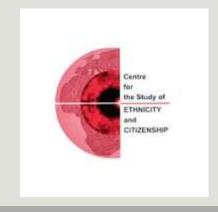


Hearing the Divine in narrative

RELIGIOSITY AND BRITISH CONVERTS TO ISLAM



The problem: From the theoretical to the methodological

Methodological atheism

- > the "sociologist must leave out the divine half of the equasion" (Bainbridge, 1992: 178)
- ➤a "virtually taken for granted presupposition of the sociological study of religion" (Porpora, 2006: 57)

⋄ Reductive pluralism

- The hybrid, multiple, bricoleur, fragmentary, 'mosaic'
- > Ranking: opposed, contradictory, competitive,

Methodological agnosticism

- Investigating "daily religious experiences" but people were in fact emphasising "religious experience" (Bender, 2007: 203, emphasis in original).
- with "the principle of the bracket we neither affirm nor deny the existence of the gods" but recognize God as part of the believers' phenomenological environment (Smart, 1973: 54; see also Repstad, 1996; Porpora, 2006).

Narrative: characteristics of identity

Characteristics of narrative identity:

"It is hard to take more than a step without narrating. Before we sleep each night we tell over to ourselves what we may also have told to others, the story of the past day. We mingle truths and falsehoods, not always quite knowing where one blends into the other... We begin the day by narrating to ourselves and probably to others our expectations, plans, desires, fantasies and intentions. The action in which the day is passed coexists with a reverie composed of the narrative revision and rehearsals of past and future... We meet our colleagues, family, friends, intimates, acquaintances, strangers, and exchange stories, overtly and covertly...Humankind cannot bear very much abstraction or discursive reasoning. The stories of our days and the stories in our days are joined in that autobiography we are all engaged in making and remaking, as long as we live, which we never complete, though we all know how it is going to end."

(Hardy, 1975: 4)

Narrative: sources of identity

Temporality

- ➤ Narratology
- > Futurology
- Present
- Continuity and change
- Spatiality
- ➤ Distal
- **→** Proximal
- o the personal, the social, the Divine

Rosie 44 years old, executive administrator & lecturer in Japanese, nominally Christian but more atheist, Muslim for 19/20 years

**

mathematician, in my head

are egg shaped?'

out of the nest,

that's really clever,

'that's clever'

he was telling me about **eggs**;

'Do you know why eggs

back to the nest.'

a design. designed like that

stuck in my head . I can't be figure out what I am not an atheist,

stuck

rolls

Where the past meets the future

Rosie: "And erm it was just sort of from there it just grew that I was thinking 'yeah, this is it, this is what I want to be, this is who I am. And it wasn't that I felt I needed to change, it was sort of that I sort of realised that yeah, this is how it is: this is what I've been looking for. And I felt like it is me and not that I had found something that I needed to alter for. I did need to make changes obviously because I had been doing things that were not going to be compatible. Erm, but it was, it just felt very natural in that way."

Vidya: "Dude, I've been the **same person** since before I became Muslim as I am today, and I have had friends over ten years who can attest to that fact" (...) "I've **changed the way I behave**" but "I've **never changed myself**, **who I am**."

Hannah: From: "I can never be like this" **To:** "I'm like oooh, I forgot to put my scarf on... you'd think I was out there naked"

Recontextualised continuity

- past-oriented
- being
- Meets change
- future-oriented
- becoming
- Narrative coherence/congruity
- o "I tell a story about someone who in the course of this story turns out to be me, that is, the I who has been telling this story all the time" (Brockmeier, 2001: 251, emphasis in original)

Summary

- * Hearing the Divine in *religious* subjectivity
- Methodological agnosticism
- Narrative identity
- Allows us the hear congruity and coherence
- Allows us to escape the compartmentalised, the fragmentary
- But just what is proximal and what is distal?