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**BEYOND SEEING AND BELIEVING: RELIGIOUS ETHOS AS
CULTURAL TERRITORY OF SOCIAL INCLUSION FOR EXCLUSION**

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Abstract

I position that religion, in spite their psycho-social functions do serve/act as cultural power centers and in so doing they tend to transmit forms of cultural reproductions of the traditional into the modern and ahead, by which the dominant old tradition/culture is institutionally perpetuated in continuum beyond any sense of truth/epistemic conditions; at their depth grammar it operates on a logic of inclusion for exclusion of the 'people' the subjects who are subjectivised into a subordinated enslaved culture. Hence the question of emancipation is seriously at stake however the role and function of religious acts are socially functional in an utilitarian sense and psychologically satisfactory at the emotional plane.

Keywords: enslaved, realistic, psychological, Religious cultural, model of reality

Religion is a 'system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic'¹. Religion observes, Clifford Geertz², is essentially a cultural system that by which humans

¹ Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System" (1975), P. 90.

² Clifford Geertz was born in San Francisco, California on August 23, 1926, after graduating B.A. in philosophy in 1950 from Antioch, he attended Harvard University in 1956, where he was a student in the Department of Social Relations. This interdisciplinary program was led by Talcott Parsons, and Geertz worked with both Parsons and Clyde Kluckhohn. Geertz was basically trained as an anthropologist, studied the religious lives of the people. He earned his Ph.D. in 1956 with a dissertation entitled "Religion in Modjokuto: A Study of Ritual Belief in a Complex Society". He produced several books, including *Religion of Java* (1960), *Agricultural Involution* (1963), and *Peddlers and Princes* (1963), *Observed* (1968), In 1970. As a professor of social science at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey from 1970 to 2000, then emeritus professor in 1973 he published *The Interpretation of Cultures*, which collected essays Geertz had published throughout the 1960s. In 1974 he edited the anthology *Myth, Symbol, Culture* which contained papers by many important anthropologists on symbolic anthropology. Geertz contributed massively to social

have attempted to seek and provide meaning to human existence³. Accordingly religious symbols and practices formulate a 'basic congruence' between a specific life style of life, allied practices, specific metaphysics as to function to synthesize a specific type of people's' ethos (people's attitude religious adherence) which steers up a particular type of quality of life and their world view (metaphysical ground).

Religious cultural ethos, Geertz observes that has a double aspect – the aspect of an ideal *model of reality* and a practical *model for reality*. These double aspects in their interactions continue to shape the meaning layer of the 'religious people'⁴. Geertz observes, 'religious beliefs and practices essentially function to provide meaning⁵ by way of presenting explanations for anomalous events and experiences (Taylor) in giving comprehension and emotional support for human suffering (Weber and Malinowski) and giving possible set of moral standards of judgments (criteria) to explain the discontinuity between the desired *ideal model of*

and cultural/Religious theory and reflected on the basic core notions of anthropology, such as culture and ethnography and study of religions.

³ Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System" (1975).

⁴ The term Religious People' here is use in the sense of those who follow a particular type of religion.

⁵ The issue of meaning in symbolic anthropology, for Geertz, is a framework which gives prime attention to the role of symbols in constructing public meaning. In his seminal work *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), Geertz outlined culture (religious) as "a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life. Geertz aimed to provide the social sciences with an understanding and appreciation of 'thick description'. Geertz applied thick description to anthropological studies (specifically his own 'interpretive anthropology') while producing theory that had implications for other social sciences. Geertz asserted that culture was essentially semiotic in nature and this theory has implications for comparative political sciences. Geertz himself argues for a "semiotic" concept of culture: "Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun," he states "I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning. It is explication I am after, construing social expression on their surface enigmatical." Geertz states that we must proceed interpreting a culture's web of symbols by isolating its elements, specifying the internal relationships among those elements and characterize the whole system in some general way—according to the core symbols around which it is organized, the underlying structures of which it is a surface expression, or the ideological principles upon which it is based. Culture is public because "meaning is," and systems of meanings are what produce culture, they are the collective property of a particular people. We cannot discover the culture's import or understand its systems of meaning when, as Wittgenstein noted, "We cannot find our feet with them." [11] Geertz wants society to appreciate that social actions are larger than themselves; they speak to larger issues, and vice versa, because "they are made to."

reality and the practical way for reality. The in-between space is materialized by the locus of religious spaces as cultural positions.

The institution of specified religious rituals -religious cultural acts- are linked with the 'problem of meaning' and the 'problem of viable explanations and solutions' that religious people continue to seek in their life. In such religious endeavors/acts, the question regarding the scientific explanation of religions is transgressed and the search for something beyond science and common sense is culturally transgressed. Using the theoretical position of J.L. Austin, we may designate the religious acts corresponding to religious locus (iii) and pilgrimages as 'performative speech acts'⁶ the meaning of which lies not in the 'verifiable possibilities'⁷ (A.J. Ayer) but in the actual performances of them. In so doing, the issues such as whether religions and their allied practices are true or false, logical or illogical, true or false consciousness, true ideology or false ideology etc., are increasingly bypassed. Thus the epistemic truth-conditions of the institutional practices centered on religious acts is thus eloped and evaded and religion as a cultural ethos form a 'symbolic structure' as a whole and religious pious activities form part of this symbolic religious/cultural structures.

Geertz notes that Malinowski approach to religion/rituals/belief practices can be called socio-psychological ('Magic, Science and Religion-1948) which emphasizes, what religion does to the individuals and how it satisfies both the cognitive and affective demands for a stable, comprehensible, and coercible world and how it enables him to maintain inner security in the face of natural contingency.

6 Refer J.L. Austin's concept of speech acts. A *speech act* in linguistics and the philosophy of language is an utterance that has performative function in language and communication. Speech acts are identified as locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts and sincere and insincere in performative contents. Speech acts are commonly taken to include such acts as promising, ordering, greeting, warning, inviting and congratulating, thanksgiving - the doings. Speech acts can be analyzed on three levels: (i) A locutionary act, the performance of an utterance: the actual utterance and its ostensible meaning, comprising phonetic, phatic and rhetic acts corresponding to the verbal, syntactic and semantic aspects of any meaningful utterance; (ii) an illocutionary act: the pragmatic 'illocutionary force' of the utterance, thus its intended significance as a socially valid verbal action (see below); and in certain cases a further perlocutionary act: its actual effect, such as persuading, convincing, scaring, enlightening, inspiring, or otherwise getting someone to do or realize something, whether intended or not (Austin 19)

7 Refer the idea that truth is a matter of either verifiability in principle or in practice and Hume's claim on the truth conditions in terms of formal and factual statements/positions as true and meaningful.

Geertz, in his essay '*Ritual and Social Change*' attempts to explore the possibility of a more dynamic understanding of religious symbols rituals from the vantage point of social change. While explaining anthropological role of religions, Geertz argues that 'the public space of religion' transcends the boundaries of 'verificationism' and in so doing stands as an inherited culture with diverse sensibilities of social organization. He observes that 'religious system showed little rationalization, rather it is concrete, action centered thoroughly interwoven with the details of (what to do and what not to do) in everyday life'⁸. Geertz further observes that Durkheim's and Radcliffe-Brown's approach to rituals of religions, namely the socio-functional explanation of religious beliefs and practices (*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* -1947) - tend to reinforce the traditional social ties between individuals; it stresses the way in which the social structure of a group is strengthened and perpetuated through the ritualistic or mythic symbolization of the underlying social values upon which it rests.

Religious experience situated at the realms of religious ethos, one can say that they belong to the territory of hearing and seeing. 'Perhaps most are visual or auditory sensations and presentations (visions and auditions), and in sense such 'seeing and hearing' goes beyond the physical eyes or ears perceptions, sort of 'different ways of seeing and hearing'. '*Seeing and hearing seems to be the believing*' that is either promoted or adhered or both at pilgrimages and shrines locations. Subjects at pilgrimages and shrines report "seeing" or "hearing," but quickly disavow any claim to seeing or hearing with bodily sense organs'⁹. Such experiences are easily to dismiss as hallucinations, but the subjects of the experience frequently claim that though it is entirely internal, like a hallucination or imagination, it is nevertheless a veridical experience, through some spiritual analog of the eye or ear (James 1902 and Alston 1991 cite many examples). In other cases, the language of "seeing" is used in its extended sense of realization, as when a pilgrim is said to "see" his or her identity with the God/deity at the shrines. 'Since the subjects of religious experiences tend to take them to be real experiences of some external reality, we may ask what reason there is to think they are right. That is to say, do religious experiences amount to good reasons for religious belief? One answer to that question is what is often called

⁸ Brain Morris, *Anthropological Studies of Religion*, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 317.

⁹ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/religious-experience/>

the Argument from religious experience according which Religious experiences are in all relevant respects like sensory experiences; sensory experiences are excellent grounds for beliefs about the physical world; so religious experiences are excellent grounds for religious beliefs. This argument, or one very like it, can be found in Swinburne (1979), Alston (1991), Plantinga (1981, 2000), and others. Critics of this approach generally find ways in which religious experiences are different from sensory experiences, and argue that those differences are enough to undermine the evidential value of the experiences. Swinburne (1979) invokes what he calls the "Principle of Credulity," according to which one is justified in believing that what seems to one to be present actually is present, unless some appropriate defeater is operative. He then discusses a variety of circumstances that would be defeaters in the ordinary sensory case, and argues that those defeaters do not obtain, or not always, in the case of religious experience. To reject his argument, one would have to show that religious experience is unlike sensory experience in that in the religious case, one or more of the defeaters always obtains. Anyone who accepts the principle has excellent reason to accept the deliverances of religious experience, unless he or she believes that defeaters always, or almost always, obtain¹⁰. However a person who is not a pilgrim and who does not belong to that specific religious acts and cultural ethos would see exactly the same shrines and pilgrim centers, but would not necessarily have the similar religious content to his or her experience.

Speaking of religious belief and practices Wittgenstein notes that religious belief and acts, beyond their truth-conditions, they are of specific form of life; they regulate one's entire life. Stating about the Last Judgment Wittgenstein says, "Whenever he does anything, this is before his mind. In a way, how are we to know whether to say he believes this will happen or not? Asking him is not enough. He will probably say he has proof. But he has what you might call an unshakeable belief. It will show, not by reasoning or by appeal to ordinary grounds for belief, but rather by regulating for in all his life"¹¹. Wittgenstein also holds 'religious beliefs and acts are not based on evidence. "We don't talk about hypothesis, or about high probability. Nor about knowing" with respect to religious belief. Christianity "doesn't

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Wittgenstein, "Lectures on Religious Beliefs", pp. 53 -54 ("Wittgenstein's Lectures on Religious Belief" appeared originally in the Heythrop Journal 32 (1991).

rest on an historical basis" and beliefs concerning it "are not treated as historical, empirical propositions"¹². To Wittgenstein, religious acts/belief goes beyond the territory of reasonableness and unreasonableness. They belong to the realm of specific forms of life and to appreciate such forms of life, one has to participate into them. The pilgrims, who periodically adhere to shrines, can be said as 'participating in the form of life of a specific language game of a particular religion. Wittgenstein maintains that although religious believers are not reasonable they are not unreasonable. He says, "¹³They base things on evidence which taken in one way would be exceedingly flimsy. They base enormous things on this evidence. Am I to say they are unreasonable? I wouldn't call them unreasonable. I would say, they are certainly not reasonable, that's obvious. 'Unreasonable' implies, with everyone, rebuke. I want to say: they don't treat this as a matter of reasonability. Anyone who reads the Epistles will find it said: not only that it is not reasonable, but that it is folly. Not only is it not reasonable, but it doesn't pretend to be"¹⁴.

Ludwig Wittgenstein argued that 'we cannot understand language without understanding the ways in which language is used and how it interacts with how we live and what we do (Philosophical Investigations). Wittgenstein was greatly influenced by Kierkegaard in his understanding of religious belief. He sought to understand religious language and belief by relating them to religious activity. He agreed with Ayer that religious language is not empirical, but rejected Ayer's conclusion that it was therefore not meaningful. Wittgenstein attempted to illuminate the nature of language by comparing language to games. In particular, like games, language is an activity guided by rules – in games, rules governing what one can do, in language, rules governing meaning; and second, meaning is learned from the rules governing the use of the word/sentence, like 'pieces' in a game, e.g. chess, are understood by how they can be used. Meaning, then, is often a matter of how words are used. Appreciating this requires a distinction between surface grammar and depth grammar: words or sentences in one context describing objects or an event may be similar on the surface to ones that in another context that do nothing of the sort, e.g. 'the bus passes the bus stop', 'the peace of the Lord passes

¹² Ibid. , p. 57

¹³ Wittgenstein "Lectures on Religious Beliefs", pp. 57 -58

¹⁴ Ibid.

understanding'. To understand a particular 'piece' of language, one must look at how the language is used, as meaning is not given by the form of words alone. Wittgenstein says that a language game is the speaking part of a 'form of life'. A form of life is far broader than any specific language game; it is the foundation out of which language games grow, the collection of cultural practices which embed language games. As part of forms of life, language games do not need any justification. They are rooted in natural human reactions and activities. If then, religious faith and language are a particular language game, part of a human form of life, their claims need no justification. We only need to understand what is distinctive about them¹⁵. So, religious language and their ritual acts must be understood as part of a religious form of life. Religious life and language contains the many different language games of praise and worship, prayer, miracles and so on; but religious language can also be understood as forming a game in its own right, governed by particular rules. Wittgenstein argued that religious language has a depth grammar quite distinct from its surface grammar. Its surface grammar can look empirical, as though, like science, religious language is talking about things and events.

Habermas position is worth remembering for evaluative purposes of wittgensteinian idea of religious practices as belonging to the realm of forms of life. Regarding postmodern culture, Habermas envisions of an evolutionary social leap into a new type of rational society, defined in communicational terms as "the communication community of those affected, who as participants in a practical discourse test the validity claims of norms and, to the extent that they accept them with reasons, arrive at the conviction that in the given circumstances the proposed norms"¹⁶. The question is such institutional rationality socially justifiable in terms promoting an ethic of justice based social inclusion. The Habermasian position is rejected by Lyotard as "the unacceptable remnant of a 'totalizing' philosophical tradition and as the valorization of conformist, when not 'terrorist,' ideals of consensus"¹⁷

Lyotard's in his work, 'The Postmodern Condition: A report on knowledge', hitherto famous positions such as '*incredulity towards meta-narratives*' (of cultures), by

¹⁵ <http://cw.routledge.com/textbooks/alevelphilosophy/data/A2/Religion/ReligionFormLife.pdf>

¹⁶ <http://www.drury.edu/ess/HNRS/Lyotard.html>.

¹⁷ Refer, Lyotard's 'The Postmodern Condition: A report on knowledge' (x).

means of 'repeated performances' for reasons of 'selflegitimization'¹⁸ and 'cultural reproduction' are worth considering for an understanding of the cultural political public spaces. While critiquing the modernist scientific-capitalistic and technological culture, Lyotard observes that "Science has always been in conflict with narratives. Judged by the yardstick of science, the majority of them prove to be fables. But to the extent that science does not restrict itself to stating useful regularities and seeks the truth, it is obliged to legitimate the rules of its own game. It then produces a discourse of legitimation with respect to its own status, a discourse called philosophy. I will use the term modern to designate any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse of this kind making an explicit appear to some grant narrative, such as the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth."¹⁹ Scientific modernity by way of 'copying the philosophical cum cultural model with in the late 20th century has turned itself to be a grand narrative that subsumes in order to sublimate its subjects by means of a performative circle. Thus the Enlightenment narrative holds, "the rule of consensus between the sender and addressee of a statement with truth-value is deemed acceptable if it is cast in terms of a possible unanimity between rational minds."²⁰

Like many other prominent French thinkers of his generation (such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze), Lyotard develops 'critiques of the subject who is located in the midst of any culture. For Lyotard the subject (let us say the pilgrim-subject) as traditionally understood acts as a central point for the organization of knowledge, (religious cultural knowledge affiliated to the pilgrim

¹⁸ The principle of legitimation functioning in capitalism is efficiency or performativity [see *The Postmodern Condition*], and this principle attempts to be hegemonic. Science and technology are prime candidates for this attempted hegemony, since they contribute to the growth of capital. Lyotard accepts that performativity is a legitimate criterion for technology, but argues that it is not proper to science. Following to some extent philosophers of science Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend, Lyotard argues that the performativity criterion does not accurately capture the kind of knowledge developed in the sciences nor the way such knowledge develops. For Lyotard, science is a language game to which legitimation by performativity is not proper. Such performativity merely subordinates science to capital. According to Lyotard, it is the idea of a deterministic system that allows performativity in science, since determinism allows the prediction and calculation of input/output values.

¹⁹ Ibid, xxiii.

²⁰ Ibid, xxiii.

shrine-locus) eliminating difference and disorderly elements. Lyotard seeks to dethrone the subject from this organizational role, which in effect means decentring it as a philosophical category'²¹. He sees the subject (let us say, of that a religious or scientific culture) not as primary, foundational, and central, but as one element among others which should be examined by thought. The pilgrim subject is thus is not a transcendent and immutable entity, but as produced by wider social and political religious cultural forces. The pilgrim-subject is construed as one organisational structure *ordispositif* which channels and exploits libidinal energies. Like other structures which threaten to be hegemonic, Lyotard proposes its disruption through the release of the libidinal forces it contains which are not consistent with it. That is, the opening of the subject to forces which are deemed irrational, such as feelings and desires. Lyotard's insistence that the freeing of dissimulated libidinal forces can only be passively done and not actively controlled is motivated by his identification of wilful acts with the organizational subject.

The question of Social inclusion and exclusion or inclusion-for-exclusion

The question then I would like to pose here is that, whether we can conceive the religious centers (pilgrim places) as centers of cultural reproduction/representations through repeated performative representations for reasons self-legitimization and cultural transmission by ways of evading the epistemic truth claims? Are the *speech* acts of religious symbols and acts are cultural representations as well cultural repressions, an aesthetic of subsumed violence of the predominance of dominant cultural symbols? Can we also hold the position that the modernist explanations of religious behavioral patterns while situating social and psychological dimension religious ethos (however interpretative and convincingly explanatory they may be) are but a way of evading the vulnerability of epistemologically positioning them?

Not to conclude...

Having pointed out that (a) the territory of religious acts be conceived within the domains of the (i) social-psychological (Durkheim, Taylor, Geertz) (iii) social organizational –the structural (, (iv) linguistic dimensions (J.L. Austin), experiential

²¹ <http://www.iep.utm.edu/lyotard/#H6>

(Kierkegaard, William James and Wittgenstein) and the cultural cum political realms (Lyotard) (b) let me now rise this reflective question here. Do religious sites apart from considering them as 'sites' or 'gaze' of the cultural, sociological, psychological and philosophical, traditional etc, promote social exclusion or inclusion? If so, what sort of social inclusion or exclusion or both are being promoted by these cultural sites? To use the language of Michael Foucault, are these cultural territories a sort of 'power sites'²², sort of panopticon cultural imprisonments²³ of antiquity in continuum? Are the seeing and hearing of the pilgrims and shrines, the ever-visible inmates, as territories of information for subjugations/subordinations never a subject in communication²⁴. Are these apparatuses of behavior control essential if we are to govern ourselves, without the constant surveillance and intervention by an "agency" in every aspect of our lives?"²⁵. If it can be 'shown' as sites of cultural inclusion and exclusion, then one cannot adhere to the claim that religious cultural locus and their associated acts in some way or other promote critical social inclusion as an ethic of social transformation, in spite of their aesthetic, social-psychological, traditional and to some extent moral positioning.

²² Power sites are the Panopticons that induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers.

²³ The *Panopticon* is a type of institutional building designed by the English philosopher and social theorist Jeremy Bentham in the late 18th century. The concept of the design is to allow a single watchman to observe (-*opticon*) all (*pan-*) inmates of an institution without them being able to tell whether they are being watched or not. Although it is physically impossible for the single watchman to observe all cells at once, the fact that the inmates cannot know when they are being watched means that all inmates must act as though they are watched at all times, effectively controlling their own behavior constantly. The name is also a reference to Panoptes from Greek mythology; he was a giant with a hundred eyes and thus was known to be a very effective watchman. The design consists of a circular structure with an "inspection house" at its centre, from which the manager or staff of the institution are able to watch the inmates, who are stationed around the perimeter. Bentham conceived the basic plan as being equally applicable to hospitals, schools, sanatoriums, daycares, and asylums, but he devoted most of his efforts to developing a design for a Panopticon prison, and it is his prison which is most widely understood by the term.

²⁴ Part Three: Discipline 3. Panopticism".Cartome.Retrieved 2008-01-29.

²⁵ Gellately, Robert *The Gestapo and German Society*, Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1990 pages 11-12 & 22.