

INTRODUCTION

Religiosities toward a Future—in Pursuit of the New Millennium

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Abstract: An approach is outlined toward imaginary projections upon presents and futures at the turn of the current millennium. The religiosity or the passionate intensity of commitment to imaginary projections is stressed, particularly the way that these may give rise to innovative social and political directions especially in current globalizing circumstances. While new religions of a millenarian character are referred to, the general concern is with the form of new conceptions of political and social processes that are by no means confined to what are usually defined as religions.

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Benedict Anderson once commented that nationalism was the modernist political movement that appeared to have had the most resilience contrasted with other political ideological movements of the time. Anderson ([1983] 1991) was writing when the nation-state, whose imaginary of community and shared history and identity constitutes a transcendent ideal, was in the ascendant. Encouraging and/or inventing such a nationalist consciousness, the agents of state power often strove to create and to legitimate the social order of the state within the terms of a nationalist consciousness, augmenting their authority and potency accordingly. In many instances, the agents and the agencies of the state were able to excite a degree of religiosity in nationalist ideals—often with disastrous and tragic results. Despite the religiosity of much nationalism, it was usually explicitly secular, eschewing overt commitment to religion (see Kapferer 1988). Many nationalisms implicated religious or cosmo-ontological orientations embedded in religious practice in the articulations of their consciousness. These orientations were subordinated to, and their meaning was fashioned by,



the political pragmatics and processes of state power. As a broad statement, insofar as religion is connected to the political interests of the nation-state, it is the political that plays the key role in defining the relevant aspects of the religious. Modern nationalisms, such as those of Israel or the Buddhist nationalism of Sri Lanka, are expressions of the religious largely constrained—and defined—within the terms of the political order of the state. In other words, it is chiefly political concerns that determine or create the particular import given to religious ideas, engaging them with the purpose of legitimizing actions that are decided largely independently of the religious. Overall, nationalism, which often shared a passionate intensity with religion, whose metaphors it frequently engaged, was a secular force that displaced the religious.

A view of many commentators is that if religion, at least in the West, once appeared to be increasingly a feature of a bygone age, it now appears to be staging a comeback. Moreover, if the abandonment of religion might appear to define the current secular age (Taylor 2004, 2007), the return of religion, in the opinion of some, is threatening a secular trend that has been seen as progressive. Contemporary secularists—some of whom, including the neo-Darwinist philosopher Daniel Dennett and the biologist Richard Dawkins, display a religiosity of their own, albeit of a scientific-rationalist variety—are attempting to push back what they see as a re-encroachment of religion, often in a manner reminiscent of similar debates in the Victorian era and into the early part of the twentieth century. In Britain, rationalist and avowedly anti-religious secularists, supporters of Dawkins's own personal crusade, have taken to parading through the streets in a London bus across which is hung a large-lettered sign proclaiming, "THERE IS PROBABLY NO GOD." By opposing their scientific conviction of radical doubt to the certainty of religious truth, they enthusiastically mimic much militant and populist religious practice. Yet in so doing they reveal a not dissimilar fundamentalism.

Such rationalist and secularist protest is motivated by the growth of popular support for creationism, especially in the US, and by the apparent link of fundamentalist religious movements with reactionary and repressive social and political processes, which is evident globally. Al-Qaeda terrorism, the fundamentalist regime of the Taliban, and the emergence of the politically powerful Christian right in the US have led some critics to note that religion is achieving a return to its totalizing, mystifying, and emotive intensity of the past, even realizing once again a theological political potency (see Lilla 2008). If such is the case, we insist that this is not a recidivist, 'back to the future' process—a strong implication of some criticism. Rather, it is a dimension of contemporary circumstances that could be described as thoroughly postmodern.

There seems to be a link between what appears to be the 'return of the religious' and reconfigurations of political and social realities attendant on what is loosely referred to as globalization. That is, the increasing power of religion in the framing, organization, and motivation for social and political action may be associated with the break-up and fragmentation of formerly dominant socio-political orders and the social dislocations and redistribution and movement of populations brought about by such developments.

In these situations, social and political alienation, poverty, and a myriad of other kinds of uncertainty and suffering drive an appeal to the religious, which has always thrived on such experience. The soteriological directives, ideas, and objectives of most religions everywhere aim to alleviate, overcome, or redress anxieties and uncertainties largely produced and driven in a variety of social and political processes. This kind of understanding is almost canonical in anthropology. Periodical bursts of religious enthusiasm and the formation of new religions (e.g., millenarian cults) at intense points of change or at times when the very conditions of life are threatened (e.g., populations disrupted by colonial invasion, the violent upheavals of war, pestilence, etc.) are widely recorded by historians, anthropologists, and sociologists.

The current return of the religious can be grasped as another instance of the emergence of the religious at a moment of crisis. This is likely to be an enduringly repeated phenomenon for the teleological reason that religion is thoroughly concerned with the crises of human existence as such. As Rappaport (1999) argues, religion is integral to humanity, as it addresses existential dimensions of life and its circumstances, offering resolutions that will always be in excess of any other rationalistic orientation. Indeed, other forms of the human creative imaginary, even those avowedly opposed to religion, are themselves vulnerable to the very kind of religiosity of which they may be critical, involving similar circularities in reasoning and cries of faith. Capitalism and the belief in economic rationalism often have more than a millenarian and religious ring to their discourses—as Jean and John L. Comaroff (2001), among others, have elaborated—especially today in a context of looming global market depression.

Rationalist social science typically claims to approach religion from an outside secular perspective, yet this contention can obscure deeper affinities. Max Weber ([1930] 2001) showed that religious discourse can constitute itself around a kind of rationalism that refracts that of the realities from which it emerges, impelling further elaborations in such realities, for example, the relation of Protestantism to capitalism. In European contexts, the character of much secularism, while apparently eschewing the religious, embeds orientations that have had their inspiration and have been shaped in the history of Christianity (see Dumont 1986). Despite enthusiastic claims to the contrary, the secular is not necessarily outside the religious. The apparent rejection of the religious in much secularism masks the secular subsumption of religious orientations. It might be said that modern secularism achieves a universalization of values that a variety of religions could not accomplish. In European and North American contexts, an ideology of secularism conceals certain dimensions of religious attitudes and orientations that it might otherwise appear to have displaced.

The point we are making here is that the arguments and the implicit assertions of religions—what can be termed the various articulations of the religious imagination—are thoroughly intimate with the social and political contexts of the realities in which they form. More than expressions of the social in Durkheim's sense, they are specific imaginary constitutions of it and, as well,

often totalizations of forms of life. That is, they are attempts to infuse and unify all aspects of life within overarching religious conceptions and orientations. This is particularly apparent in contemporary global situations where the socially constitutive capacity of the religious has a force in what seems to be both the resurgence and the modernity of religion.

We have commented on the connection between globalizing forces and the seeming growing importance of religion. The dissolution of the Soviet Union, the new national assertions in Central Asia and Eastern Europe, and the economic and social (if limited) liberation of China have all been marked by a spectacular reassertion of religious commitment and practice. An example is the extraordinary re-emergence of the popularity of the Russian Orthodox Church, which has seen the agents of state power, the president and prime minister, acknowledge its spiritual authority. In China, practices connected with the worship of ancestors, Confucianism, and Buddhism have returned to an intensive visibility. Undoubtedly, these developments are connected with the removal of state-mediated authoritarian and rationalist constraints in the face of global political and economic pressures, but this overlooks the role of religion in the re-formation of social realities under new conditions. Roman Catholicism in Europe appears to be resurgent. The death of Pope John Paul II in 2005 resulted in an unexpected outpouring of religious emotion, which may be related to a renewed dependence on the socially and morally maintaining, generating, and sustaining role of Catholicism in circumstances of rapid social and economic change and increased alienation and uncertainty.

Pentecostal religious movements have been gaining ground throughout the world. Apart from their direct appeal to personal existential anxieties and the problematics of self (see Csordas 1994), some of the impetus for their popularity stems from their affirmative take on the trappings of wealth and success. They do not express millenarian ideas of a new dawning (sometimes of an apocalyptic kind); rather, they focus on a remoralization and an insistence on practices that appear to fit with what seems to be the outward associations and indications of success among already dominant groups. Much current Pentecostalism is aspirational and orienting in attitude and behavior toward managerialist values that are associated with business or corporate elites.

This is the case with Pentecostal movements such as Hillsong and Rhema, which have major followings in Australia, Europe, and southern Africa. Influenced by Midwestern American television revivalism, they are high-tech, media-driven proselytizing organizations that have a pronounced celebrity-consumerist style. They appeal to the upwardly mobile and, in Australia, for example, to recent immigrant groups that are powerfully achievement-driven. Those Pentecostal movements whose appeal is directed mainly to the impoverished—such as the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (founded by a Brazilian lottery-ticket seller), which has a marked presence in South America and in southern Africa—aggressively equate their worship with the attainment of the symbols of wealth and success. These are not religious movements of suffering and marginalization, or even of the weak. The redemption that is sought is in the immediate benefits of success and wealth. They preach confidence and acceptance of

the values that appear to be in control and, in the case of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, also seem to force entry into the domains of social and economic power. These religious movements are built around consumerism and the ethos of globalizing capital, generating the creation of religions of radical acceptance rather than resistance.

In their missionizing zeal, such movements are also intimate with the expansion of global capital and the social and political orders that support and facilitate its spread. Christian missionizing is widely shown to be systematic with the hegemony of colonial and imperial expansion, a bio-political, virtually ontologizing force, creating populations of control despite, or perhaps even through, their resistance (see J. Comaroff and J. L. Comaroff 2001; van der Veer 1996). The current wave of Pentecostalism and similar Christianizing movements, which often work closely in hand with development agencies such as World Vision and CARE, could be seen as vital in new processes of an imperial kind in which the parameters of state orders are undergoing significant change.

Although the nation-state remains the dominant political form, there have been a growing number of external as well as internal attacks on the nature of state sovereignty and autonomy, especially among those countries that have achieved independence from colonial control after World War II. Broadly, the social-economic orders of states as these were politically constituted in the idea of the nation-state have weakened. What might be referred to as the 'society of the state' (the order established through the relative totalizing power of the nation-state) has been disrupted by post-colonial processes of international dependency and the postmodern forces of globalization. This is expressed in the rise in civil wars, the emergence of contested or "wild sovereignties" (Kapferer 2004), and the scaling back of state intervention in what is widely referred to as civil society, which is increasingly viewed as being opposed and denied by the assertion of state authority.

Many of the newer religious movements appear to have expanded their opportunities in these current circumstances, actively promoting programs that supplant state functions or obtruding on domains in which state or other locally based institutions have been ineffective. Here they can play a role in augmenting neo-imperial moves connected with new socio-political and economic configurations emanating from global centers. They thus play a positive part in opening the way for new intrusions of external power and, more significantly, in the articulations of new social assemblages of political and economic effect that bypass erstwhile state controls, perhaps further weakening them. What we are saying is that new religious movements are not only Durkheimian expressions of particular social processes; they are agencies in the creation of new kinds of social and political arrangement of a global and non-territorial kind.

In Pentecostalism there is a remarkable similarity globally in the presentation and style of message and the characteristic of participation despite local variations (see Robbins 2004 and this issue). This has much to do with the movement's connections and influence within North American corporate culture: the

leaders of Pentecostal groups sometimes appear to manifest the charismatic and messianic qualities of some corporate executive officers (CEOs), including an intense authoritarianism and a degree of secrecy. That Pentecostalism embodies the techniques and spirit of much global capital is arguably a key to understanding the extraordinary spread of its success. It could be said to build from the basis of the social and political alienation of an increasing individualization and flattening-out of globalization, Pentecostalism itself being an engine of the process even as it appears to be the resolution of its anxieties. Often Pentecostal organizations have the internal as well as transnational forms of cellular, rhizomic, and social assemblages, concepts that have arisen to describe the globalizing social of postmodernity. Paradoxically, these notions are themselves to a degree consistent with the very spirit of the postmodern as a particular emergence within capital.

Pentecostalism, while Christian in inspiration, often suppresses the Christian denominational aspect. What might be referred to as the ‘apparatus of capture’ (see Deleuze and Guattari [1980] 2002) of Pentecostal organizations, especially the large ones, is an ecumenical suppression of a clear Christian message. The references are often to an abstract God or Lord or to ‘He’ (rather than the more specific ‘Christ’), and the apparent fundamentalism is documented by frequent readings from the Old Testament, thus communicating a kind of generalized primordialism. There is a blandness in performance and an explicit use of styles of music that is international in reference but capable of merging with the local. Pentecostalism in its various manifestations often conveys the sense of a global product operating through a diversity of local franchises. Many Pentecostal groups are overtly inclusive rather than exclusive, encouraging the participation of people from different faiths, although this apparent inclusiveness may mask an ultimate closure.

If sameness is a feature of Pentecostal groups, other new religions are more consciously hybrid, which operates as their apparatus of capture. This is especially so among groups that have developed in Asia and have spread out along the migratory or travel routes of their adherents. One of the many examples is the movement begun by Mata Amritanandamayi (a spiritual leader known as Amma), which originated in Kerala, India, and now has ashrams or centers in the US, Europe, and Australia. The iconography of the movement is a complex of references to a diversity of religious practices in South Asia with Amma, who manifests as Devi/Bagavati/Krishna, at the center. The ambience of this movement, like the neo-Hindu Satya Sai Baba movement, is strongly ecumenical. Amma has addressed the United Nations, and the movement is open to people of all religions. One message of the movement is its capacity to ‘heal’ the evils of capital but simultaneously to assist in the progress to success. Devotees who travel from America and Europe to the main ashram in Kerala seem to be largely concerned with overcoming their personal anxieties. They take part in performances at the ashram where they are pointed out as, in a sense, exemplars of the ills of modern realities who are healed through their contact with Amma and who can be returned to modernity, cleansed and renewed in their capacity to take advantage of the possibilities of capital. The movement might be thought

of as a kind of recycling station within the dynamics of globalizing capital. It is of considerable appeal to an upwardly mobile Indian urban middle class and is highly corporate and indeed totalizing in its organization (a dimension of the hybridity of its iconography and message). The movement's non-profit organization, Mata Amritanandamayi Math, has among the best hospitals in India, operates institutes of technical and vocational training, provides pensions to widows, and builds houses for the homeless. Its Amrita Institute of Computer Technology possesses one of the most powerful computers in the country.

Our argument is not so much that new religious movements merely reflect the logic of capitalism and the processes of globalization. They may do this, but simultaneously they can put forward new interpretations on what appears to be a general process and offer in themselves a reorientation within the logic of capital—or propose ways out of it, some of which are radical and extreme (see Bubandt and Devji, this issue).

Religious groups are perhaps better conceived of as singularities in the sense that they are intensities of potentiality that open up innovative orientations to existence and perhaps ways of living it. They are not to be seen only as representations or symptoms of larger encompassing structures or systems, as in much functionalist sociology, but as processes or organizational dynamics in themselves, out of which relatively new orientations may develop. We refer here to an understanding that was apparent in Max Weber's sociology of religion and which is taken in a possibly new direction by scholars such as Badiou and Deleuze. Although we have argued that Pentecostalist groups and Mata Amritanandamayi Math are organizations within globalizing capitalist processes, this should not occlude the fact that they are better conceived as differentiations within these processes and are by no means reducible to common terms. Nor are these movements just dimensions of capital. Rather, they develop new potentiality within cosmological frames and cosmologies of the person and through relations that are at hand in the cultural-historical circumstances that form the location of their emergence.

Pentecostalist groups, for example, were born out of social realities in the US that are part of a history thoroughly oriented around individualism and concepts of the bounded self, and this is integral to their imaginary. Such is not irrelevant to the movement of Mata Amritanandamayi, but this movement, at least in the context of Kerala, if not elsewhere, is oriented in its values toward an existential *communitas* of the sort outlined by Victor Turner (1969) and is intensely so in the specific Indian context in which it was initiated. The idea of the independent autonomous self is suppressed to produce a community that is united through the body of one person, Amma, who in the practice of worship physically embraces her followers, implicitly giving them a rebirth through her body (Amma presents herself as a manifestation of the Hindu goddess Kali, currently considered the goddess of time and change). This might have Christian resonance except that in Pentecostalism, we suggest, individuality and the self are not suppressed or momentarily erased. The community of much Pentecostalism is more a collectivity of individuals or groups (often of families) who maintain and even assert their identity as part of a community. Both

Pentecostals and those who are part of the Mata Amritanandamayi movement express an ethos of work. But in many Pentecostal groups, this work, while for the community, is also an assertion of commitment and personal identity. By contrast, in Mata Amritanandamayi ashrams, work for a devotee takes the form of self-abnegation.

The religious, we suggest, is thoroughly the realm of the ontological, which usually is delineated cosmologically. The cosmological schemes that religions often outline and the ritual practices that are elaborated in cosmological terms establish the horizons of experience, often the space-time coordinates of such experience and its transcendental limits, and the manner in which human beings should live and proceed through such domains. Religions and their rites, whether of the past or of the present, construct worlds for life that are to be lived in and conditioned by the ontological-cosmological ground and enclosure of the religious domain.

Religious buildings are not merely venues of worship. Spaces of ontological and cosmological enclosure, they are places of social moral ordering and sites for the formation of relations. A Christian cathedral, an Islamic mosque, a Jewish synagogue, a Hindu or Buddhist temple, a Pentecostal auditorium—all become spaces in which a form of life and its inner structures is lived, however fleetingly. Their architectonic domains are spaces for explorations within ontology, even experiments in ontology. They are, in other words, singularities or places of intense potentiality that are not necessarily to be reduced to the external realities that have motivated their emergence. Thus, our descriptive contrast between some forms of Pentecostal practice and that of Mata Amritanandamayi might see them not simply as different expressions of generalizable globalizing processes or as distinct permutations of capital echoing the same universal logic, but also as living experiments and part of the ongoing differentiation of human social existence. These practices constitute in themselves domains of intensity emergent within a particular constructed cosmic ontological plane in which certain potentialities are realized and formed as a socially lived reality, a present that might become a future.

The point is well-illustrated in Norman Cohn's ([1957] 1970) classic work, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, in which the author explores the marvelous heterogeneity of religious ideas and practices that took root in Europe at the turn of the previous millennium. These, as Cohn argues, anticipated and prefigured later social and political ideas and movements from anarchism to National Socialism. They were created as particular potentials upon largely Christian ontological-cosmological ground in which new ideas and practiced orientations and relations to the realities in which people lived were articulated. Thus, in the twelfth century the monk Joachim de Fiore's reconceptualizations of the idea of the Holy Trinity and its vision of progress toward an ultimate order on earth in which suffering would be eliminated, as well as the earthly powers that were its cause, was later to be repeated in Hegel and Marx, but, of course, distinctly so. The latter have no necessary historical connection to de Fiore, whose magical and mystical elaborations have no part, for instance, in the insistent scientific rationalist approach of an avowedly secular Marx. Nonetheless, as

Cohn indicates, regardless of their religious or secular manifestation, they can be understood as different realizations of the ontological potentiality ingrained within historical realities, however distinct. In Cohn's argument, other possibilities, such as the ideas and practices of Nazism, are realizable out of the same ontological-cosmological ground. The ontological or ontic potentials that become manifest in ideas and action are not essential to ontology but come into being through the socio-cultural historical realities in which they are shaped, directed, and come to have effect. Leaving aside the issue of ontology, which is not Cohn's concern, what we develop in relation to the kind of argument and evidence that Cohn presents is that the forms and practices that emerge as the potentialities of socio-cultural and historical worlds can also be grasped as forms of lived creative experiments upon reality—a realization of a potential that in its singularity or particular uniqueness is a specific configuration with its own intensity of potential that may or may not be manifested.

Religious domains are, we consider, *par excellence* the space of the creative and experimental imaginary of human beings upon their existential realities. Here are thrown into relief some of the potentials of existence but within an ontological-cosmological grid or scheme that is presented as fundamentally vital to existence as well as reorienting of it. The diverse religious ideas and practices that are evident around the world are experiments in living that sometimes throw up possibilities and enthuse people in such a way that they may shift or switch their beliefs in new directions entirely—a point that Max Weber ([1930] 2001) made in relation to the emergence of Christianity and the particular redirection in ontology and the intensity of potentiality that were variously manifested as its historical effects.

Our emphasis on the religious as a major site of what can be understood as often radical social and political experimentation does not, however, exclude other entities that are ostensibly non-religious or anti-religious. In contemporary social and political realities there are numerous movements that are thoroughly experimental. In their demands for participation, they often insist that their ideals and principles should be completely lived. While they are by no means religious in a conventional sense, they nonetheless express a religiosity—an urgency to total commitment that is a force of the religious and that tends to find the legitimation of its truth in the evidence of experience, in the qualities of its lived relations, and in its capacity to rid the world and the person of the perceived humiliations and injustices of encompassing realities. This is also a well-demonstrated feature of many nationalisms, often motivating their excesses of destruction, as well as of those movements that might resist the dangers of nationalism and urge a greater ecumenism or toleration of difference. We argue that religiosity may be considered not merely as expressive but as a force in itself. Like the re-formations of experience and of life that take place in religious domains, it can have major redirectional effects of a historical nature, of even irreducible ontological depth. Through the intensity of potentiality that social and political movements in their very religiosity can express, new visions of reality—visions that have radical, historical consequence—may be imagined into life.

The Essays

The articles in this special issue are in different ways concerned with the religious and the religiosity of social and political processes. The first of the articles, “The Politics of Conviction: Faith on the Neo-liberal Frontier,” by Jean Comaroff, outlines the structural premise for the current, intensified relationship between religion and these social and political processes. Comaroff argues that the expansion of religious symbols into what has been perceived as secular spaces and the sacralization of profane and everyday practices are integral to a new stage of capital. With the secular hegemony losing ground to social formations wherein the religious is a core element, we are entering an epoch in which state regulation, with control of labor and capital, is no longer the key policy and governments engage in “novel power-sharing partnerships with private enterprise.” This trend undermines ideas of unitary communities, the nation-state, and the ‘society’, and new movements, freed from the social entities of earlier stages of capitalism, are being born. In the article, Comaroff examines some of the ways in which religious life can be linked to these shifts: firstly, religious movements tend to take the form of theocracies; secondly, these movements “strive to counter relativism and a crisis of meaning”; and, thirdly, these movements often mimic the social form of the market. Nigerian Pentecostalism, analyzed as “world-making” and “inherently political,” is an example of the first. North American religious politics that are shaping government policy is another. As an example of the second link, Comaroff draws attention to the intimate quality of the new religious movement, exemplified in the “cell-group structure” where face-to-face interaction is dominant. This social structure stands in contrast to the processes of fragmentation and alienation characteristic of ‘modernity’ and thus reintroduces the ‘softer’ and ‘meaningful’ aspects of social life. As an example of the third link between the new religious movements and the new stage of capital, Comaroff points to developments including “fee-for-service” faiths and the “market in Gods and services,” such as the Universal Church in South Africa, which offers “daily specials” for curing AIDS, depression, and witchcraft. She concludes that a rereading of Weber’s ([1930] 2001) classical work on the Protestant ethic might prove useful in assessing the new development of Christianity and capitalism: “Are we not witnessing a later chapter in the same long story of the kinship between evangelicalism and capitalism?” she asks.

One of the main arguments made by Jean Comaroff is nicely exemplified in the next article, “Strategic Secularism: Bible Advocacy in England,” by Matthew Engelke. In describing the British and Foreign Bible Society’s work to promote the Bible in British society, Engelke illustrates exactly the current tendency of religious institutions and movements to integrate secular formations into religious agendas. The Bible Society’s poster campaign, featuring guns and flowers and references to the popular BBC evening drama *Eastenders*, is analyzed not only as an example of a religious institution’s ability to develop a strategy of public engagement through a creative approach. The article also explores how the Bible Society attempts to accommodate itself to a ‘privatization of religion’ trend in which individuals feel that the Bible is no longer pertinent to

their everyday lives. As a result, the Bible Society, whose goal has been “to put a Bible in the hands of everyone on earth,” realizes that its message must be made relevant for people’s daily lives and speak to their ongoing moral dilemmas. The ethnography shows how a ‘traditional’ institution undergoes radical change in its advocacy and in its means and ends judgments in order to fit the new religious conditions of modern British society, thus engaging in what Engelke calls “strategic secularism.” This article thus also contrasts with descriptions made by Jean Comaroff on the new religious movements that are challenging secular institutions, wherein the religious not only is made relevant in profane places but totally encompasses profane values, making secularism irrelevant. Engelke’s article is an analysis of a religious institution that is “working to make the secular a channel of its own transformation.”

Another aspect dealt with in Jean Comaroff’s article, namely, the fragmentation of unitary social entities and the re-emergence of new forms of collectivity in new religious movements, is the puzzle that opens Joel Robbins’s article, “Pentecostal Networks and the Spirit of Globalization: On the Social Productivity of Ritual Forms.” Robbins investigates why the Pentecostal church movement has grown rapidly in a time when social institutions are vanishing, collectivism is diminishing, and individualism is growing. The article targets one aspect of the Pentecostal church movement: its institutional success. In this article, Robbins is mostly concerned with the social aspect of Pentecostal churches, what he calls their “social form.” He describes the way that Pentecostal churches ritualize social behavior (“praying, praising, worshipping, healing” together). These rituals are easily identifiable and the same all over the world. Drawing on the concept of interaction rituals (from Collins and Goffman), Robbins argues that what makes the Pentecostal church so attractive is its constant focus on collective interaction or everyday rituals. These interaction rituals, Robbins concludes, generate novel social forms that can “flourish in contexts where older social forms find it difficult to survive.”

Annelin Eriksen’s contribution to the issue, “Healing the Nation: In Search of Unity through the Holy Spirit in Vanuatu,” focuses not so much on Pentecostal Christianity’s ability to become global. Rather, the main concern is the way in which the Pentecostal church takes on locally meaningful social and political agendas. Eriksen analyzes the growth in the South West Pacific nation, Vanuatu, of a number of small and independent Pentecostal churches that are creating “new social spaces wherein the value of change and the value of becoming independent are emphasized.” She argues that the new churches do not seek to replace the state in Vanuatu; instead, they seek to salvage the nation from what is regarded as the malignant forces of the colonial era and those of the independent state. Many people believe that the post-colonial situation “has created a false independence.” To some extent, this development is comparable to the cargo movements, which also sought to circumvent state structures and oppose the values and rationality on which the state was founded. The new independent church movements in Melanesia, as well as the cargo movements, are efforts at creating alternative forms of social unity that threaten established social orders.

It is exactly this aspect of cargo cults that Ton Otto addresses in his article, “What Happened to Cargo Cults? Material Religions in Melanesia and the West.” Otto argues that cargo cult movements are especially appealing to the marginalized and dispossessed, whose religious imagination creates millenarian visions of violent upheavals and radical transformation. Comparing Melanesian cargo cults to Norman Cohn’s description of revolutionary religious movements in Europe in the Middle Ages, Otto asks whether the revolutionary zeal that characterizes both of these movements might still be found in modern Western and Asian societies. He also compares the Melanesian cargo movements to certain aspects of millennial capitalism (see J. Comaroff, this issue; J. and J. L. Comaroff 2001). He suggests that both millennial capitalism in the West and millennial cargo cults in Melanesia are fueled by the fundamental contradiction between two central value orientations: “mind versus matter, or spirituality versus materiality, and redemption versus wealth.” Following Dumont, he argues that there is a constant struggle for hierarchy between these values, whether in medieval Europe, the present-day West, or Melanesia.

Nils Bubandt’s article, “Gold for a Golden Age: Sacred Money and Islamic Freedom in a Global Sufi Order,” speaks directly to the theme of ‘revolutionary millenarianism’ discussed by Cohn and illustrates how current developments have allowed for religious forms of social movements and of “global protest.” Analyzing links between faith and finance, the article provides an analysis of the Murabitun movement, a Sufi brotherhood with established communities on several continents, and their search for Islamic enlightenment and a new kind of freedom—not from religious domination but from the “false promises of modern capitalism” and the “Enlightenment project of democracy and individual liberty.” By establishing the gold dinar as the global currency, the Murabitun movement aims to overturn the capitalist world system and bring about a modern Islamic millennium. This golden age of unity and freedom, as envisioned by this movement, is earthly and will be brought about through a “specific program of socio-economic restructuring.” Fleshing out the millennial utopia promoted by this Sufi brotherhood, Bubandt makes a strong argument for seeing the Murabitun movement as an example of a range of contemporary movements that overturn the conventional distinctions between ‘secular’ and ‘religious’ politics. While the idiosyncratic fusion of Sufi mysticism with strands of existentialist philosophy is unique, this movement is part of a much wider—arguably global—phenomenon that Bubandt aptly terms the “contemporary re-enchantment of politics.”

With Rohan Bastin’s contribution, “Sri Lankan Civil Society and Its Fanatics,” we move into the radical strand of Buddhist religious politics as it unfolds in the context of a protracted civil war, the ‘war on terror’, and the utopian discourse of global civil society. Current manifestations of Buddhist militancy include the creation of the Buddhist monk political party, the Jathika Hela Urumaya (National Heritage Party), which has formed an unstable alliance with the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (People’s Revolutionary Front), a political party with roots in violent insurgency. This ‘robe and plough’ alliance plays on a “profound sense of rupture between Buddhism and the state,” a trope that

runs through the history of the Buddhist revitalization movement that emerged in the eighteenth-century revival of monastic orders and was accompanied by assertions of Sinhalese ethnicity and Buddhist ritual in the face of the perceived danger of Tamil Hinduism. Bastin gives several examples of how monks engage in “acts of fanatical iconoclasm,” understood as the destruction of ideal representations of the ‘natural’ order of the state—practices that are reminiscent of the aggressive iconoclasm in different periods of European history. He points out that the militant clerics’ critique of the state resonates strongly with the notion of civil society as this concept is presently peddled by global civil society advocates. Rather than dismissing Buddhist militants as “fundamentalists or nationalists or reactionary conservatives,” Bastin argues that Sri Lanka’s militant clerics are “subaltern agents” who are caught up in the “global state of war” that takes the form of “wars on abstractions,” such as terror, drugs, or poverty. As militant Buddhists pursue their wars against enemies both imagined and real, they manifest the violent possibilities of the utopian discourse of civil society and the “current crusade to replace governments with governance and the nation-state with the post-national state.”

The contemporary moment is also characterized by emerging forms of global security governance. In her article “Dharma Power: Searching for Security in Post–New Order Indonesia,” Kari Telle examines how members of the Hindu minority on the island of Lombok have appropriated the “discourse of security” in an effort to realize an existential, cosmologically grounded sense of security premised on the importance of cultivating auspicious connections between the invisible and visible realms. Highlighting the deliberately eclectic nature of Hindu Balinese security formations on Lombok, Telle understands these formations as avatars of a ‘culture of security’ centered on the cultivation of invulnerability that has a long history in Southeast Asia. Telle further suggests that the militarization from below, fueled by perceptions of being under threat on a Muslim-dominated island, is a defensive response to growing appeals to ‘sons of the soil’ discourses that have accompanied Indonesia’s program of decentralization and the devolution of power after the collapse of the New Order regime in 1998. While some Lombok Balinese express ambivalence toward this discourse, others have eagerly embraced the new opportunities “to mobilize along ethnic and religious lines.” As Telle argues, ongoing efforts to revitalize Balinese Hinduism through a renewed focus on a spiritually empowered notion of security entail an understanding of state-society relations that rejects the idea of the modern state as carved into seemingly distinct secular and religious spheres.

Bruce Lincoln’s article, “An Ancient Case of Interrogation and Torture,” addresses how members of “worried empires” persuade themselves and their interlocutors that they are engaged in a righteous cause. Juxtaposing ancient Persian materials detailing the judiciary ordeals that “enemies of the realm” were made to go through with torture scenes from the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, Lincoln uncovers a number of intriguing, if deeply disturbing, parallels. The analysis recounts a struggle for imperial succession between two sons of Darius II (r. 423–404 BCE). Lincoln’s careful reading of sources chronicling the

incident makes plain that ordeals were constructed to reveal the ‘truth’ about ‘enemies’ of the state. By transforming and disfiguring the body, the interrogation process became a “self-validating practice” that enabled the regime to write its own “preferred truths on the bodies of captives and victims.” Drawing on Scarry’s work on torture, Lincoln argues that the photographs from Abu Ghraib depicting captors and captives make use of many of the same oppositions that figured in the Persian ordeals. But in the case of Abu Ghraib, it was a group of ordinary GIs who invented cruel spectacles to persuade themselves that they were fighting “Terror on behalf of Freedom.” Lincoln concludes by noting that the methods employed by worried empires to reassert their legitimating beliefs are likely to be so crude and self-serving as to contradict the values that the actors are supposedly fighting to preserve.

Questions of Islam’s universality are the focus of Faisal Devji’s contribution, “The Terrorist as Humanitarian,” which offers a reading of militant Muslim politics in a globalized world. How does Islam come to represent humanity and why? These are the questions Devji poses while uncovering surprising parallels between al-Qaeda’s global jihad and Mahatma Gandhi’s writings on sacrifice as a way to lay claim to the noblest of human virtues, such as courage. Foregrounding the ethical as opposed to the political content of al-Qaeda’s actions and rhetoric, Devji argues that these practices invoke the “specter of a global community.” Extending from Hannah Arendt’s writings on shame in the aftermath of World War II, Devji suggests that shame provides a starting point for al-Qaeda militants, for whom the Islamic community (*ummah*) in its status of global victim has come to represent humanity. While these militants partake of the language of humanitarianism, Devji insists that they are less concerned with the “victimization of humanity” than with its “transformation into a global agent.” For these reasons, martyrdom is represented by al-Qaeda as a “victory in its own right,” even as humiliation becomes a category that transcends a means-ends-oriented politics. Rather than offering an alternative to the current world order, Devji claims that these latter-day militants would transform it by bringing forth its “latent humanity” through their sacrificial acts. If terrorist rhetoric has been marked by a rigorous logic of equivalence, Devji concludes that this logic, associated with a statistical conception of humanity, may be yielding to an “existential conception of humanity.”

In the final article, entitled “Reflections on the Rise of Legal Theology: Law and Religion in the Twenty-First Century,” John L. Comaroff explores the growing hegemony of the law. Due to the rising salience of the law—as ideology, utopic cure-all, and instrument of governmentality, among other things—Comaroff characterizes our epoch as one of “theo-legality.” The simultaneous “fetishism of the law” and assertive forms of religiosity in our time make it vital for scholars to understand more about legal theology as opposed to political theology. While modern secular law has always had the quality of a fetish, Comaroff maintains that the contemporary moment is marked by an unprecedented ‘faith’ in the law, a development that is discussed in relation to shifts in the understanding of nationhood and the outsourcing of many operations of governance with the rise of the neo-liberal state and globalization. What

is different nowadays, he argues, is the extent to which members of all faiths resort to “lawfare” to protect and extend their sovereignty. In other words, the secular instrument of legality has become one of the principal means whereby members of faith-based communities attempt to secure the propriety and authenticity of religious rites. The sacralization of the law and the ‘juridification’ of religion, as Comaroff demonstrates with reference to both Christianity and Islam, transform the nature of religion. By the same token, courts everywhere have to respond to lawfare conducted under the “sign of R/religion” and cultural difference. Citing examples of the infusion of the sacred into governance and the rising tide of difference, Comaroff observes that the recourse to a theo-legality that redeploys liberal jurisprudence against itself in order to overturn core principles of the modern liberal constitution is far from played out. After a spirited plea for recognition of the values associated with the Enlightenment episteme of empirical reason as opposed to some alternative episteme of conviction, Comaroff ends his article by noting that “wherever it is being engaged, the battle itself is changing both faith and the law.”

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