scientologists as 'Ron'. Hubbard, whom Urban describes as an 'American entrepreneur' and 'spiritual bricoleur' (Urban 2011, 26), invented a self-help psychological method called *Dianetics* (from the ancient Greek terms for 'through' and 'knowledge'), which he first explained in an article in a science-fiction magazine in May 1950, and in another volume later that year (Hubbard 1950a; Hubbard 1950b). Dianetics is based on the thesis that the human mind is impaired by *engrams* or mnemonic traces of traumatic experiences. The passive part of the mind where they are stored is called *reactive*, as opposed to the active part or *analytical mind* (CSI 1998, 16). Through a procedure called auditing (from the Latin verb for 'listening') applied from 1952 onward by means of a device called the *Electropsychometer* (or *E-Meter*, patented – though not invented – by Hubbard; see Wallis 1976, 116 and Urban 2011, 49–52), these engrams could be identified and eliminated, leading to the drastic improvement of a person's potential for action and success (cf. CSI 1998, 33–7).

Early on, Hubbard faced intertwined challenges with the recognition, doctrinal integrity, and financial success of Dianetics. The medical establishment from which he initially sought approval did not accept his theories (see Wallis 1976, 23). When they gained more visibility, they were criticized as pseudoscientific/pseudomedical (see Urban 2011, 64–66). Finally, practitioners begun discussing ways in which to invent and implement their own variants of Dianetics (see Wallis 1976, 81). With a series of practical initiatives, among the most important being the incorporation of three new organizations in December 1953 in Camden, NJ (the Church of Scientology, the Church of American Science, and the Church of Spiritual Engineering – see Urban 2011, 65), Hubbard bestowed on Dianetics the characteristics of a religion.

Scientology (from the Latin term for 'knowledge' and the Greek suffix denoting 'study') encapsulated Dianetics in a broader conceptual system. The human soul was defined as *thetan* (from the ancient Greek letter *theta*, representing 'life force'), as a spiritual unity that goes through a process of successive (human) incarnations (cf. CSI 1998, 17–18). The engrams were attributed to traumatic experiences undergone in earlier lives, dating back millions of years. The thetans' collective vicissitudes were absorbed in a space-opera grand narrative whose details were to be gradually revealed to Scientologists according to their advancement on the path of improvement, called the *Bridge to Total Freedom* (cf. CSI 1998, 31, 56). The phases of such advancement through auditing were elaborated in great detail, together with

hierarchies, procedures, and prices. An individual before liberation from the content of the reactive mind is described as *pre-clear*; a liberated one, as *clear* (cf. CSI 1998, 37). One of the higher stages in the bridge is called *Operating Thetan* or *OT*, and is said to be able to control *matter*, *energy*, *space*, and *time*, or *MEST* (cf. CSI 1998, 18, 37, 55, 104–9), which otherwise entrap thetans.[2] Scientology also contains a meticulously numbered taxonomy of emotions called *tone levels* (see Harley and Kieffer 2009, 194–5). Another theory concerns the *eight dynamics* or dimensions of survival, the eighth one being the *Supreme Being* or God (cf. CSI 1998, 22–26). The psychiatric establishment became a major polemical target; Hubbard attacked it for being unscientific and inhumanly abusive (see Rothstein 2009, 381).

Notwithstanding international legal problems that forced Hubbard to establish his headquarters on a small fleet constantly on the move, he nourished the Church's doctrines and practices through an inexhaustible production of books, articles, and lectures as well as periodical publications which he controlled.[3] The dissemination and recruitment strategies became increasingly refined, including the involvement of celebrities and the usage of front groups presented as fighting against violations of human rights or drug addictions.

Hubbard established ceremonies such as marriage and funeral that, like those of other religions, mark an individual's and a community's most important and emotionally-laden biographical events (cf. CSI 1998, 41–3[4]); furthermore, he decided on the adoption of symbols such as a special cross[5] and priestly collars, and terms creating or emphasizing Scientology's similarity with already existent religions (e.g. auditing was called *pastoral care* and local organizations *missions* - cf. CSI 1998, 61). However Scientology was also given its own distinctive terminology, which its practitioners should gradually master (Hubbard's neologisms have been estimated in the hundreds – see Wallis 1976, 231) and which would mark its special identity.

After Hubbard's death, the leadership was assumed by David Miscavige (b. 1960), currently Chairman of the Board of the Religious Technology Center, which manages the trademarks and copyrights of Dianetics and Scientology (cf. CSI 1998, 71). The figure of Hubbard has been divinized

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2 I italicize the terms since Hubbard characterized them in an idiosyncratic way both far from commonsensical and physical usage so that they can be assumed to be Scientology jargon.
3 For a discussion of Hubbard's authorship and the related problems see Christensen 2009b.
4 Dericquebourg 2009 describes in detail the ceremonies yet also recognizes that they are neither regularly held nor well attended (a fact explained with the centrality of auditing rather than any other activity).
5 Scientology's cross has four rays symbolizing, together with the arms, the eight dynamics (cf. CSI 1998, 52-4).

and, faithful to his strenuous attempts at keeping the doctrines fixed and immutable, no theological shifts or changes have been introduced; one of the tenets of Scientology is that, since Hubbard's accomplishments were perfect, no deviation is able to obtain the same results and therefore all critical discussion or creative elaboration is prohibited (see Wallis 1976, 230).

A major success achieved by Scientology after Hubbard's death was its formal recognition as a religion (entailing tax exemption) by the US Internal Revenue Service on October 1, 1993 (cf. CSI 1998, 237). Scientology officially claims millions of adherents worldwide and skyrocketing figures. However, both anti-Scientology activists and some scholars have suggested that such numbers are inflated, e.g. by counting people who have even only once made an expression of interest, and that a realistic figure would be no more than a maximum 40,000 (Urban 2011, 205–6; Hawkins 2010; Ortega 2011b). Scientology is not recognized as a religion in all the countries where it is present, and over recent decades has come under considerable criticism from scholars, activists, politicians, former members, and journalists concerning, *inter alia*, specific legal cases of fraud and abuse, dissemination and promotion methods, its status as a religion, claims regarding the scientific status of its doctrines, and the truthfulness of the narratives about Hubbard.[6]

The magazine *Advance!*

I have already referenced several argumentations through which Hubbard presented his theories as religious. This issue is the object of much debate; it can be questioned how much such moves were cynical and opportunistic (see Kent 1999 and 1997); it can be asked whether and to what extent Scientology doctrines complemented or in fact contradicted Dianetics; the definition itself of 'religion' needs to be discussed and negotiated before applying it to Scientology. The questions whether Scientology *genuinely* is a religion or not, and whether its founder's statements were opportunistic, will be treated here as irrelevant; the relevant point is that Scientology was *presented* as a religion, that it adopted *symbols* and *rituals* that resemble those of existing creeds, and that its founder and members propagated theories and narratives that explicitly claimed its continuity with other religions.[7]

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6 For an overview see Lewis' *Introduction* to Lewis 2009a (1-14).

7 The scholars of new religious movements widely recognize that one of the factors of success of such movements is the capacity to create continuity (narrative or visual) with established creeds while at the same time marking its identity and novelty i.e. its superiority. See for instance the discussion in Lewis 2009b.

Within Scientology (i.e. among readers who were already members), a major platform for the diffusion of narratives that stressed continuity with other religions was the magazine *Advance!* launched in 1968. Urban describes it as '[...] primarily devoted to religion and to comparing Scientology with various other religions [...] concluding that Scientology is the ultimate fulfilment of the spiritual quest embodied in every one of these faiths' (Urban 2011, 164–165). Given the relatively scant scholarly information available about this publication, I have made use of first-hand statements by ex-Scientology members formerly directly involved in its production.

William Burke, an ex-Scientologist who runs the blog *Ask the Scientologist*, explained:

'The basic format and theme of *Advance!* was specified by L. Ron Hubbard in confidential documents to the editors. The idea was to compare and contrast Scientology with other, established or historical religions and belief systems. The message was always 'This was an earlier attempt by mankind to solve their problems and advance spiritually. They failed but now Scientology has succeeded in accomplishing what they tried and failed to do.' It was called 'positioning' in the advertising world. You put your product next to the image you want people to have of your product – in this case, real religions' (private e-mail, September 4 2014).[8]

Jefferson Hawkins, ex-Scientologist[9] and *Advance!* editor between 1976 (after David Ziff) and 1980, stated that its circulation was approximately 40,000 issues (private e-mail, September 10 2014) and explained:

Hubbard was very much involved in *Advance* Magazine and dictated exactly the sort of articles that should go into it. He gave an hour lecture to the *Advance* Magazine Editor (David Ziff at the time) talking about how to put together these 'spiritual history articles.' They were supposed to follow a set formula - there would be a description of the religion or spiritual practice, then it would end with the statement that these people were searching for spiritual knowledge or spiritual freedom, but they failed to reach their

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8   In the same e-mail Burke continued: 'Unofficially, in lectures, Hubbard said a lot of nasty things about all other religions, except for Buddhism which he liked to say Scientology was derived from. In one or more lectures he disparages Islam and Muhammad quite badly. Those lectures are definitely NOT available from the Church of Scientology but excerpts have appeared on the Internet'.
9   He left in 2005 and spoke out about Scientology fraud and abuse. See his blog *Leaving Scientology.*

goal, and how they would be overjoyed to hear that their spiritual goals can finally be achieved through Scientology. It was an exact set formula. There were many different subjects covered, not only religions, but also things like tarot cards, astrology, divination and so on. […] Basically, these articles were intended for Scientologists, and were supposed to add credibility and gravitas to Scientology by comparing it to other religions and saying it was superior. These articles were very popular with Scientologists […] (private e-mail, September 10 2014).[10]

Whereas *visual* and *linguistic* Christian references (the adoption of collars, of the cross, expressions such as 'pastoral care') seem to be the predominant method through which Hubbard suggested Scientology's continuity with other religions, allusions to Buddhism also prevailed in published pieces and lectures. This resonated with the narratives concerning Hubbard's journeys to Asia as a young man. For instance, he explicitly compared the concept of thetan liberation to that of the achievement of the state of *bodhi*. Hubbard even suggested he might be the *Mettreya*, a 'messianic' figure of Buddhist eschatology in the 'Hymn of Asia' – a poem supposedly composed to celebrate 2,500 years of the Buddhist era (Hubbard 1974 [1956]). However, Hubbard also claimed that Scientology had a goal superior to that of *nirvana* (which he defined as nothingness) since it aimed at perfecting the individual's knowledge. Even more cursorily, remarks were made by Hubbard regarding the Veda as the ancestors of Scientology and about its affinities with Taoism (Urban 2011, 82–6). Hubbard's competence in things Buddhist, and the accuracy of his specific references, however, have been scrutinized and criticized by scholars. References to the Asiatic religions have been explained, besides biographical influences, as catching up with cultural trends of the times.[11]

We should also remark that Scientology currently claims in its official texts to tolerate and accept other creeds. (Scientology Frequently Asked

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10 'I was a Sea Org [i.e. highest-ranking association within Scientology] Member and was working in the promotion and marketing area. I could design (I had a background in commercial art) and could write, so I got the job' (private e-mail, September 10, 2014). 'David Ziff's family owns Ziff-Davis Publishing and is quite wealthy. David decided not to pursue the family business as a career and studied Buddhism and then Scientology. He was a very intelligent man, very bookish, so was a natural for Advance Editor. He was removed in 1976 and sent to the RPF as a supposed 'List One Rockslammer' and I took over as Editor from 1976 to 1980' (private e-mail, September 14 2014).

11 For a thorough and critical discussion of Hubbard's references to Buddhism see Kent 1996 and Kent 1999.

Questions 2015; Scientology Newsroom 2015.) Moreover, some sympathiz-ers have produced essays and texts that complement Hubbard's claims regarding the continuity with other religions.[12] Finally, some scholarly texts regarding the observation of Scientology's similarities with other religions have been absorbed by Scientology itself into its discourse by publishing them in official literature.[13]

I have been able to purchase and analyse two issues of *Advance!* dedicated to Islam: number 33 (1975) and number 43 (1976).[14] In the following sections I offer an analysis of their iconography and narratives.

Advance! **N° 33**

Iconography

I shall analyse the graphic elements in the two issues of *Advance!* not only because of the synergy of illustration and text in the magazine, but also be-cause some of the pictures[15] relating to the articles about Islam are presented on page 1 (*To the Reader*) of *Advance!* N° 33 as belonging to a 'fabulous' series […] personally photographed by L. Ron Hubbard'.[16] It is stated that he 'is well known internationally as a top photographer […]. He brings to each subject his characteristic technical mastery based upon years of exact study and experience.' Hubbard as a photographer is further described as truthful, knowledgeable, and understanding, and it is claimed that his 'brilliant work' represents 'a very important new extension in the field of still photography subject control and aesthetics'.

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12   See Sawada 1998. I was not able to purchase a copy of Safa 1996.

13   Most notably Wilson 1998.

14   They were located in the Stephen A. Kent and Gordon Drever Collections on Alternative Religions that currently contains: *Advance!* Issue 1, Vol. I. 1968. *Advance!* Issue 2, Vol. I; *Advance!* Issue 3, Vol. I; *Advance!* Issue 4, Vol. I; *Advance!* Issue 5, Vol. I; *Advance!* Issue 6, Vol. I; *Advance!* 7; *Advance!* 8; *Advance!* 9; *Advance!* 10; *Advance!* 11; *Advance!* Issue 12; *Advance!* Issue 13–164; *Advance!* Issue 174, 175, 178, 186–193; *Advance!* Issue 194. 2007; *Advance!* Special Issue 1998. Alexis Brown has materially explored the collection for me. The collection cannot be claimed to be complete, hence the present investigation can be integrated by further ones. However, it can be stated that the sources here examined are highly significant since they were authored or directly supervised by Scientology's founder and are in widely disseminated materials to Scientologists. Other informants (ex-Scientologists contacted on the net) were unable or unwilling to assist me with their own collections of the magazine.

15   Such pictures are presently in my archives and can be made available to anybody who is interested.

16   Information confirmed by Jeff Hawkins (private e-mail, September 10 2014).

The picture displays four men sitting cross-legged on a carpet, dressed in stereotypical 'Bedouin' robes with rugs. One in the middle sports a thick and long black beard; he is looking up to the sky. The other three, whom he seems to be directing with a gesture of his left arm, are writing down his words with ink on parchment. In the background three figures seem to be dictating or whispering something to him. One has a sort of paper hat and multicolour wings. We are told that the image represents the moment in which 'The angels reveal God's word (The Koran) to Muhammad who dictates it to his followers'.

The impression is that of a rather amateurishly staged situation, the dresses and props having been improvised. For instance the third standing figure's 'wings' are far from being angel-like and his headgear seems to have been made with cardboard. The turbans and robes rather resemble kitchen towels and curtains. I am not qualified to discuss technicalities in photographic matters; however, in the light of my competence about Islam, I should point out that the picture is not respectful towards its subject: the representation of the Prophet's face is in blatant contradiction with a Muslim taboo.

Further illustrations evoke Islam and the Muslim world. On page 3 is a stylized drawing of a mosque, with the article's title in an 'orientalizing' font; on page 4 is a calligraphy text with the names of God and Muhammad (although the caption only references the former); on page 5 is a miniature of the Prophet represented as faceless and surrounded by a flame that, the caption tells us, signifies His spiritual power.

Narrative

'The Word of God', an anonymous piece, occupies three pages.[17] It presents two features typical of Scientology literature in general and of *Advance!* in particular. First, the extremely pedagogical tone: 'difficult' terms (both English and Arabic, such as 'vestment' and 'jinni' respectively) are explained in footnotes,[18] and popular misconceptions about Islam (such as the use of the term 'Mohammedanism') are corrected. Second, there is a frequent use of exclamation marks (cf. the title itself *Advance!*[19]); the style of the text sounds

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17   Given the limited size of the pieces I shall not indicate page numbers.

18   Complementarily to the usage of a special jargon, Scientology texts systematically insist on the importance of having understood each and every term before proceeding further in learning. See Lewis 2009b, 9.

19   A generous usage of exclamation marks also characterizes Hubbard's novels.

as if its author wants to acknowledge or induce a sense of wonder felt by the reader approaching such a novel matter (cf. the first sentence: 'A book, a revelation, the direct word of God!'). Exclamation marks are counterbalanced by question marks that highlight the most pedagogical passages ('How did it happen that an illiterate trader from remote southwest Arabia could rise to such eminence?'). The article also displays a taste for 'hard' data, especially in a passage that gives statistics about the verses and words of the Qur'an. Some brief quotations from the Qur'an are also provided.

The narrative is designed to convey the idea of continuity with Scientology, especially after the introductory, 'factual' part. A parallel is suggested between the Prophet and Hubbard, emphasizing that the former 'met the fate of all genuine religious reformers. He was at first jeered, rebuked and attacked by the materialists and vested interests of his day.' It is also stated that idolatry which he fought against, '[...] was big business in ancient Arabia, the AMA [American Medical Association] of its day!' The theological significance of Islam is reduced to two teachings: (i) 'Only the ethical will realize their true spiritual potential'; and (ii) 'Spiritual goals are senior to the craving for sensation or possessions'. Further affinity with Scientology is suggested by recalling the belief that the Black Stone in Mecca was of extra-terrestrial origin. Finally, a rudimentary 'Qur'anic exegesis' is formulated in Scientology jargon. It is explained that 'The Koran was an attempt to introduce a more spiritualized and less anthropomorphic concept of the 8th dynamic', and that in a quoted Qur'anic passage 'God's chronic tone level in this work is from 1.5 - anger - to 2.0 - antagonism!'

Towards the end, the tone of the article abruptly changes. It is claimed that Islam 'failed', since it turned violent and could not cope with modernity: 'in Islamic lands, the authority of the Koran itself is rapidly receding as it fails to provide answers to a space age world.' The conclusion is that 'The Koran was another fascinating milestone in Man's relentless search for the solution to the riddle of his own destiny', but another way has been found: Dianetics and Scientology, which, the author proclaims, have 'brought the dawn'.

Advance! **N° 43**

Iconography

Advance! N° 43 displays three pictures. The cover illustration, by Hubbard, is set in a wood. In front of what seems to be a wooden catapult we see nine

men. Four of them lie dead – one sports a red cross on his white vestments. The remaining figures are dressed in 'Bedouin-like' robes with turbans. One on the left has just slaughtered one of the men lying on the ground, dressed in white, with a scimitar. Three are raising their scimitars to the sky. A fifth man, on his knees, seems to be examining or plundering one of the victims (his identity is ambiguous).

On the first page, the short text titled *Contents* states:

The Moslem-Christian wars in the Middle Ages were a bloody chronicle in Man's history. Yet Islam (Mohammedism) which gave world the *jihad* (holy war) also nurtured, surprisingly enough, a mystical philosophy in in the highest tradition of Man's long search for Truth and Freedom.

A parallel short piece titled *To the Reader* reads:

[The cover] represents a typical bloody scene from the Crusades. One of the principal battlefields of that period was the area we now call Lebanon. The amazing thing is that a thousand years later the scene is virtually the same.[20] [...] This is what we call the dramatization of a third dynamic engram.

On page 6 we find another photograph by Hubbard. In a sandy landscape, we see a white-haired, long-bearded figure, barefoot and wearing a white turban, draped in a green tunic, and threatened with rocks and scimitars by younger-looking, stereotypically Bedouin figures who are similarly barefoot and wearing red and white robes. (One of them might actually be holding him up rather than grasping him). In the background we see a black cuboid with a golden stripe. The article and a caption suggest that the picture represents the Prophet of Islam 'persecuted by the religious bigots of his day', and that the black cuboid is the *Kaaba*. On page 9 an artistic drawing shows three whirling dervishes 'after an illustration in a Persian manuscript'.

Narrative

The article 'Sufism. The Moslem Search for Truth' was most probably authored by David Ziff (the credits on page 1 report 'leading article by the Editor' and the remaining ones by Hubbard). Whereas its goal, structure, and critical depth are analogous to those of the previous article, it can be

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20   The Lebanese Civil War had begun in spring 1975 and would last until 1990.

said that this one is slightly better crafted and less strident in tone. It begins describing Islam's past greatness, represented by the flourishing of Cordoba in medieval times. The author emphasises that the Muslims exported their civilization to Europe, so 'no one should arrogantly look down on the Moslem peoples', then goes on to distinguish the 'lesser *jihad*', the historical warfare against the infidels, from the 'greater *jihad*' or the mystical quest. The latter is described as the 'finest achievement of Islam'. The author recalls the emergence of Sufi mystics and emphasizes that Sufis seek 'Reality' (a term typical of Scientology but here quoted in a Sufi prayer). The author also recalls how Sufism was persecuted in Baghdad. Reference is made to personalities such as al-Hallaj, al-Ghazali, Omar Khayyam and Rumi. The core of Sufi doctrines is summarized as follows: (i) 'Man [...] was trapped by his own ignorance'; (ii) he existed 'in a trapped state'; (iii) he was dominated by the 'lower soul'.

The attempt to establish a resonance with Scientology's doctrines is apparent. It is stated that the Sufis' goal was 'the traditional spiritual goal of personal realization and fulfilment on the eighth dynamic. It's really that simple.' It is emphasized that Sufis rejected academic learning, and insisted on love and ethics. All this is argued with plenty of quotations (whose authors, such as Saadi and Rumi, are cited, but not the precise works).

Sufism is presented as embryonic Scientology; the author states that its chief practice was '[...] a meditation exercise called *remembrance* [emphasis in the original] as it consisted of 'remembering' God in a very intense way [...] always done under the guidance of a teacher.' By repeating the phrase 'there is no god but God', the disciple, argues the author, gradually eliminates his attachment to things, replacing it with a love of God. Reference is also made to other contemplative and ecstatic practices, such as dervishes' dances. The article concludes by suggesting that the Sufis were striving to attain the status of OT; however, Sufism failed: 'it didn't have a clue about the reactive mind' and 'its 'tech' [...] would interiorize the individual and eventually spin him in'. The article ends with the statement that the Sufis' dream 'has become our everyday achievement'.

Advance! 33 and 43: possible sources and influences

An anonymous ex-Scientologist informant has suggested[21] that a possible source of information for the articles at stake might have been the *Story of*

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21 Private communication in the forum *Operation Clambake*, September 1–3 2014.

Civilization by Will Durant (1885–1981), a simplified and popularized history of the world published between 1935 and 1975. Durant, philosopher and historian, covered the Prophet of Islam in the volume *The Age of Faith* (published in 1950). He presented history as the product of the agency of extraordinary individuals. Hubbard held Durant in high esteem, and dedicated the book on Dianetics to him (Hubbard 1950b). Durant's conception of history and the concept of 'great men' were in line with (and nourished) Hubbard's self-perception.[22]

I have been pursuing this line of investigation by comparing the *Advance!* article about the Prophet with relevant passages of Durant's *Story* (Durant 1950). I do not cast any doubts about his overall influence on Hubbard, and I find it likely that he could be one of the sources for such texts. However, the article at stake does not seem to be an edited version of Durant's text (for instance the transcription of Arabic terms and names does not coincide), albeit similar in style and content. Some of the pro-Muslim sentences are too uniquely Muslim in tone and details to be independently written by Hubbard or a non-Muslim; perhaps the text was produced by editing some pro-Muslim material.

On the matter of possible sources I have further addressed Hawkins, who recalled:

> The editor would research the subject out of encyclopedias or other books. Hubbard had an old set of Encyclopedia Britannica (1911) and that was used while we were on the ship. I became Advance Editor in 1976, and I used to research these articles at the Clearwater library. (Private communication, September 10 2014.)

I have followed this suggestion and compared the texts at stake with the 1911 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, but they do not seem to have been directly taken from there.

Other references to Islam

Hubbard alluded to Islam in other texts, that appeared prior to *Advance!* In an 'Essay on Management' dated 9 January 1951, the Prophet of Islam is

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22 Regarding *The Story of Philosophy* (1928) by Durant, Gerald Willms writes: '(…) [T]his story contains nearly everything that is basic to Hubbard's anthropological and, moreover, anthropocentric philosophy: the matter/mind problem as one of the most popular themes in the occidental philosophy (…); the principle of pleasure and pain (…) as the one and universal motive of human action, the (pre-)utilitarian views on utility as virtue, and egoism as reason. The most impressive, sometimes literal source, however, is Durant's Spinoza, especially with regard to the view that mechanical laws of nature have to be applied to the functions of the mind' (Willms 2009, 249).

evoked as a successful 'manager': 'Nations are so large that until they embark upon conquests they usually have few national goals which embrace all the group [...] Asia Minor, given a goal by Mohammed, exploded into Europe' (Hubbard 1951a, 288). Hubbard expands on the concept of national goals, which, he claims, '[...] are dreamed first by one man, then embraced by a few, and finally held up as the guidon of many.' The Prophet was an instance of this phenomenon, since he '[...] sat alongside the caravan routes until he had a goal formulated and his followers managed Mohammedanism into a conquest of a large part of civilization'; an analogous role is attributed to Thomas Jefferson, Christ, and Saint Paul (Hubbard 1951a, 289).

In 'Some Notes on Black Dianetics' (a 'professional lecture' dated September 17, 1951), Hubbard, talking about mental manipulation, cites as an example a narrative about the Persian Hassan-i Sabbāh (1050–1124 CE), the Old Man of the Mountains who led the sect of the *Hashshashin* or *assassins*. According to the legend, he had created in his fortress a 'Qur'anic paradise' full of physical pleasures. Select young men were narcotized through *hashish* (hence the term *assassins*), and brought to a state where they were induced to believe that they were in paradise and could then be manipulated to kill people in the world outside with the promise they would be welcomed back 'in paradise' again. (Hubbard 1951b, 266–267). The same narrative is briefly alluded to within a similar context in a 'professional course' entitled 'Mysticism', dated February 2 1952 (Hubbard 1952a, 167–168).

An official Scientology webpage highlights another reference to Islam in 'The Hope of Man,' a lecture given on June 3, 1955: '[The spiritual leaders of the past] handed on a torch of wisdom, of information, generation to generation. It was handed along geographical routes and one of those geographical routes was the Middle East. And one of the people who handed it on was a man named Moses. And again it was handed on to a man named Christ. And he handed it on and even the Arab nations benefited from this through their own prophet, Muhammad.'[23]

Anti-Scientology activists are eager to dig out less flattering references by Hubbard to Islam in order to contrast Scientology's alleged continuity with and respect for other faiths. A post entitled 'Scientology Slanders Islam', posted on the anti-Scientology website *Operation Clambake* by the user 'J. Swift' on June 5, 2009 points to the lecture: 'What's Wrong with this Universe: A Working Package for the Auditor' (9 Dec 1952) and supplies this transcript of an excerpt:

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23 See Scientology Newsroom 2015.

It's [the Black Stone] an enormous stone hanging suspended in the middle of a room, this is an incident called the Emanator by the way, and this thing is by the way the source of the Mohammedan Lodestone that they have hanging down there, that, eh, when Mohammed decided to be a good small-town booster in eh Kansas, Middle-East, or something of the sort. By the way, the only reason he [the Prophet] mocked that thing up [Islam], is the trade wasn't good in his hometown. That's right. You read the life of Mohammed. And he's got a black one and it sort of hung between the ceiling and the floor, I don't know, maybe they call it the Casbah or something or… Anyway, anyway, that thing is a mockup of the Emanator! The Emanator is bright, not black. And so, your volunteer, who insists on a sightseeing trip, goes in and this thing is standing in the middle of the room, and it's going 'wong wong wong wong wong' and he says: 'Isn't that pretty?'. It sure is, and then he says 'Mmmgrmrm ponk' Why, I'll tell you, they cart him from there, and they take him in and they do a trans-position of beingness. [24]

We do not need to embark here in a word-to-word exegesis of Hubbard's claims. However we can remark that he seemingly employs 'Kansas' meaning an arid and insignificant place and, more importantly, confuses the term *Kaaba* with *Kasbah*, usually designating the citadel or the oldest part of an Islamic city.[25]

The other visual or verbal references to Islam and its Prophet that have been located in the empirical material I have analysed can be regarded as negligible.[26]

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24   'J. Swift' 2009. It directs to Hubbard 1952b.

25   The post further reports remarks by Hubbard about the Arab 'race' (20th Advanced Clinical Course, 'Case Analysis—Rock Hunting', August 4, 1958). Finally, it points out that in Footnote 6 Scientology's filing for tax exemption in the US states that, 'Although there is no policy or Scriptural mandate expressly requiring Scientologists to renounce other religious beliefs or membership in other churches, as a practical matter Scientologists are expected to and do become fully devoted to Scientology to the exclusion of other faiths. As Scientologists, they are required to look only to Scientology Scriptures for the answers to the fundamental questions of their existence and to seek enlightenment only from Scientology.'

26   For instance, CSC 1978 contains a paragraph about the Prophet 'who taught that spiritual goals are more important than material goals' as well as a depiction of him; see also CSI 1992, CSI 1998, 2. Remarks about Islam (some of which rather stereotypical and potentially offensive) can be also found in the second and third volumes of Hubbard's series *Mission Earth*, respectively entitled *Black Genesis* and *The Enemy Within*, whose story partly takes place in Turkey. Such remarks are attributed to the series' villain, Soltan Gris, or filtered through his narrative. We read for instance in *Black Genesis* that a 'turbaned' character explains to him: 'You have to understand the Mohammedan religion. […] in the Middle East, it is tradition that the children, including boys, are raised in, and have to live in, the harem.' (Hubbard 1986a, 308). In *The Enemy Within* a character described as 'Moroccan' observes: 'Allah forbids the rendition of live figures' (Hubbard 1986b, 87).

Scientology and 9/11

Scientology took a stance about the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, attributed to the Islamist terrorist network al-Qaeda, on at least two occasions. In the days immediately following the massacre, Scientologists were actively engaged around the remains of the buildings while allegedly providing the rescue workers with food and psychological assistance. The Church's building on 46th Street was renamed 'Disaster Relief Headquarters', and volunteers were invited to join. This version was given some visibility in the media: *The New York Times*, while cursorily recognizing that the suspicion of proselytizing lingered over the entire operation (in fact along with food and practical help in the form of a massage often came the proposal of an auditing session), reported the claims of John Carmichael (president of the Church in New York) who emphasised that Scientologists were only 'trying to help' (Waldman 2001). However, anti-Scientology activists, producing intercepted e-mails from Scientologists in New York City, stated that the group was taking advantage of traumatized people and interfering with legitimate mental health practitioners active in the disaster zone. They pointed out that Scientology cynically promoted itself in the media under the name National Mental Health Assistance, very close to that of the organization National Mental Health *Association* (see Graham 2001).[27]

What is most relevant for the present analysis, however, is that no anti-Islamic or Islam-related overtones can be identified in the discourse around this event. In other words, the 9/11 tragedy was not exploited in official Scientology discourse in order to blame Islam.

Eight years later, while recognizing that it was not completely sure that the Egyptian physician and al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri was the person who masterminded the massacre, Dave Figueroa, then president of the *Citizens Commission on Human Rights* (recognized as a Scientology front group), declared that the terrorist was a psychiatrist (a claim unsupported by any evidence) who manipulated al-Qaeda founder Osama bin Laden through psychiatric practices and (unspecified) drugs (see Edroso 2009, Forsloff 2009, von Marcab 2009).

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27 Scientology's involvement in post-9/11 volunteering is also reconstructed in Cusack and Digance 2009. I was surprised to see that the authors, albeit admitting that it had not been possible to discover how exactly Scientology was granted permission 'to undertake such a high-profile role' (Cusack and Digance 2009, 437) do not mention *any* criticism of the initiative, not even in the interest of scholarly completeness.

Scientology and the Nation of Islam

Scientology is also associated with Islam in the context of the adoption of Dianetics by the Nation of Islam (NOI), a religious black-nationalist group adhering to Islam and founded in Detroit in 1930 by Wallace Fard Muhammad (1893–? [disappeared in 1934]). He was presented and perceived, *inter alia*, as the Islamic Mahdi or Prophet (or even Allah).[28] NOI's leader Louis Farrakhan (b. 1933), who allegedly recognized in 2005 the beneficial effects of Dianetics on a NOI minister in Los Angeles called Tony Muhammad, started encouraging followers in 2010 to take auditing and to become Scientology auditors. According to NOI's official newspaper the *Final Call*, in 2012 more than 1,000 members had become certified auditors and another 4,000 were studying 'some aspect of Scientology' (Gray 2012). Farrakhan was unconcerned with the fact that Hubbard was white (and at best uninterested in the social causes promoted by NOI if not blatantly racist); he regarded Dianetics as a useful technology, 'a tool that I can use to help our people' (Hallowell 2012).[29]

All this resonated with a Scientology policy aimed at proselytizing among black communities that included founding churches in Harlem and Inglewood, California, as well as discounts for NOI members (Gray 2012). It has been suggested that NOI and Scientology already enjoyed some affinity. NOI's beliefs also include UFO-related narratives (such as that a 'Mother Plane' is alluded to in the Book of Ezekiel[30]) and greatly emphasises self-improvement. Moreover, NOI similarly perceives itself as under attack by malignant media (Gray 2012).[31]

Interpretation

What would Hubbard choose from the Islamic basket? We can now draw some observations and extrapolations from the empirical material observed so far.

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28 '12. WE BELIEVE that Allah (God) appeared in the Person of Master W. Fard Muhammad, July, 1930; the long-awaited 'Messiah' of the Christians and the 'Mahdi' of the Muslims' (Nation of Islam 2015).

29 In her autobiographical *Little X. Growing Up in the Nation of Islam* author Sonsyrea Tate recalls 'Ma […] would later become a minister in the Church of Scientology, explaining that its philosophies in no way contradict those of Islam. She preaches universal love and universal understanding and forgiveness now' (Tate 1997, 227).

30 See Elijah Muhammad 2010 [1973].

31 For a polemical viewpoint see Ortega 2001a. For media coverage on part of NOI's newspaper see Muhammad 2013, Muhammad 2012, Muhammad 2011. See also Warikoo 2013.

From the 1950s onwards, Hubbard was emphasizing that Scientology was a religion. In Hjärpe's parlance we might state that he was constructing a 'Scientology basket'. One might be tempted, following Hjärpe's image, to argue that Hubbard basically was taking from Islam the very 'basket' he needed – the 'religious container' – in order to present Scientology itself as a religion. However, this statement, upon closer inspection, appears simplistic, since in fact it is not simply claimed Scientology continues and complements the Islamic revelation. In the articles examined here, the argumentation followed by Hubbard is based on a more complex *dialectic*.

On the one hand Islam is 'exoticized' and provided with an aura of *antiquity* and fascinating 'otherness' that Hubbard can draw upon, thus allowing Scientology to enjoy the same aura. This 'exoticization' is not necessarily and completely intentional; it can be also seen as depending on Hubbard's (and the Scientologists') non-scholarly understanding and amateurish information about Islam, clearly indicated by elements such as the inconsistent oscillation between the usage of the terms Mohammedanism/Islam, the confusion of the terms *Casbah/Kaaba*, and the depiction of the Prophet's face (outrageous for a Muslim readership). Furthermore, it can be argued that Islam was in any case liable to be perceived as exotic *per se*, like any non-Western religion, by Hubbard's readership in the 1970s. The exotic/exoticizing character of the 'Islamic basket' exploited by Hubbard can be better understood if we recall that he also adopted Christian-like symbols, which had more of a *normalizing* function for his audience (i.e. they conveyed a religious aura but they were also identical or similar to other symbols that an American public was accustomed to).

From another point of view, Islam is made relevant for Scientology (and modernity) by emphasizing its alleged 'scientific'/Scientological elements (i.e. both its scientific supremacy and the alleged presence of ethical and epistemological intuitions later developed by Dianetics and Scientology).

In the texts (and pictures) examined, Islam is presented *both* as an ennobling and exoticizing canopy for Scientology *and* as a form of spirituality that anticipated Scientology itself, a 'Scientology of old': Scientology is religionized in Islamic garb, and Islam is 'Scientologicized.' Such a dialectic is constantly present in the texts analysed here, and according to scholarly studies (and in line with my informants' observations) seems analogous to the use made by Hubbard of other non-Western religions such as Buddhism. Sticking to Hjärpe's metaphor here proves rather difficult; we might say that Scientology is placed in the Islamic basket and *vice versa*, simultaneously.

Other, more specific items of the 'Islamic basket' seem to be placed into the 'Scientology basket' in accordance with this dialectic. One is the Prophet, who is presented as a religious, exotic figure but also as a contemporary 'manager' when reading it through Durant's philosophy. Another item is the lesser *jihad* presented as a partially successful 'enterprise'. Interestingly the *jihad* was not evoked as a threat for the West as it currently happens in Islamophobic discourse (that often fails to distinguish between a lesser and greater one). Also this is probably seen as a reflection of the times. Islamophobia was possible but it was not *necessary*.

As mentioned in the introductory paragraphs, the question 'What would Ron choose from the Islamic basket?' can also be interpreted as a question about Scientology's theological developments and PR strategies.

In scholarly analysis, one should not engage in future-telling, especially if the theoretical framework chosen is non-confessional and nominalistic, as Hjärpe's is. We should set no limits to the creativity of theologians. However it is of some interest to debate the extent to which Scientologists might be willing and able to intervene in Scientology's beliefs and ideas (i.e. to place or take items in and out from their 'basket')[32] while presenting themselves to potential *converts* and *interlocutors* with a non-Western and non-Christian cultural/religious background.

It is at present unclear whether Scientology has the capacity (or the ambition) to expand in Muslim countries.[33] However, such a case might be Turkey, which is close to Europe and also economically developed enough to constitute an interesting market.[34] The encounter of Scientology with the

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32   For a discussion of the most central beliefs of Scientology see Christensen 2009a.

33   Issue 298 of the Scientology publication *The Auditor* reports a short piece about Scientology being introduced to the Toronto Iranian Community by Auditor Vaheed Jaberanasari (Anonymous *Auditor* Scientologist Undated). Through anti-Scientology related mailing lists and websites I could read articles regarding occasional collaboration between Scientology and Turkish Muslims in Germany in the late 1990s, as well as about short-lived propositions to Muhammar Gaddafi, and a rejected attempt of a collaboration proposal with the Grand Mufti of Russia in 2001 (see Clamato 2001). No further info about such events could be located. However such episodes seem to involve more financial/juridical/political issues than doctrinal discussions.

34   There seems to be a very limited presence. A newspaper article (Akbaş 2007) claims that Scientologists came to Turkey during the earthquake in 1999. The Turkey representative of the Church of Scientology Umut Duman (see Duman 2004) told the newspaper that upon his invitation, four representatives of the Scientology humanitarian organization Volunteer Ministers came to the earthquake affected area and registered around 500 Turks. Duman is also quoted as saying that there are around 30 active members in Turkey, and that efforts are made to translate Scientology works into Turkish. Another newspaper article (Anonymous *Habertürk* Reporter 2008) claims that four recruitment agencies linked to the Church of Scientology have been established in Turkey.

Nation of Islam is another example in the wider context of a non-Middle Eastern country. Another scenario is the one in which Scientologists officially claim a *compatibility* with Islam in order to be accepted as credible interlocutors in a dialogue of religions, or at least to uphold the weaker claim according to which Scientology is *respectful* towards other religions.[35] In fact Islam-related official statements made over the past years seem to be rather limited to the declared advocacy of religious tolerance (the refusal to view 9/11 in Islamophobic fashion should be read in this perspective, channelling criticism instead towards the traditional polemical object of Scientology – the psychiatric establishment).

Which of the items in the basket might be useful, and what could or should be discarded? While arguing for Scientology's compatibility or affinity with Islam, the vagueness of its concept of God (the eighth dynamic) (see Bednarowski 1989, 63) could be both an advantage (i.e. as another lesser 'basket' available to be filled with concepts sympathetic for potential new members) and a disadvantage (Muslims could precisely claim that they already entertain a much more articulated concept of God). The idea of reincarnation doesn't seem reconcilable with Islam. Another potential disadvantage in a specifically Middle-Eastern and traditionally Muslim context is that Scientology as a whole may be negatively identified by critics as quintessentially Western and indeed specifically American. Analogous considerations hold for the Christian-like elements in Scientology's language, symbols, and rituals.

I have already highlighted the absence of blatantly Islamophobic official statements in recent years, even in contexts that could have inspired them; Scientologists might capitalize on this and contrast it with the less friendly official statements about Islam made within other religions. There are, however, other statements made both by the founder and by other Scientology-related authors which can be seen as stereotyping, inaccurate, or even offensive, and these should also be taken into account. In all of the aforementioned scenarios they potentially undermine not only Scientology's claim of a theological affinity/compatibility but also its claim regarding tolerance and respect for Islam, not to mention the scholarly credibility of those who make such claims.

Specifically concerning the encounter with the Nation of Islam, we should note that the way that Islamic beliefs are interpreted within a movement like

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35 The Mayor's Interfaith Council in Washington, DC did include at least one representative of Scientology, Reverend Susan Lee Taylor between 2011 and 2013 (for its functions and members see Mayor's Office of Religious Affairs, Undated).

this one are regarded as deviant or heretical by the majority of Muslims. Moreover, what we see in it is at most a pragmatic convergence with the practice of Dianetics: so far no theological synthesis has been proposed, doctrinal discussion being limited to the statements by Louis Farrakhan cited above. Hence, we should be cautious in assuming that the adoption of Dianetics by NOI can be seen as a 'prototypic experiment' in the fusion or encounter of their respective beliefs, with any potential for application on a larger scale. Such encounter as has occurred is due to Farrakhan's initiative, and may well fade away after a change in leadership. Yet if anything can be learned from such alliance, it is that in order for Scientology to attract Muslim believers or communities, a winning strategy might be to eliminate from the 'basket' most of the specifically religious items and leave the 'scientific' ones. In other words, Scientology might succeed in a Muslim environment by shrinking back to Dianetics.

<div align="center">* * *</div>

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Musical religiosity

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Abstract

In this essay the author explores the thesis that music is by its nature religious, or rather, that it has qualities that correspond well with what religion, in a broad sense, aspires to be. Four musical qualities are explored: timbre, the tonal system of western music, the time relations within the tonal network, and the non-referential nature of music. These qualities are linked to the definition of 'the religious' by John Dewey. The main conclusion is that an analogy can be shown between the musical and the religious experience: both composers and musicians challenge the listeners to explore the hidden religiosity in the performance of music.

Keywords: *music, religion, transcendence, experience*

In December 2010 I attended a performance of the composition *Blue Encounter* by the Dutch composer Joep Franssens,[1] a fascinating piece that 'moved' me during the performance. *Blue Encounter* is a composition for solo instrument. It was performed by Sarah Oates, a young violinist, who played the work with great concentration. The live performance made everyone focus on the violinist and the music she was making. For fifteen minutes Oates captivated the audience of over a hundred people. With just her violin, she managed to achieve the greatest possible richness of sound, as she let the long melodic lines flow into each other, making good use of the acoustics. Oates created a sphere, a soundscape, in which the audience could, albeit temporarily, 'live' (Murray Schafer 1993).

New spirituality

joep Franssens (1955) can be regarded as a composer of the New Spirituality movement. Internationally, this movement is associated with composers such as Arvo Pärt (Hillier 1997; Shenton 2012), John Tavener (Dudgeon

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1 For more on the composer Joep Franssens, see <www.joepfranssens.com>.

2003), Pēteris Vasks and Henryk Górecki (Thomas 1997). In the Netherlands the main representatives of the New Spirituality movement are Franssens, Daan Manneke and Coen Vermeeren. Critics have described the music by these composers as a denial of the usual format of western, classical music (Fisk 1994). Rather than a propelling motion, a development of themes and motifs, the New Spirituality composers present us with a standstill: their music moves forward very slowly, it is not about motion, but about the sound itself. Critics also refer to New Spirituality as 'New Simplicity'. A more positive approach would be to describe the New Spirituality compositions as affirmative music: it consists of comprehensible, tonal harmonies and does not set out to alienate the listener. Communication with the listener is key (Cobussen 2007).

The biographies of New Spirituality composers show that they place themselves, implicitly or explicitly, in a religious tradition, and their music is to a greater or lesser extent an expression of their religiosity. We could say that the consciously sought-after simplicity of these compositions serves a higher purpose, the expression of the religious. Josiah Fisk provocatively writes:

> With the religious aspect we get closer to the nub of the problem. We are asked to accept that the New Simplists' elimination of the play of ideas in music isn't born of highhandedness, confusion or lack of ability. It is authorized by powers far beyond human comprehension. (Fisk 1994, 405.)

Joep Franssens also places himself in a religious field of meaning. He says: 'I did not have a religious upbringing. I am not Russian Orthodox like Pärt, or Catholic like Górecki. I stay away from everything to do with the institutionalization of religion. But there is something. There is more than we can perceive.'(Van Eekeren 1999)[2] Through his music Franssens aims to make that 'something' explicit and thus 'move' people. 'When music does not move the heart, it does not move anything', says Franssens in an interview in the *Timbres* magazine. (Lelie 2010, 18.)

Social-cultural context and frame

Blue Encounter by Joep Franssens aims to be 'religious music', at least that is how I understand the composer, and that is how I understand this com-

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2   All translations by the author.

position as part of the New Spirituality movement. But what does it mean, religious music? Let me take my own listening experience as a starting point for my reflection. What moves me when I listen to *Blue Encounter*? I experience listening to this composition as a special moment, a sacred or holy moment (Evans 2003). 'Sacred' means something like 'whole and healing' (Van Uden & Pieper 2012). For a moment there is unity, my existence is one. Listening to *Blue Encounter*, time and space momentarily cease to exist. In my listening experience there is only sound, I am captivated by the music, I am captivated by the movement of Sarah Oates, I engage myself with her and the music she is making. For a moment there is, in my experience, an ideal situation of unity, harmony and happiness (Small 1998).

The performance of *Blue Encounter* was attended by around a hundred people. Did all of them experience this performance as an expression of religiosity? The performance took place during a symposium at Radboud University, Nijmegen (the Netherlands), entitled *Welluidend modern klassiek. Over nieuwe spirituele muziek* (Harmonious Modern Classical Music. About New Spiritual Music). In other words, those present knew that they were going to hear 'spiritual music'. Their ears had, as it were, been pre-tuned. We always listen to music within a certain context (Blacking 1995). That context to an important extent determines what meanings we attribute to music. The production and reception of music can only be understood if we realize that composers, performers and listeners operate within the parameters of a specific social-cultural context (Shepherd 1991). Whether music is considered 'good' or 'important' depends, at least partly, on the meanings a social group attributes to this music. What this actually means is that music itself does not have an objective, fixed meaning. In other words, the meaning of music is not *in* the music; meaning can only be attributed to it. The meaning there is, is one that is *experienced* and one that depends on the subject who is listening to it or performing it (Hoondert 2009). This also applies to music that is classed as religious: music *is* not religious, but it can be *experienced* as religious. For that matter, this applies to the religious in general: nothing is religious in itself; depending on people's interaction with something, the religious can appear in everything and anything can acquire a religious meaning (Borgman 2006, 65).

In addition to the social-cultural factors that always play a role in the process of attributing meaning, the concrete listening experience is largely determined by the setting or *frame* in which a musical performance takes place. Framing is something we do all the time: we search for interpretations of cultural expressions we encounter by placing them in a specific frame

(Bell 1997, 160). Sometimes the frame is handed to us from the outside. For example, a church acts as a frame: music we hear within the walls of a church, whether as part of a ritual or in a concert, will generally acquire a religious meaning. Titles of a composition can also act as a frame. An example of this is the composition *Sanctus* (1996) by Joep Franssens. The title of this work refers to one of the fixed sections of the Roman Catholic liturgy. The *Sanctus* is part of the Ordinary of the Mass (the sections that do not vary by different seasons or occasions) and for many it is a familiar term. For some of the listeners, this will 'direct' the process of attributing meaning: they will search for an attribution of meaning that for them 'corresponds' with the title of the composition. However, Franssens did not compose *Sanctus* for the liturgy. He has radically transformed the form: we do not get to hear the text from the liturgy which we would expect. *Sanctus* by Joep Franssens is an instrumental composition without a text and has a duration of more than twenty minutes.

Categorizing the works by composers such as Joep Franssens, Arvo Pärt, John Tavener and Henryk Górecki as New Spirituality also acts as a frame. Not the composers, but journalists and musicologists are the ones who have given this movement its name. They have created a new frame in which this music is perceived. A lot of the music by the 'new spiritualists' employs old compositional techniques: from a modernist perspective, this music is old-fashioned and refers to the past rather than to the present. By means of reframing, by placing the music in a new frame, it is given a positive classification. This music is not 'unmodern', no, it is 'new spirituality'. And spirituality is 'in' (De Hart 2011; Houtman and Aupers 2007).

Blue Encounter complies with the frame of New Spirituality. To a certain extent it is harmonious music that is easy to understand: it develops somewhat slowly, without sudden changes in dynamics, tempo or rhythm. Both the setting of the symposium and the frame of New Spirituality acted, as it were, as a church for *Blue Encounter*: the listeners were willing to accept the music as an expression of religiosity. The frame may even be so dominant that we perceive meanings which are not intended. This became painfully obvious when a second work was played at the same symposium: *ShivaShakti* (2008) by Rokus de Groot. When this composition was also announced as 'new spiritual music', the composer immediately responded that he himself did not classify his music as such.

Hidden religiosity in music

We have seen that the explicit religious meanings we attribute to music are to a great extent determined by the social-cultural context and the frame in which the musical performance takes place. However, the performance also comprises a 'hidden religiosity', hidden because it is musical. I would like to elaborate on this by describing how music works. But before I do this, I would like to discuss the concept of 'hidden religiosity'.

This concept has been defined by Leo van der Tuin in his inaugural lecture from 2008 (Van der Tuin 2008). Generally, in our culture, religion and religiosity are seen as categories undergoing change. Religion is not disappearing, but it is transforming (Van de Donk 2006). The institutional form ('religion') is being replaced by a more individualistic form ('religiosity'). In his inaugural lecture Van der Tuin prefers to speak of religiosity, defining it as 'people's desire to continue to search for answers so they can deal with the uncertainty of their existence' (Van der Tuin 2008, 21). Van der Tuin does not approach religiosity as a theoretical category, but as a praxis: it becomes visible in the doings of people. Religiosity is first and foremost

> […] the praxis of symbolic action in which the desire for a transcendental attribution of meaning to the unfathomable miracle of existence is expressed. The vocabulary – words, images, symbols, music – in which these meanings are expressed, sometimes contains traditional language which, used in new contexts, should be interpreted anew, and sometimes it contains new language which is not yet understood according to its proper meaning. (Van der Tuin 2008, 21.)

In this last phrase, Van der Tuin gives a description of 'hidden religiosity': it refers to a language that researchers or representatives of institutionalized religions do not immediately recognise as 'religious'. And it might also refer to a form of religiosity that those who are themselves attributing meaning do not place in the field of meaning of 'religion'.

How can we uncover this 'hidden religiosity'? Can it be researched, or is the gap between the conceptual frame of the researcher and that of the 'field' unbridgeable? Is there a traceable form of religiosity, or is it, by its nature, undetectable? Van der Tuin appears to approach these probing questions from a particular preconception when he states that religion is simply there:

> [Religion is] inherent in a culture and society that maintains the human measure, precisely because that is, in the end, what it is about: the ultimate

meaning of reality, the meaning that finally lies beyond existence, beyond life. (Van der Tuin 2008, 21.)

Underlying this, one can perceive the ideas about meaning and transcendence of philosophers such as Heidegger, Levinas, or Derrida, who argue that experiences of meaning are always transcendent: in other words, they are exempt from human control or manipulation (Burms and Dijn 1986). However much I may identify myself with this philosophical tradition and however much I may be willing to accept the premise that religion is a self-evident part of culture, it will have to prove itself 'in the field'. In other words, the much-heard and often cited thesis that institutionalized religion has not disappeared, but has transformed and taken on a cultural form, requires careful investigation. Such investigation needs to be of an ethnographic nature: it will examine behaviour through the eyes of the participants and let them explain how that behaviour is meaningful for them; and whether it entails a notion of transcendence; and also whether the meanings that are found are religious in some understandable or still to be discovered way.

However, there is yet another way to trace the 'hidden religiosity', namely by experiencing it. How? By listening to music intensely and with full attention. I want to defend the thesis that music is by its nature religious, or rather, that it has qualities that correspond well with what religion aspires to be. If we listen intensely, we participate in the movement and in the 'now' of the music. Does this listening experience explain the fact that music plays such an important role in almost all religions (Beck 2006; Suppan 1984)? Music can be heard in many different ways in relation to religion, but music is always there, whether it is the recitation of psalms or verses of the Qur'an, the communal singing of a strophic hymn, the listening to a melodious motet by Bruckner or the singing of a mantra. There is a close connection between music, rituality and religiosity, a connection which I believe is also logical and explicable (Beck 1993).

The working of music

To explain my hypothesis, I will use a book by Kathleen Harmon, who is music director for the programmes of the Institute for Liturgical Ministry in Dayton, Ohio (USA). In 2008 she published a theology of liturgical music titled *The mystery we celebrate, the song we sing* (Harmon 2008). In her book she attempts to understand music from within, making use of theories by various authors. I will summarize her discourse in four points.

Participation

Music is a form of sound. Any sound, whether musical tones or simply noise, manifests itself to us as 'present'. Even if we can't see the source of the sound, it is still there; it as it were forces itself on us, from all directions and inescapably. Sound is produced by a 'body' (Brown 2007), an object or person with certain characteristics that together determine the nature of the sound; this is called the timbre. In other words, the sound manifests inner qualities of the object or person. However, the sound can only be heard if I as a listener let my body resonate, resound. Hearing is participating in the inner qualities of the source of the sound. This aspect means that sound unites. If we sing or make music together we get through to each other; there is to a certain extent an intimacy, a 'sense of belonging'. Sound makes you engage with the other, albeit not entirely voluntarily and not always in a positive manner: the power of sound can evoke a positive or comfortable feeling of identification, but it can also alarm us and make us run away from the source of the sound.

Dynamic quality: immeasurable but real

Music consists of sounding tones. These tones are not detached, but form a system of relations. The relations between the tones give the individual tones a dynamic quality, so the tones are constantly in motion, always on their way to the next tone. A tone becomes a musical fact through this dynamic quality. When we listen to music, we participate in this dynamism. Thus, we become part of a world that goes beyond actual perception. After all, while the tones can be measured as vibrations in the air, the inner dynamism is not measurable, but that does not make it less real. Harmon writes: 'What we learn from musical hearing, is that there is more to the world than what meets the eye' (Harmon 2008, 27). Musical experience teaches us that the material and the immaterial world are connected: they permeate each other, or rather, they are two aspects of one and the same world.

The working of music Harmon describes here, is reminiscent of the way Christopher Small characterises musical performance (Small 1998). Small does not speak of 'music', but of musical performances, which he refers to with the verb 'to music' and the participle 'musicking' that goes with it. Meanings are created during and by the performance, in the network of all those involved in the act of 'musicking'. Small elaborates on this by explicitly including the network of relations in the process of attributing meaning. I

quote a passage from a lecture he gave at the University of Melbourne on 6 June 1995:

> The act of musicking brings into existence among those present a set of relationships, and it is in those relationships that the meaning of the act of musicking lies. […] These sets of relationships stand in turn for relationships in the larger world outside the performance space, relationships between person and person, between individual and society, humanity and the natural world and even the supernatural world, as they are imagined to be by those taking part in the performance. (Small 1995)

In his book *Musicking* from 1998 he elaborates further on this idea, adding a remarkable but exciting idea. The musical performance creates a network of human relations: not, however, the relations as they are in reality, but the *ideal relations* we long for. This includes not only relations between people, but also relations with our own body, the cosmos and the world beyond. During a musical performance the desired relations reach a virtual existence, so the participants can experience them as if they were real. Thus music acquires the character of a ritual. These ideal relations not only come into virtual existence, but, suggests Small, they are also 'explored, affirmed, and celebrated' (Small 1998, 139-189, 183).

The 'now' of music

The dynamic quality of the tones gives us a new relationship with time. Music takes place in time, but through the relations between the tones, the expected and realized ascents and descents, we experience the past, the present and the future at the same time. In the 'now' of the music we hear the tones that have already sounded and anticipate the tones still to come. We hear the tone in the relations-network of tones, although what we actually hear is always a 'now' in which the past and the future resound. In other words, in the 'now' of the music we experience time to its full extent. Harmon writes: 'Musical hearing is […] presence to and participation in the completeness of time in every present moment' (Harmon 2008, 33). This anamnetic quality of music connects it with the religious, and in particular with the ritual expression of the religious. Indeed, many rituals, e.g. the celebration of the Eucharist or Last Supper, commemorate the past in the present for the sake of the future.

Centripetal

The working of music we experience while we are listening, the musical experience, is meaningful in itself. In this respect music differs fundamentally from language. Words refer to reality, while this reality in no way depends on words. Such a distinction can't be made for music: the meaning of music does not lie in what it refers to, but in the presence, in the sounding of the tones. In language there is a distinction between 'signifier' and 'signified'. Music focuses the listeners (and also the musicians, who are the first listeners!) on itself, it has a centripetal working. Thus, music reveals the fundamental unity that lies under or behind the diversity of our reality. We experience this in an intense way when we sing together: we are invited to participate, to join in with the sound and the 'now' of the music; we become partners in the musicking. This focused attention takes away the barriers between the participants. Harmon: 'The sense of other as oppositional dissipates as we enter together into a shared new world' (Harmon 2008, 39).

The religious

The description of the working of music offered by Kathleen Harmon provides us with keywords like *sense of belonging*, the *connection between the material and the immaterial*, *anamnesis*, and *unity* or *totality*. We also find these keywords in the definition of the religious (Matsunobu 2011). Referring to 'the religious', I go along with the Canadian pragmatic philosopher John Dewey (1859-1952). He distinguishes a *religion* (with its specific content and recognizable religious experiences) from *the religious*, which is an attitude that can characterize any human experience, including the experience of music (Berding 1999). Dewey describes the religious as seeing one's own position as part of a comprehensive whole, which makes life meaningful, despite its complexity (Avest 2011, 49). Both the musical experience and the religious experience in the meaning given by Dewey are experiences of unity, experiences of totality. From the perspective offered by Dewey, there is an analogy between the musical and the religious experience, without reducing the one to the other. In other words, musical experiences can be interpreted analogously to religious experiences. In the musical experience we find a *hidden* religiosity, because it has taken on a musical form and only becomes religious when we explicitly interpret our musical experience as such. The religious is first and foremost a category of interpretation: by interpreting we can discover the religious in reality and the other way round; thus the religious also helps us to understand reality. As Lynda Sexson puts

it in her fascinating book *Ordinary Sacred* (Sexson 1982), composers are the 'tricksters': '[…] the ones who do not fit into any categorization and break through all categorizations, the ones who turn order into chaos and chaos back into order, like religion itself does in a both secularizing and religionizing culture such as ours', says Erik Borgman in his review of Sexson's book (Borgman 2006, 63). Borgman adds:

> In the current situation the trickster reveals itself in numerous places: for example, by classical mythological and religious themes going underground in popular literature and mass culture, in comics and films. […] Those who want to investigate the present religious situation need to be led by the trickster from the periphery of existence to the centre and back again and be shown reality as an endless number of options. (Borgman 2006, 63.)

Seen from this perspective, it is the composers and musicians who make it possible to experience the religious through their musical take on reality. At times this takes some getting used to, because this musical take on reality is also an experiment with the sacred, an experiment that does not always lead to recognized religious truths. Both pop culture (Ostwalt 2012; Sylvan 2002) and New Spirituality offer a hermeneutic open space (Hoondert 2006, 194, 201; Vuijsje 2007, 195ff.), in which musical experiences and experiences of the religious meet (Cobussen 2008).

For me, listening to *Blue encounter* at the symposium mentioned in the introduction was an intense musical experience, a 'deep experience' (Heijerman 2011). I regard this deep experience as a religious experience. I believe that the openness of sound and form are essential to this denotation. The composition by Franssens is not a 'discourse', like a symphony by Beethoven, but an open space, a cathedral of sound. I am allowed to enter this cathedral, look around, see what is meaningful to me, admire the beauty. I am not really sure what to do with this space. Like a cathedral of stone and glass, this musical cathedral is too large for me. I feel both at home and not at home in it: the musical space is *fascinans* and *tremendum* (Otto 1917). I can't really cope with this space, I can't comprehend it. In this context I quote the Flemish musician and musicologist Jan Christiaens, who compares this musical experience to the experience of the major mystic writers:

> Through the *via negativa* of no longer being able to comprehend, no longer being able to synthesize what has been heard into an overall picture, the music can make the listener break through to the hereafter. (…) The major

mystic writers proclaim that the strongest experience of God is not one of knowing and comprehending, but is often one that implies a not-knowing and a 'no longer being able to understand'. Where the usual frames of reference break down, in those very cracks and breaks themselves the mystery, the 'hereafter' shines strongest. (Christiaens 2005, 58.)

* * *

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Book Reviews

Kaarina Aitamurto and Scott Simpson (eds): *Modern Pagan and Native Faith Movements in Central and Eastern Europe*. Durham: Acumen, 2013, x+358 pp.

Modern Pagan and Native Faith Movements in Central and Eastern Europe is the first book that focuses on phenomenon of contemporary paganism in this particular region. This focus makes the volume valuable, as there is still a lack of internationally available books on this region, which has undergone dramatic social changes during the past century. The starting point for this book stresses the importance of contemporary paganism for the study of the role of religion, both in this region and in its new manifestations in contemporary society more widely. Interestingly, neither of the editors of this book is from the region, but they both have a deep interest in the processes that are currently taking place in Central and Eastern Europe. Kaarina Aitamurto is a well-known Finnish scholar of contemporary pagan movements in Russia, and Scott Simpson is an American scholar who currently lives in Poland and is studying paganism there.

The volume consists of twenty chapters, organized in three parts. In the Introduction, the editors present the idea of the book and make a short excursus into the specific historical events of the past century that have created the context for the emergence of pagan movements within the post-communist societies. Another goal in inviting scholars of this region to contribute to the book is the hope that in this way a scholarly comparison of data from different countries might be achieved. This has not been easy, due to the multilinguality of the region. However, it must be said that in this volume Poland is statistically the most represented.

The first part of the book gives an overview of the situation of pagan movements in Central and Eastern Europe. It consists of four chapters, written by Piotr Wiench, Scott Simpson and Mariusz Filip, Agnieszka Gajda, and Victor A. Shnirelman. Wiench suggests that the rise of paganism should be related to the romanticism that emerged in the early 20th century in many Central and Eastern Europe countries and led to the foundation of the modern states; thus he challenges the assumption that contemporary paganism is primarily related to the re-emergence of religion after the fall of the totalitarian Soviet regimes in these countries. His ideas are later echoed by Gajda in her chapter.

In their chapter, Scott Simpson and Mariusz Filip discuss the problem of the definition of contemporary paganism, mainly in linguistic terms, and conclude that there is no one satisfactory label for the phenomenon. The authors thus open a space for discussion as to

what we define as paganism, and why. I would disagree that there is no one adequate term, but suggest that the difference between emic/etic terms should be invoked. As I know from some members of the Lithuanian native faith movement, however, they tend to experience the term 'paganism' as alien, as it has connotations deriving from Christianity. On the other hand, it is a well-known term, and broadly understood by scholars and the rest of society. The alternative term, 'native faith movements', is probably mostly welcomed by the movements themselves, and it is therefore probably appropriate to use both of the terms referenced in the title of this book. However, I would also have suggested to the editors and some of the authors to reconsider using the term 'neopaganism'; in my opinion, this term has an evaluative connotation which treats the origins of these movements, their doctrines and practices as non-authentic, implying that during ancient times there were 'real' pagan religions, but that what we currently encounter are replicas, and thus of less value.

The second part of the volume presents country-specific studies of contemporary paganism. The spectrum of countries includes Armenia, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovenia and Ukraine, and this variety significantly enriches the volume. The contributors to this part of the book are Rasa Pranskevičiūtė, Ga-

tis Ozolinš, Mariya Lesiv, Kaarina Aitamurto and Alexey Gaidukov, Anna-Marie Dostalova, Aleš Črnič, Vladimir Dulov, Laszlo-Attila Hubbes, Reka Szilardi, Boris Knorre, Yulia Antonyan and Konrad Siekierski. Collectively, they provide a valuable set of empirical data for comparison between the phenomena of contemporary paganism, its doctrines and practices, and their interrelations with other religions and the rest of society in Central and Eastern Europe. The conclusion which emerges from this material is that we are talking about paganisms in the plural rather a single phenomenon of paganism across this region. Such diversity is highly dependent upon the socio-historical context where these movements operate.

The third part of the book consists of three chapters of thematic studies, by Maciej Strutynski, Maciej Witulski and Alexey Gaidukov, which analyse various pagan ideas, certain leaders, and the relations of pagan movements with other social institutions. These chapters richly supplement the second part of the book and give more insights into the varied manifestations and influences of the contemporary paganism movement.

The strength of this volume lies in the empirical data which is presented in the case studies from various countries of Central and Eastern Europe. This data allows the reader lots of space for interpretation, comparison between countries, etc. I expected more theoretical insights

in trying to explain why the paganism phenomenon is so important for this region, and how it differs or maybe supplements the scholarship on paganism in general. Perhaps this might have been done in the concluding remarks by the editors. I have already suggested that the use of many parallel terms in defining paganism may confuse the reader, and I would also add that the use of the term 'modern' in conjunction with paganism leaves me confused, too. Bearing in mind some of the recent discussions about modernity and multiple modernities, it is actually not clear what the editors had in mind when using this term here, and I think that it would have been more clear to use the term 'contemporary'. From a sociological perspective, the term 'modern' implies specific social conditions which, as I see it, are not usually met or are not at the same level in Central and Eastern Europe as in the rest of the 'modernised' world.

My critical comments about this book should be seen as suggestions for the editors of this book and to their future work in the studies of contemporary paganisms. In general I see this book as a very valuable contribution to the study of religions in Central and Eastern Europe, and I think that it will be very useful, not only for university teachers and students, but also for anyone interested in contemporary paganisms and the recent developments in religion in this particular region.

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Catherine Cornille (ed.): *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue.* Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, 490pp.

This impressive volume seems to be a sign of the times, when the emerging field of inter-religious studies and inter-religious dialogue is being established more firmly in the academic field of theology in the broad sense. Cornille, who is a professor of Comparative Theology and a highly respected scholar in the field, has edited the volume and contributed both an Introduction and a separate chapter ('Conditions for Inter-Religious Dialogue'). The list of contributors is long and impressive. Among them are Leonard Swindler ('The History of Inter-Religious Dialogue'), Francis X. Clooney ('Comparative Religion and Inter-Religious Dialogue'), Marianne Moyaert ('Scriptural Reasoning as Inter-Religious Dialogue'), Paul Knitter ('Inter-Religious Dialogue and Social Action') and Jeannine Hill Fletcher ('Women in Inter-Religious Dialogue').

The book is structured in two parts. The first part consists of contributions addressing different aspects of inter-religious dialogue ('Focal Topics'), including the abovementioned chapters. The second part is a cluster of case studies, seventeen in all, addressing inter-religious dialogues between (usually two) religious traditions. Seven of these include the Christian tradition – in one case, it is solely the Evangelical tradition, in the encounter with the Church of the Latter Day Saints. However, to include chapters on Muslim-Hindu dialogue, Buddhist-Jewish relations, and Shinto-Buddhist dialogue is a refreshing approach to the field, which is heavily dominated by Christian theologians. This helps in promoting the recognition that inter-religious dialogue goes way beyond Western, Christian approaches to the world. The strength of the over-arching perspective in this volume is the historical frame of reference present in many of the contributions. To have access to the history of religious relations in specific contexts, as well as the history of inter-religious dialogue in more general terms, proves to be both valuable and useful beyond its immediate academic relevance: How is it possible to enter into Jewish-Christian dialogue without knowledge of the history of Jewish-Christian relations? Similarly, to learn about the monastic encounter and its history between Buddhist and Christian monks and nuns seems extremely relevant in order to understand the specific development of Buddhist-Christian dialogue.

The contributors include many different Christian theological positions, as well as authors from other religious affiliations and backgrounds. This diversity strengthens the volume, and the reader finds different patterns of argumentation and theological reasoning around the theme of inter-religious dialogue. For instance, the contribution of Tinu Rupurell ('Inter-Religious

Dialogue and Interstitial Theology') establish one of the poles in the discussion in reclaiming the contested notions of syncretism and religious hybridity as valid elements in the discourse. The variety of positions represented may give an impression that the book aims to exhaust the field, or the theme. In the introduction, however, Cornille states that 'the experience of genuine dialogue or constructive engagement between religions is still in fact in its infancy' and that 'the possibilities for inter-religious dialogue are virtually infinite', entailing that the book 'cannot represent a summary or an afterword to the history of inter-religious dialogue, as much as a preamble' (p. xvi–xvii).

Nevertheless, the book appears to be deeply situated in the broad Roman Catholic theological discourses on inter-religious dialogue, with many contributors from this discourse, and the many historical references made by them. This is particularly the case in the first part of the book, which in many ways establishes the theoretical/theological perspectives. The views represented are also dominated by North American debates on religious plurality, with the strengths and limitations this entails. This does not make the volume unimportant or uninteresting for, for example, European protestant theological debate on the theme, or other discourses – but the work would have profited from being more explicit about its own overall situatedness. One of my expectations in reading this book was

to learn more about how the fields of comparative theology and inter-religious dialogue relate to each other. This expectation was only partly met by Clooney's chapter, since he mainly argues that the theoretical, textual world of comparative theology is something completely different from the practise of inter-religious dialogue. Reading this, I missed reflection on the complex relationship between 'theory' and 'practise', as well as reflection on the emerging field of inter-religious studies, which aims to be an academic, theoretical reflection closely (but not exclusively) connected to the practical field of dialogue. On the other side, several of the other contributions addressed what I missed in Clooney's chapter, concerning the relationship between practise and theory, but in the context of various other perspectives, such as peace building and social action.

The value of this volume is considerable, because it covers a vast historical, geopolitical, theological and thematic field. Throughout the book you will find surprises, such as the chapter on 'Art and Inter-Religious Dialogue' by Mary Anderson, and interesting case studies (e.g. 'Dialogue between Islam and African Religions', or 'The Implicit Dialogue of Confucian Muslims'). At the same time, the overall approach of inter-religious dialogue and the identified 'Focal Topics' could have included not only feminist critique (Hill Fletcher), but also postcolonial and other critiques. Some critical reflections of this kind are included

in some of the case studies. For such an extensive volume on the theme, however, it would have been valuable to further address the claim that inter-religious dialogue is the new project of Christianity attempting to dominate the religious world after the colonial era by reproducing a religious hierarchy (through organized dialogue) where Christianity in more or less subtle ways is always on top. (for elaboration of this argument, see Kwok Pui-Lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, SCM Press 2005).

It is impossible not to be enriched and inspired by many of the contributions in the book, particularly for those working in fields relating to inter-religious relations and dialogue. Whether this book will emerge in the future as *the* reference book on inter-religious dialogue remains to be seen, but it might well do so, particularly within the North American and to a certain extent the European Roman Catholic discourse on the theme. At the moment the volume is beyond competition, but this may change. It may be wiser to take Cornille's words in the Introduction literally, that the book is a preamble, although an ambitious and comprehensive one – opening up for further critique, case studies, and theological reflections of all kinds and from different places on inter-religious dialogue and inter-religious encounters.

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David Thurfjell: *Faith and Revivalism in a Nordic Romani Community: Pentecostalism Amongst the Kaale Roma of Sweden and Finland*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2013, 216pp.

The Romani population is one of the oldest minorities in the Nordic countries (apart from the indigenous Finno-Ugric Sámi people), with a history dating back at least to the 17th century. Historical policies and attitudes have ensured the isolation and the non-assimilation of the Romani people. This in turn is reflected in their culture and their ways of practising religion within their communities. As David Thurfjell demonstrates in his book, one outlet for emotions and a way of living their history and experience for the Romani people has been Pentecostal religiosity.

Thurfjell has done a good job in painting a clear picture of the culture and religiosity of the Kaale Roma. This previously neglected group has in recent years attracted more attention in academic research, and this work provides a much-needed and important resource for both scholarly purposes and general public interest. Although Thurfjell concentrates in his book on the Romani community, his work also sheds light for the study and understanding of Pentecostalism in general, and his ethnographic approach captures the lived religion in its processes. Since Pentecostalism is a religion strongly centred on the oral transmission of tradition and the interpretation of bodily experiences, this study significantly expands our understanding of the dynamics of Pentecostal religiosity.

Thurfjell emphasises that Pentecostalism gives the Romani people a worldview, language and emotional experiences through which to express themselves (p. 159). Here I would have addressed and highlighted the case of language even more than Thurfjell does. The free interpretation and narrative construction characteristic of Pentecostal religiosity enables every group – and every individual – to construct their own interpretative tools for their purposes, whether consciously or unconsciously. Although the other methods that author mentions are also important, flexible language enables the group to redefine their worldview and interpret or explain their experiences. Nevertheless, this comment does not annul the fact that the book gives a good description of the case in question.

In Thurfjell's words, his work is 'about how religion may provide a stage upon which the dream of a possible solution to problems caused by cultural incommensurability can be performed and experienced.' Furthermore, he states that it is a 'book about the way beliefs and ritual practices sometimes provide means of meaning-making and aesthetic expression to individuals; and […] how the same beliefs and practices at times may lose their relevance entirely' (p.7). In this task he succeeds well, although the emphasis in the book is more on living the religion,

than on losing it – which could be a topic for another book.

The Romani communities in Nordic Countries are mainly divided into two groups, Kaale and Kalderash, which can be distinguished by their language, history, and traditions. The Kaale Roma, with whom this book is concerned, are (usually) Finnish-speaking, living in Finland (10 000) and Sweden (3 000). Furthermore, there are differences between the Kaale and Kalderash Romani languages or dialects. Thurfjell explains, all Romani people have struggled for centuries to become accepted and integrated part of the society. Many of the programmes and projects initiated by the state have left the impression and suspicion of aiming to merge the Romani people into the majority culture to the point of losing their cultural identity and history. This, as Thurfjell demonstrates, has affected how the Romani people approach and view all institutions, both governmental and religious. As a result, many Romani find consolation and answers to their needs from outside the state churches, from a minority religious movement that places more emphasis on the free expression of emotions – although this connection is not unproblematic either.

Thurfjell is well aware of the sensitive nature of his research, and of portraying a picture of a minority culture, and expresses well the ethical choices he has made. Although he does explore the question of taking a subjective side, the overall feeling of the book is of a neutral inquiry into the subject, weighing the arguments from all sides. Prejudice and attitudes of distrust towards Romani are still strong in the majority population, even when they are expressed silently. This has ensured the isolation of the Romani people – in some respects, also in the churches. The Romani people have a nomadic past and identity, and they are often very sceptical about the majority culture, thus reinforcing a cycle of distrust, where there is not much dialogue between the groups.

The book is constructed around an interplay between ethnographic description and theoretical reflection. Thurfjell opens and closes the study with well-chosen examples from his fieldwork, giving a glimpse of the world and context that his informants live in. Starting from a revival meeting with its emotional fervour, and finishing with a private meeting on a low key with one individual and his subdued thoughts, Thurfjell paints a wide picture of the emotional scale of his informants' world. This enables the reader to experience on some level the emotional worlds of the Romani people.

Something is usually lost in translation, as has happened also in this book. This is understandable in the light of the fact that the author has to deal with three languages, including one which he does not speak. Translating informants' words from Finnish into English (or from English into Finnish) loses some nuances, although the main points remain intact and clear.

There are couple of minor details of misinformation, which are not important for the main topic of the book, but noticeable for an expert in local histories. These minor errors are concentrated mostly on one page (39), and deal with the background history of Finnish Pentecostalism. To name a few, the first Finnish Pentecostals were not Norwegians, although two preachers visited Finland in the 1910s: the first Finnish Pentecostals were Finnish Lutheran revivalists, who also organized the revival to become the Finnish Pentecostal movement. Prior to the Second World War, the movement was small, and the summer conferences of 30 000 people that Thurfjell refers to weren't possible then (not until the 1970s); moreover the Pentecostal movement before and after WWII was not called Helluntaikirkko (Pentecostal Church), but Helluntaiherätys (Pentecostal revival movement, literally 'awakening') – Helluntaikirkko is the name of an officially registered Pentecostal Church founded on the basis of the Helluntaiherätys in 2002. In addition to these small details, there are couple of words translated incorrectly – for example, in page 89, in Finnish 'spirit baptism' is not pyhäkaste ['holy baptism'], but henkikaste; but these minor errors do not compromise the main argument of the study.

What, then, are the benefits from this book? First, it portrays in a fair manner an often neglected minority. By doing so, it broadens the picture and therefore our understanding of the Kaale Roma people. Having been targeted by official programmes and projects largely based on political ideology and prejudice, this minority has remained a public mystery for most, ensuring the ongoing isolation and non-assimilation of the Roma in the Nordic countries. By offering a wider and analytical picture of the group, this study can help public officials, academics and students, but also others – both in the majority and minority cultures – to understand not only the culture and religion, but also the social and historical situation of the Roma .Secondly, the book illustrates Pentecostal religiosity through a specific case-study. In so doing, the dynamics of this type of religiosity are made visible, and explained by ethnographic examples. Although this is not a book about Pentecostalism in general, it can profitably be used alongside other books dealing with Pentecostalism more widely, to illustrate and explain the phenomenon. Thirdly, the book is a well-constructed analysis of how a religion can serve cultural and ethnic objectives, as well as fulfilling personal needs.

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Marjo Buitelaar & Hetty Zock (eds):
Religious Voices in Self-Narratives: Making Sense of Life in Times of Transition. Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2013, 280 pp.

Today, it seems to be a generally accepted understanding that identity is constructed like a story. In psychology, human psychic functioning has been understood as storylike at least since Jerome Bruner's inaugural work, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (1986, Harvard University Press), and since then, the idea of identity as narrative has spread even to disciplines in which the findings of the humanities are usually disregarded. The neurologist Antonio Damasio, for example, in his book *Self Comes to Mind* (2010, Pantheon Books) has a chapter devoted solely to the 'autobiographical self,' thus exemplifying the broad appeal of narrative identity theories.

In a similar vein, the book *Religious Voices in Self-Narratives* discusses how religious narratives are employed in the construction of a personal identity. The contributors to the book represent a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds, including history, anthropology, and psychology. Considering this, the articles in the volume form a remarkably coherent and unified whole. This is achieved first and foremost through a common theoretical framework: most of the articles draw on the theories of Dan P. McAdams and Hubert J. M. Hermans, both of whom have proposed a comprehensive theory of narrative identity construction.

Together with Gary S. Gregg, who has contributed to the book with an article of his own, McAdams and Hermans are probably the most important names in the contemporary narrative psychology of identity. The book thus serves also as an introduction to the main approaches within this field.

The book is divided into three main parts. The first part is the most theoretically and methodologically oriented, including an overview of Hermans' theory and his religious views (by the volume editor Hetty Zock), as well as Froukje Pitstra's methodological reflection on using the theories of Hermans and McAdams in the study of biography. James M. Day, in turn, attempts to link the narrative approaches with cognitive-developmental theories, such as those of Kohlberg, Fowler, and Oser. The first part closes with Gary S. Gregg's article in which he outlines the basics of his own personality theory and summarizes some of the key findings from his book *Culture and Identity in a Muslim Society* (2006, Oxford University Press).

The second part of the book focuses on transitions. In their articles, Robyn Fivush and Tania Zittoun concentrate on adolescent identities and religious elements in these. Both articles are based on a subsample from a larger interview study. Ulrike Popp-Baier and Barbara Henkes, in turn, both study an individual life in more detail, the former analyzing the cancer diary of the German artist Christoph Schlingensief, and

the latter investigating the overall life-course of one German migrant to the Netherlands.

The third part of the book is named 'Religious Positioning in Diaspora,' but it might as well be called 'Muslim identities in Diaspora' because each of the articles is related to Islam in some way or other: In her article, Ellis Jonker depicts a family crisis triggered by a daughter's conversion to Islam. Marjo Buitelaar explores a somewhat similar subject, namely, the continuities and discontinuities between the religious identities of Muslim parents and their adult daughters. Sunil Bhatia, in turn, adopts a wider perspective and investigates how 9/11 has affected the cultural citizenship of religious minorities in the US.

If one were to summarize the message of the book, one could say that the Dialogical Self Theory (DST) of Hubert Hermans is a fruitful way to conceptualize how religion functions as part of personal identity. As the name of the theory suggests, Hermans claims that even individual selves are best understood as ongoing debates between concrete and imaginary others. In other words, the self is a continuous dialogue among a variety of voices, some of which are related to a religious tradition. In this book, the authors analyze these 'religious voices' in order to understand, for example, how such voices maintain agency (Fivush, Henkes, and Buitelaar), support well-being (Fivush), exemplify religious innovation (Gregg and Zittoun) or provide meaning in

times of crisis and transition (Fivush, Zittoun, and Popp-Baier).

The book in general and the third part in particular are valuable because of a multireligious perspective: As a number of authorities in the field have remarked, the psychology of religion has for the most part been a psychology of Christianity alone. Thankfully, there are signs that this state of affairs may be slowly changing, of which this book is one. Besides Christianity, the authors also discuss other faiths, including Judaism (Zittoun), Islam (Gregg, Jonker, Bhatia, and Buitelaar), Hinduism (Bhatia), and Sikhism (Bhatia).

As I see it, the main problem with the book is the same as the main problem with narrative psychology more generally. The book is, for the most part, based on qualitative case studies of individual life stories, and other methodological solutions are lacking. As an interesting exception, Robyn Fivush has also employed methods of statistical hypothesis testing, but as she herself acknowledges, her data does not really meet the requirements of the tests used. The value of the statistical results is therefore, in this case, questionable.

Even though qualitative studies of individual lives are most certainly needed to reveal the elaborate composition of self and identity, it is a sad state of affairs if this is the only kind of methodology available. The goal of psychology is not just to understand individual cases, but to provide general descriptions of human psychic functioning. Further-

more, even though the case studies exemplify the background theories well, they can be hardly said to test the validity of these theories. For these purposes, one needs to move beyond a single-case approach and apply, for example, experimental designs and statistical methods.

Designing experiments or other quantitative designs that would tap into the narrative construction of identities is difficult. I nevertheless believe that such designs could, and should, be employed more than they are at the moment. After all, McAdams, Hermans, and other grand figures of the narrative study of identity did not limit themselves to qualitative methods and small samples, so why should their followers?

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