

Special Editor's Introduction: Legitimation Strategies within the Cultic Milieu

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Legitimacy plays an important role in the ideological and organizational dynamics of religious movements, especially within the transient and unstable “cultic milieu” (Campbell 2002 [1972]). Traditional, charismatic, and rational appeals to legitimate authority, introduced by Weber (1947) and applied to NRMs by Lewis (2003), provide a useful framework to understand how movements gain adherents, retain members, and prevent defection. Similarly, studying the contexts in which legitimation strategies weaken or fail can also provide insight into religious conflict and change, such as schisms, disaffiliation, deconversion, and religious innovation. In this issue, we will explore the how a variety of alternative religions and spiritualities employ legitimation strategies, and the resulting outcomes.

Traditional appeals to legitimacy are described in the first essay of this issue by Malcom Hadden. He examines controversies surrounding the origins of the Hare Krishna movement and its claims to traditional religious heritage in India. He explains that the hagiography and history of their founder, Srila Prabhupada, are difficult to separate, and that many academic studies of the movement during its inception drew upon Prabhupada's official biography, which the movement regards as a sacred text. ISKCON argues that Prabhupada's religious heritage was accurately replicated by his Western devotees, which, in turn, serves to legitimate its existence. This claim has caused much sectarian tension within the Hare Krishna movement, along with the crises of succession that followed Prabhupada's death, but not without benefit to the movement and to the broader Hare Krishna milieu.

Next, Kjersti Hellesøy analyzes a critical moment in the history of the Church of Scientology (CoS)—the 1982 Mission Holder's Conference—and the role it played in subsequent schisms within the organization. She discusses how the death of the CoS' founder, L. Ron Hubbard, created a crisis of authority, moving from a single source of authority to multiple, contesting sources. Hellesøy explains that David Miscavige set out to centralize the church and quell opposition to his newly-assumed leadership, either by silencing or excommunicating dissenters—strategies often used in hindering or fomenting schisms. Consequently, this shift motivated significant numbers of members to

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disaffiliate from the CoS, several of whom formed independent Scientology movements free from the church's newly-imposed authoritative structure and ideology.

In "Shamans in High Heels," Anne Kalvig explores mediumship and neo-shamanism within Norway's popular media "occulture," (Partridge 2006) using case studies of a celebrity shaman and other high-profile media practitioners, including fieldwork she conducted within the alternative spirituality subculture. Within this milieu, spiritual practices exist within a hegemonic, "medialized" structure, with mediumship located at the bottom and indigenous, "traditional" shamanism at the top. Kalvig finds that these "high heeled" shamans construct an image of themselves that contradicts stereotypical portrayals of female mediums and Western gender roles by appealing to the ancient, primal, and darker characteristics associated with shamanism. This appeal to tradition serves to increase their spiritual credibility in the public sphere and for themselves.

Turning to charismatic legitimacy, Jane Skjoldli looks at the evolution of at the development of three movements—the Jesus People, Calvary Chapel, and the Vineyard Movement—that originated in the Charismatic Renewal of the 1960s. She examines three controversies that surfaced over the classification and importance of *charismata*, or spiritual gifts endowed to the faithful by the Holy Spirit. Skjoldli demonstrates how differences between what members consider as charismatic practices can separate existing movements as well as provide innovative forms of religious expression that eventually become new movements within the broader charismatic milieu.

Examining the intersections of traditional, rational, and charismatic appeals to legitimacy, Inga B. Tøllefsen discusses some of the controversies within the history of Transcendental Meditation (TM), including a notable schism from the movement, the Art of Living Foundation (AoL), whose membership includes many defectors from TM. TM identified with its Vedanta roots in its formative years, when they were embraced by the hippie movement and The Beatles, which placed their founder, Maharishi, and TM in the public spotlight, garnering them much fame as well as ridicule. TM's shift from traditional appeals to Hindu roots to rational appeals of science occurred around 1970, which was a strategy by Maharishi to attract members from the rational, scientific-minded mainstream, although this did not protect him from media controversy. Maharishi's charismatic authority was challenged by a rival guru in the movement, Robin Carlsen, who formed the AoL foundation, taking nearly 300 former TM members with him. Tøllefsen concludes her essay with a thoughtful discussion of the often difficult relationship between NRMs and mass media.

In the last essay, Erik A. W. Östling presents an analysis of the central mythology of the Raëlian movement, discussing the biblical creationist narratives (traditional appeals)

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and ancient astronaut theory (rational-scientific appeals) that it draws upon as dual-sources of legitimacy. During the time of the religion's founding, neither of the aforementioned sources were new to the cultic milieu which, Östling speculates, may be from where the founder, Claude Vorhilon (known as Raël), drew inspiration for the Raëlian interpretation of the Bible. Further, the word, "Elohim," which is of particular importance to the Raëlian movement (referring to the extraterrestrials who created all life on Earth), had been used previously as well. While critics of the movement have used this evidence to suggest Raël's motives were less than sincere, Östling argues it merely demonstrates a sociological point, in that all religious innovations draw upon the cultural repertoires of the societies from which they originate.

The precariousness of charismatic authority requires that it must be continually demonstrated and validated to members, to the effect that it rarely develops beyond "short-lived mass emotions of incalculable effects" (Weber 1991:263). As demonstrated by the articles in this issue, charismatic authority typically "routinizes" into either traditional or rational types—often, some measure of both. While charismatic authority may be diminished, it does not completely vanish; it must accommodate other appeals to legitimacy. Nonetheless, new claims to charismatic authority that challenge the established traditional or rational authority of a movement may bring spur the cycle once again.

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