Hearing the Divine in narrative

RELIGIOSITY AND BRITISH CONVERTS TO ISLAM

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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

o 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, he was telling me about **eggs**; **stuck**
in my head

'Do you know why eggs

are egg shaped?' **rolls**
out of the nest, back to the nest.'
that's really **clever**,
'that's **clever**' a design.
designed like that

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

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**

○ "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?