2017 | *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7 (1): 123–138

SPECIAL SECTION

Unbundling sincerity

Language, mediation, and interiority in comparative perspective

Niloofar Haeri, *Johns Hopkins University*

This *Hau* collection is an exploratory group effort in promoting comparative studies of followers of different religious traditions. We take the concept of sincerity as it is defined and used in the anthropology of Christianity and examine how it is attended to (or not) among ultra-Orthodox Jews in New York, Eastern Orthodox Russian women, Shi'a women in Iran, and Lutheran missionaries in Papua New Guinea. Sincerity in this sense is argued to be closely associated with autonomy, agency, freedom, and is seen to underlie modern subjectivity. We found a great deal of anxiety over notions of sincerity and its implications for constructing a relationship to the divine in our various communities. In unbundling sincerity from its associated concepts and consequences, we examine the different senses of interiority implicated by local concepts of sincerity in order to unpack those anxieties on the part of both believers and institutional clerical authorities. We argue that attending to interiority complements rather than denies the fundamental role of historical power relations in forming the religious subject. Power relations do not fully determine how, over time, the subject finds ways of shaping that relationship. In considering the modernity of Protestantism as illuminated through its attachment to sincerity, we show how, in moments of change, the very ideas, assumptions, and practices that have come to define certain communities as not-quite-modern become objects of reflection, intense debate, and disagreement, both within individuals and in their broader contexts.

Key words: sincerity, interiority, comparative studies, Islam, Judaism, Christianity, prayer

The debates on sincerity within the anthropology of Christianity have opened up a number of promising and productive lines of inquiry that bear further reflection and cross-cultural investigation (Robbins 2001, 2004, 2008; Keane 2002, 2007; Cannell 2006; Schieffelin 2008; Yelle 2013). Sincerity, a concept held to be central to the formation of the Protestant liberal subject, is achieved when feelings, thoughts, and intentions are matched by exterior, spontaneous speech that expresses that

ISSN 2049-1115 (Online). DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.14318/hau7.1.013

interiority without the mediation of persons, things, and other people's words (Trilling 1972; Keane 2007; Seligman et al. 2008). Sincerity is a "guide to the linkage between linguistic ideology and other cultural values" (Keane 2002: 6), and as a linkage, it touches on a series of vital ideas about interiority, mediation, the relationship between language and subjectivity, and what is said to lie at the basis of modern subjectivity (Keane 2002, 2007).

Defined in this way, sincerity is therefore centrally concerned with the relationship that the *individual* constructs with the divine. The focus on the individual subject renders comparative ethnographic work more viable as we attempt to relate specific individuals' reflections and practices to each other in specific times and places—an effort that is far less perilous than comparing theologies and matters of doctrine. With attention to local articulations and appropriate historicization, we propose to unbundle the associated concepts and consequences of sincerity to show that: (a) traditions other than Protestantism are also concerned with sincerity in various ways; (b) the configuration, presence, or absence of all associated features is not necessary for it to play a prominent role; and (c) the lens of sincerity can be fruitfully used to explore subjectivity in other traditions. We aim to avoid adding to studies of religion and modernity that offer explicit or implicit binary comparisons between the religious tradition under study and a rather standardized image of pietistic Protestantism. Such binary comparisons tend to privilege contrast and opposition, and give a curiously central role to Protestantism by seeming to divide religious traditions into Protestant/not-Protestant. What we do instead is to explore four different communities—Shi'a Muslims, ultra-Orthodox Jews, Eastern Orthodox Christians, and Lutherans—and examine their dilemmas and self-understandings as a field of possibilities where there are contrasts *but also partial similarities*. Moving to a wider field of comparison helps us ask new questions about all four traditions, including the Protestant Lutherans analyzed in Handman's article.[1]

At the same time, we do worry about the implicit but strong and taken-for-granted Protestant categories and concepts in the study of other religions and agree that locating and articulating this tendency has led to productive and lasting correctives (Asad 1993; Orsi 2006; de Vries 2008; Houtman and Meyer 2012). Yet we also aim to avoid another implicit imperative that even if there are certain commonalities, in particular as exemplified in the reflections of our interlocutors in the field, we somehow must avoid exploring them or drawing attention to them lest we slip back into the old Protestant bias. We hope we can do both in this collection.

We argue that the anxiety over the quality of believers' relationship with the divine—that it be unmediated, or mediated by the appropriate, sanctioned speech,

1. We had originally included materiality (of language, form, and of persons and things that may mediate the individual's relationship with God) as a central concept in our articles. Several reviewers, however, found materiality to be a confusing concept that has come to mean too many things and encouraged us to give it far less prominence. We followed this suggestion because we realized that explaining why we thought materiality is one of the relevant concepts in our discussions would risk making the entire section primarily about materiality and would leave us less space to elaborate our various other arguments.

ritual, person, or thing—is present in many religious traditions, including the ones we attend to in this collection. Hence, concern about that relationship is not limited to Protestantism—it may just express itself in different ways than for the Calvinists studied by Webb Keane, for example. In this collection we aim to explore religious subjectivity through the notion of interiority. In the contexts of our ethnographies, by interiority we mean self-understandings about the hows and whys of one's religion and its rituals; the specific ways in which individuals make a ritual their own; and what occurs in the process of self-cultivation. Self-reflections, commentaries, and critiques figure prominently in particular moments of these practices. For some, the term "interiority" is hopelessly tainted by Protestant bias, and for others it is connected more with psychoanalysis than with social sciences.[2] Our use of the term is meant to underline the fact that a historical analysis of religious subjectivity that is arrived at through a study of the power relations that result in particular authoritative discursive traditions is necessary but not sufficient in order to answer the ethnographic question: What are followers of any given religion up to at any given moment—what are they doing—when they aim to fulfill, question, revise, modify, challenge, or submit to the requirements of their religion? The study of the practices of *puja* by Humphrey and Laidlaw ([1994] 2004) offers a good example of what we have in mind. Having watched worshippers in various temples and having come to an understanding of the acts and their orders, the authors then ask several people who had just performed it to comment on the "placing of flowers on the statue" (ibid.: 34). What they find is that "agreement among celebrants about the constituents of the *puja* does not lead everyone to identical performances. Far from it . . . and the meanings which different people assigned to the same offerings and acts varied considerably" (ibid.: 33–35). Hence, even when our studies identify why particular rituals, for example, come to dominate, how each worshipper enacts, understands, and makes a connection to it remain unanswered.

Why interiority?

Through the influential works of Asad (1993), Mahmood (2005), and Hirschkind (2009), anthropologists of religion have been challenged to identify and rethink Christian, liberal, and even feminist partialities and predispositions to notions of belief and agency. Agency in particular has been incisively rescued from dominant conceptions within the social sciences and in liberal political theory, where it has always been asserted to be about resistance (Mahmood 2005). As Mahmood argues (ibid.), one can have agency and submit to authority and power. Inspired by Foucault's work on ethics and subjectivity, the mode of religiosity that such analyses have articulated, in particular for the piety movement in Egypt, is that of ethical self-cultivation. Mahmood writes: "Foucault's conception of positive ethics is Aristotelian in that it conceives of ethics not as an Idea, or as a set of regulatory norms, but as a set of practical activities that are germane to a certain way of life"

2. In a search for this term on Anthrosource, we came across 340 hits. The term seems to be receiving wide usage in recent years without being explicitly defined. A Google Ngram shows a steep rise in the use of the word between 1950 and 2010.

(ibid.: 27). In explaining how Foucault distinguishes ethical practices from morals, she continues: "'Ethics,' on the other hand, refers to those practices, techniques, and discourses through which a subject transforms herself in order to achieve a particular state of being, happiness, or truth" (ibid.: 28). At issue here is whether, through a set of ethical practices, the *transformation* of the subject is something predictable in process and in result. If through years of performing the same ritual, for example, at every stage of life and under all social, political, and historical conditions, the result on the subject was both predictable and unchangeable, then one would be in effect claiming that nothing happens so to speak to the subject in the process of performing the ritual. That is, there would be no "transformation of the subject." Speaking of "acts of knowledge," Foucault writes: "I think we can say that in and of itself an act of knowledge could never give access to truth unless it was prepared, accompanied, doubled, and completed by a certain transformation of the subject"([1982] 2005: 16). There is a "price" that one pays in order to access truth. And the price is that one in fact undergoes change. As Ghamari-Tabrizi points out in his illuminating discussion of the role of the Iranian Revolution in bringing spirituality to the center of Foucault's thinking: "Care of the self and access to the truth not only impose demands on the self, they also rearrange and reshape one's relation with others and with one's environment. That is why Foucault poses this question as a founding question. . . . 'What is the price I have to pay for access to the truth?'" (2016: 178). Whether or not one must pay this price and undergo self-transformation; whether or not the transformation must only be within certain limits, and so on—these are questions that often end up at the heart of highly divisive political and social conflicts in many communities. The mode of religiosity exemplified in self-cultivation does not necessarily point to a foregone conclusion for what is happening to the subject. Even when the subject begins with the aim of submitting to collective authority and ends with it, there can well be a process of self-shaping in between. Submitting itself can be understood and enacted in various ways by different individuals. Hence, even when believers strive to "submit to God" in performing a ritual, we cannot take it for granted that we know, at each iteration, exactly *what* that submission entails. What is being experienced and what kind of understanding will it result in (Haeri 2013: 27–28)? While Foucault's writings on technologies of the self have been widely interpreted as a rejection of interiority at the expense of disciplines of power, he replies to this understanding when he writes: "Perhaps I've insisted too much on the technology of domination and power. I am more and more interested in the interaction between oneself and others, and in the technologies of individual domination, in the mode of action that an individual exercises upon himself by means of technologies of the self" (Rabinow 1997: 225).

Our explorations of interiority in this collection are meant, first, to acknowledge and articulate the existence of this space where the subject comes to various kinds of self- and other-understanding as a result of seeking what she is told to seek by structures of authority. And at any given moment, we need to be attentive to the possibility of a plurality of such structures. Second, we use the notion of interiority to explore the processes through which individuals seek to follow the requirements of their religion, perform rituals, speak to God spontaneously (or stop talking to God), do penance, carry out acts of charity in caring for others as for themselves,

and so on. We argue that in the process of doing all these and much more, we cannot know in advance what will happen, and neither can the subject.

We note briefly that in his *Outline of a theory of practice* (1977), what Bourdieu tries to achieve with his concept of habitus is to delineate the existence of a space where the subject reflects on, interacts, and plays with acts and words that have been taught to her and inculcated. And he reminds us of the importance of time and of uncertainty:

> To restore to practice its practical truth, we must therefore restore time into the theoretical representation of a practice which, being temporally structured, is intrinsically defined by its tempo. . . . .Even in cases where the agents' habitus are perfectly harmonized and the interlocking of actions and reactions is totally predictable *from outside*, uncertainty remains as to the outcome of the interaction as long as the sequence has not been completed. (Bourdieu [1972] 1977: 9, original emphasis)

As Mahmood emphasizes, there must be historical and cultural specificity to analyses of subjectivation, and hence we need to acknowledge the complex temporality of self-cultivation similar to the temporality of other modes of being and becoming religious (Mittermaier 2012: 250). We see a Foucauldian analysis as complementary with delving into questions of interiority. Structures of power and authority do not erase spaces of reflection and critique, nor do they determine how and if so in what ways individuals will undergo self-transformation.

The sincerity bundle

According to Keane, a working definition of sincerity might be when our words (exterior) match up with our inner thoughts (interior). But the assumption in this articulation of sincerity is that for words to in fact match up with our thoughts, they must spring from our own interiority. They must be ours so that we are their authors, in contradistinction to formulaic prayer. Speech coming from this interiority is what gives agency to the subject, who is therefore autonomous from other people's words and their influence. This use of language exhibits "freedom" in that the speaker is making choices—is not "parroting." The ensemble of this ideological bundle is argued to lie at the basis of "modern subjectivity" (see Keane 2007: 208–22).

> The concept of sincerity weds metadiscourse with the sphere of moral evaluation. It is a guide to the linkage between linguistic ideology and other cultural values . . . the words I make available to you, *to the extent they are sincere*, display their *freedom* from any external compulsion: I do not say them merely out of deference to you, *nor am I parroting the words of someone else, for instance*. (Keane 2002: 75 emphasis added)

Sincerity is hence achieved by avoiding the mediation and materiality of words, things, and persons. The concepts that are bundled with sincerity in the order just discussed are: inner self, spontaneity, originality or authorship of one's words, agency, autonomy, freedom, and modern subjectivity. We examine the implications of unbundling these concepts in a range of different religious contexts in this collection.

Spontaneity and its implications

Avoiding homogenization of Protestants across time and denominations, we note that even among Protestants, sincerity and spontaneous speech are connected to different degrees. Some seek to reduce all semiotic mediation to a minimum, as among some African groups for whom even the Bible is too constrained in materiality (Engelke 2007), or Calvinists who radically value unscripted, personal prayer over the recitation of pregiven texts (Keane 2007). Anglicans, another Protestant denomination, produced one of the most enduring and influential prayer books in the sixteenth century, namely the Book of Common Prayer (Targoff 2001). The Book of Common Prayer contained a whole set of formulaic prayers, precisely the kind that prominent Protestants wrote vociferously against, and went on to figure centrally in Anglican services worldwide. Lest one think that several centuries later the Book of Common Prayer is no longer used or lacks influence, at the moment the website of the Church of England, under "Join us in Daily Prayer," states:

> The services of Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer and Night Prayer for today, yesterday and the next four weeks are available on this site to help you find time for God during your day. Church House Publishing have produced **a new, free Daily Prayer app** to make it even easier to access Daily Prayer wherever you are . . . . Each of these services—drawn from the two collections of services and prayers authorized for use in the Church of England: *The Book of Common Prayer* and *Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England*—is available in either contemporary or traditional form.[3]

If the words of others, so to speak, continue to be used in church services, if members of congregations are reciting prayers from prayer books, and if their major religious activity is organized by the church each week, then the Protestant subject does appear to be less autonomous than has been argued. Such worshippers' interiorities are therefore formed by both spontaneous and formulaic language. In other words, what happens (or has happened) to the Protestant ideal *in practice*? We agree with Keane that ideas about language "come to be intertwined with how one understands the human subject" (2007: 10). However, given this intertwining, we question the idea that the spontaneous use of language *is uniquely involved in giving agency to the modern subject*.

If, as de Certeau argues (1988), voice is a presence in the signifier, then not just one voice but any number of voices can be juggling for presence in any number of signifiers. It is difficult to conceive of situations in which this is not the case, except perhaps when speakers recite words that are believed to be sacred and belong to God. We can reformulate the question of spontaneity and ask, with de Certeau: Whose voice do worshippers hear in the signifiers of acts of worship, and under what conditions can they hear their own? These kinds of questions address simultaneously relations of power and how language and ritual figure within them. We may then succeed better in formulating the relationship between language and

3. Bold type in original source. Names of both books are live links on the website: https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-worship/join-us-in-daily-prayer.aspx (accessed March 10, 2017).

agency—a formulation that takes more than the ideal of spontaneity into account, and pays attention to actual historical practice. Within the sincerity framework, Protestant subjectivity is formulated almost exclusively in terms of spontaneous language in worship. Note that one finds the reverse in writings on Muslims: *du'a* prayers, which involve talking to God spontaneously, as opposed to *salat*/*namaz* prayers, which are *suras* from the Qur'an, are rarely discussed by social scientists as playing a role in Muslim subjectivities.[4] Keane acknowledges the "difficulty for purportedly spontaneous speech to abolish all traces of its externality to the speaker" (2007: 195), but it remains unclear how this difficulty is in fact acknowledged in the relation seen between autonomous, spontaneous language and agency.

Together with other linguistic anthropologists who have looked at religion and ritual speech, we note that there is no getting around the fact that language precedes us and there are multiple kinds of struggles that create hierarchies of sacredness, of access, and of authorship. We argue that the opposite of spontaneity in language is not formulaicity, and that while the former may figure in notions of agency, the latter does so as well, albeit in more complex and invisible ways. It is clear that even premeditated language such as songs, poems, prayers, and ways of speaking that come to be associated with particular people and professions can be and are used by others who identify with the experience, the feeling, and thinking in someone else's words. So we can be sincere without being spontaneous. In her analysis of *salat* prayers in Egypt, Mahmood (2001) calls this "rehearsed spontaneity" (see also Mahmood 2005: 128). Spontaneity and its association with agency and modern subjectivity, then, is in need of further unpacking and examination from the point of view of different denominations of Protestantism, non-Protestant Christians, and non-Christians in a variety of communities around the world (Luehrmann, this volume; Luhrmann 2012).

In contexts of evangelization and conversion, implicit in the connection between sincerity and spontaneity is the idea that a spontaneous speaker is a fluent, native speaker capable of linguistic improvisation. And while Protestant Bible translation has been a central part of missionary work, Protestant missionaries sometimes find themselves in situations in which fluent, spontaneous, and thus sincere speech seems impossible. Interestingly, given the central role of "spontaneous sincerity" in theorizations of the Protestant subject, missionaries still try to evangelize in these contexts. That is, they still think evangelism is possible. Handman's article in this collection shows in detail the various and unhappy compromises that Lutheran missionaries arrived at in their attempts to deal with the bewildering number of languages in Papua New Guinea (see also Handman 2015). She shows how they articulated their dilemmas and gave up on the ideal of the vernacular as the language of worship. If they had aimed for the language spoken and shared by a majority, they would have chosen Tok Pisin. But they viewed this language as lacking the capacity to help worshippers in building (the right) interiority as it lacked depth. They therefore ended up imposing two languages that were only spoken natively

4. Seligman et al.. offer an imaginary scenario in which a "Protestant housewife, mixing her cake batter while praying for a good visit with her friend" (2008: 117) is doing something "phenomenologically" different from Muslims in Friday prayer. But Muslims do talk to God in very similar ways and these are called *du'a*.

by two communities on a majority who did not speak them natively. Missionaries saw this as a compromise and far from their ideal, but they did not give up on the evangelical project

A central ingredient of spontaneity that remains implicit in debates about sincerity is the feelings and emotions that are assumed to accompany it. Spontaneous language presumably springs from feelings and desires that swell up and that often are related to longing for a connection with the divine. Hence, sincerity is not just a matter of *semiotic* ideology. The concept of semiotic ideology may at times lead us away from the central importance of felt emotions that are crucial to the experience of believers. The self-transformation discussed above is not merely a matter of changes in ways of thinking and on the level of ideas. In Fader's article, the rabbis and therapists are anxious both about what exactly is transpiring in the processes that young ultra-Orthodox Jews are engaging in as Jews—they are afraid of the transformations that seem to be happening—and about the feelings that are being experienced. These are not the feelings that they have been teaching about and they seem unable to control them.

Mediation

The question of mediation (of persons, things, and language) is at the heart of the conceptualization of sincerity evident in anthropological writings on Christianity: What, if anything, should be allowed to mediate and matter in constructing a relationship to God? Should images, statues, saints, deceased kin, things, pilgrimages, other people's words, music, the Internet, offerings, vows, devotional poetry, different languages of prayer, and so on, mediate that relationship? We found the recent volume of Houtman and Meyer (2012) relevant and helpful in exploring debates on mediation and materiality. Houtman and Meyer devote their introduction to arguments against the dominant approach in the study of religion that opposes it to materiality:

> This antagonism resonates with a set of related oppositions that privilege spirit above matter, belief above ritual, content above form, mind over body, and *inward contemplation* above "mere" outward action, producing an understanding of religion in terms, basically, of an *interior* spiritual experience. (Meyer and Houtman 2012: 1, emphasis added)

This is an important and valuable discussion that clears much needed ground in the study of religion. It also poses a series of crucial questions for scholars of religion. Houtman and Meyer remind readers of the successful deconstruction of the concept of "belief" in the last two decades and point out its Christian bias, as others have done (Asad 1993). But there is also a slippage in their treatment of interiority that needs to be brought out and examined. One of their specific criticisms of "belief" has to do with the fact that it obscures issues of power and politics. They argue that

> belief . . . privileges a concern with *interiority* . . . *at the expense of issues of power, practice, and materiality,* making us blind to how religion appears and becomes tangible in the world. . . . Far from operating as a

> politically neutral concept, "belief" has been shown to resonate with a broader secularist idea of *religion as interiorized and private*, according to which religion is ideally located outside the public sphere. (Meyer and Houtman 2012: 2, emphasis added)

The slippage we see in this argument is that the notion of interiority goes down with that of belief. Because belief is "interior," its study leads us necessarily to ignore the larger questions of power. But "belief" does not equal "interiority," nor are attempts at understanding the latter the only or even the main reason why some might ignore power and politics. In fact, while this assertion might be true about, for example, some studies of Protestant Christians, in studies of Muslims, one would like to see *more* of a focus on interiority, not less. The intensely political question is: Who is a Muslim and what subject positions do Muslims occupy in various times and places? It is true that we do not know exactly how interiorities are formed and constituted, but it is reasonable to avoid assuming them to be apolitical entities somehow immune from power struggles, including those over correct practice and scriptural interpretation. Whether we are talking about language, ritual, or relationship with the divine, attention to interiority is not meant to deny that they are parts of structures of authority and figure in specific ways in many kinds of power relations.

There is, furthermore, no reason why exploring self-transformation, inward contemplations, and reflections would force us to buy automatically into the liberal secular idea of religion as belonging to the "private sphere." The question is how to do justice to the role of the individual and her struggles as a religious subject while not losing sight of the political and the social, as we argued above (see also Schielke 2010, 2015; Mittermaier 2012; Orsi 2012). We do not equate belief with interiority and do not assume that interiority may be constituted in a seeming vacuum of more visible and exterior contexts and conditions. Consequently, we also do not sharply separate the public from the private (Gal 2002; Khan 2012), corresponding to exterior and interior. The articles in this collection make explicit contributions to reflecting on interiority without Western liberal-derived assumptions about what interiority looks like (Pandian 2010).

Ethnographic contexts

A strategy that our articles in this collection share is to pay attention to moments of broad social and political change, moments when relationships of authority are contested, implicating both the individual and larger formations. During the last few decades of Soviet rule, abortion was legal and widely available. As other forms of birth control were hard to come by, abortion became a major method of limiting the number of children each family aimed for. But in the post-Soviet era, when large numbers of people, especially women, flocked to the newly opened Orthodox churches, the occasion to reflect back on those abortions came up. As Luehrmann tells us in her article in this collection, many women over fifty had had multiple abortions, and with the fall of the Soviet Union, ideas about their decisions began to change. Large numbers of women wondered about how to understand abortion (was it birth control or murder?), what their own role as individuals was, how their

intentions counted (or not), and how to expiate for it if it was indeed a sin. Questions about inner states and their moral evaluations became voiced and audible, and turned into questions about the actions needed to transform oneself into a more virtuous individual. In answering these questions, Russian Orthodox women recontextualized old practices of self-cultivation in new ways, bringing them from monastic practices into everyday lay lives.

In postrevolutionary Iran, many of the women with whom I spoke told me that had it not been for the Revolution, they may not have become as attentive to reflecting on practices that define a "true Muslim." This is said in spite of the fact that most disagree with some of the state-sanctioned forms of religiosity that they have been encountering in the public sphere. In the face of their fundamental disagreements over who is a true Muslim, they did not give up and cede the ground of religion to the state, that is, they did not just retreat to the "private sphere." They have gone on to form weekly gatherings where interpretations, acts, practices, and differences are discussed. Despite a variety of state-sponsored undertakings, such as the mandatory inclusion of prayer rooms in all public offices and educational institutions and the constant presence of religious figures in the media who emphasize the conditions for the legal validity of prayers as opposed to conditions for concentration and self-transformation, for the women I have been working with a prayer without concentration and "presence of the heart" is not "good *namaz*." [5] At the same time, they speak of differences with their mothers, for whom it seemed to have mattered less whether they could or could not keep their concentration each time they prayed. Hence, debates about why one prays and what is a good prayer take place in public and private spheres. Two of the most frequently used terms in discussions of the performance of the *namaz* and other rituals are *huzuureh qalb,* "presence of the heart," "concentration," and *khuluus*, "sincerity," "purity." People speak about a prayer where one is fully concentrated as having been able to "create a presence" in its performance and make a connection with the divine. Translated into the language of Protestant sincerity, when one creates a presence in the words and acts of a ritual is when the inner and the exterior overlap. The way this state is often described seems to involve so much concentration that one is emotionally transported from one's mundane conditions. Achieving this is spoken of as a constant struggle. Hence, what is a good or bad *namaz*, and what is the role of presence, have become major objects of debate (see Haeri, this collection).

Among ultra-Orthodox Jews in New York, until recently, religious practice was the basis for the cultivation of trust in God (*emune*). Individual intention, while valued in prayer, was less relevant than the discipline provided by embodied religious practice that structured everyday life (Fader 2009). Fader's article shows, however, that over the past fifteen years interiority has become a public, political topic of concern, as a growing number of ultra-Orthodox Jews rejecting religious stringencies found their voice in a counterpublic online. "Discipline" had to be allowed to accompany the possibility for self-transformation. In response, rabbis, educators, and religious therapists have described the contemporary period as a "crisis of *emune* (faith)." Communal leadership has become concerned with newly vulnerable Jewish hearts, minds, and souls, potentially corrupted, invisibly,

5. See Katz (2013) for a historical account of Sunni jurists on this debate.

by religious doubt. Fader examines how ultra-Orthodox rabbis, therapists, and life coaches, in their attempts to prevent and treat hidden doubt, marshaled two historically competing notions of interiority—the psychological/therapeutic (rooted in liberal Protestantism) and the theological (ultra-Orthodox)—a form of sincerity which relied on submission to authority rather than one rooted in individualism.

In Handman's article, Lutheran missionaries in colonial New Guinea went through a (reluctant) shift in their choice of language of translation (of the Bible) and of worship. They were caught between a view of language as "infrastructural"—seen as on a par with roads and transportation—and as "self-making"—a language that would enable the individual in this process. They found Tok Pisin a "horror" that could only be a language of surfaces, while the spoken vernaculars were capable of depth and expression of interiority. They imposed two vernaculars even on communities that did not speak them despite their strongly held belief that only vernaculars spoken natively should be used as languages of conversion and worship. Hence, the missionaries worked with languages whose capacity to express sincere Christian statements were constantly in doubt. Within this mainline Protestant tradition, sincerity was a goal, but one that was constantly deferred in colonial narratives of New Guinean disorder.

In all of these cases, it is clear that the interiority of individuals is not shielded from the larger political conditions and their contradictory demands. Moments that for various reasons bring about heightened doubt, critique, and self-reflection render social and individual ambivalence about key issues of daily life more visible than usual. In the language of Foucault, the self-transformations become visible and audible.

Language and subjectivity

The articles in this collection pay particular attention to language use in worship, ways of performing prayers, talk about pilgrimages, plans and expectations of confessions, and the guidance/treatment of rabbis and psychotherapists for religious doubt. Handman's article in particular attempts to take a step back from implicit assumptions about the complex dialectic between language and subjectivity and first poses the broader question of how the relation between language and subjectivity was understood by Lutheran missionaries.

The ambivalence of Lutheran missionaries with respect to the particular ways in which language and subjectivity intertwine is found in the other three communities discussed in this collection. Among the Iranian women in my group, there is great ambivalence about the choice of Arabic versus Persian when it comes to *du'a* prayers. Whereas few questioned the fact that *namaz*, made up of *suras* of the Qur'an, should be in any language other than the original Arabic, in spontaneously talking to God, they became more explicitly uncertain about whether they could express what they wanted to tell God in Arabic.

Were they to choose Arabic, it meant that they had to recite prayers written by imams and printed in prayer books, and while they can read these and understand them (they are available in bilingual editions), they would not be able to speak to God in Arabic spontaneously as they do not actually speak the language. Hence,

the desire to speak to God from the heart mingled with the idea of choice of language and became an explicit and expansive commentary on sincerity, relationship with the divine, and formulaic versus spontaneous prayers. It also mingled in various ways with the power struggles between well-known clerics over whether to promote prayer books, and if so, which ones. Note that if we were to formulate their semiotic ideology solely on the basis of *namaz*, we would barely run into the ambivalence toward Arabic in *du'a* and toward Persian in *namaz*.

As Fader suggests, methodologically following specific uses of language as it is employed in a range of sites in daily life, beyond explicitly religious contexts, allows us to "get at" interiority. She examines emerging public talk about interiorities in contexts where community leaders developed a new division of labor to protect against religious doubt. With religious therapists treating "health" and rabbis dealing with "ethics," ultra-Orthodox leadership was able to define those with religious doubts as "unhealthy" but not morally culpable. Luehrmann exemplifies a comparable approach by examining the ways in which "sin" is talked about. An idea with little currency during Soviet times, sin has regained a place in everyday conversations. Yet it is "a thing, something external to the self rather than a deep truth about who one is." People say that they "have" or "hand in" that sin, akin to depositing a piece of clothing on a rack. The articles offer examples of some of the many ways in which explorations of language use and language choice can illuminate ideas about subjectivity in different spheres of daily life.

Conclusion

The constitution and reconstitution of interiorities through the mediation of language, persons, and things is viewed with ambivalence rather than any absolute judgment in the communities that we examined. Such views become wellsprings of wider political disputes and power struggles and hence have broad ramifications for the society as a whole. They also, almost always, intersect with other bases of conflict and other speech events that may have little to do with questions of worship. The medium of the Internet, its threats to Jewish interiority, its potential for the anonymous expression of religious doubt, and innovations in the therapeutic treatment of doubt have all contributed to an ongoing "crisis of mediation" (Eisenlohr 2011) where the very nature of mediation was contested.

This collection is intended as an invitation to engage in more systematic studies of interiority and attendant concepts. We aim to harness the promise of the concept of sincerity by scrutinizing it in different religious contexts and demonstrating that it proves a useful one for a focus on the individual worshipper in her interactions with institutionalized religion. Sincerity as an anxiety about the quality of one's relationship to the divine is not limited to Protestantism. By pursuing the notions of sincerity and interiority in four different communities we hope to explore the possibility of undertaking, in increasingly more methodical and principled fashion, comparative ethnographies of interiority. One promise of our approach is that it does not take the potential consequences of doctrinal religious differences for granted as starting points with already well-defined and bounded communities of followers. We need to better understand how interiorities are constituted and

to ask ourselves: What kinds of roles with what kinds of temporalities do various contexts play in their formation? Relatedly, how are we to historicize interiority and avoid representations of timeless ways of boundary making between the self and the world? How do we account for individual changes in these crucial respects so that we acknowledge ethnographically and theoretically that individuals' interiorities change over a lifetime and in different historical periods?

Finally, a major promise of the studies in this collection is that perhaps as we make progress in understanding interiority, we can have a more nuanced approach to modern subjectivity. Whether or not, within the limited context of the sincerity debate, autonomy, spontaneity, freedom, and so on, are reasonably seen as centrally involved in the emergence of modern subjectivity, we do not find our field interlocutors to be indifferent to or unaware of "the competing demands of human intentions, divinely appointed order, and worldly realities" (Luehrmann, this collection). As Seligman et al. state: "What we usually call the 'modern,' therefore, should instead be understood in part as a period in which sincerity claims have been given a rare institutional and cultural emphasis" (2008: 181).

Relative to Protestant subjects, postrevolutionary Iranian Muslims, post-Soviet Eastern Orthodox Christians, and ultra-Orthodox Jews are often seen as "traditional," rooted in a premodern past, and somehow unable to move to the present modernity of Protestant societies. The communities we have studied do differ in many ways from each other and from Protestant ones, but to determine what exactly these differences mean, and their ramifications for modernity, we need to devote more sustained attention to questions of interiority (Hann 2014). We have tried to show that, in particular in moments of change, the very ideas, assumptions, and practices that have come to define certain communities as not-quite-modern become objects of reflection, intense debate, and disagreement, both within individuals and in their broader contexts.

Acknowledgments

The original versions of the articles in this section were part of a panel convened at the 2014 American Anthropological Association meetings with the title "Sincerity, Ethics and the Constitution of Interiority." The articles of four of the five panelists appear in this section. I thank Sonja, Ayala, and Courtney for their input into the writing of this introduction. Our panel was cochaired by Webb Keane and Michael Lambek; and our discussant was Rupert Stasch. We are grateful to all three for their participation and comments at the panel.

References

Asad, Talal. 1993. *Genealogies of religion: Discipline and reason of power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre. (1972) 1977. *Outline of a theory of practice.* Translated by Richard Nice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cannell, Fenella. 2006. *The anthropology of Christianity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

de Certeau, Michel. 1988. *The practice of everyday life*. Translated by Steven Rendall. Berkeley: University of California Press.

de Vries, Hent. 2008. "Introduction: Why still 'religion'?" In *Religion: Beyond a concept*, edited by Hent de Vries, 1–98. New York: Fordham University Press.

Eisenlohr, Patrick. 2011. "The anthropology of media and the question of ethnic and religious pluralism." *Social Anthropology* 19 (1): 40–55.

Engelke, Matthew. 2007. *The problem of presence: Beyond scripture in an African church.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Fader, Ayala. 2009. *Mitzvah girls: Bringing up the next generation of Hasidic Jews in Brooklyn*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Foucault, Michel. (1982) 2005. *The hermeneutics of the subject: Lectures at the Collège de France 1981–82*. Translated by Graham Burchell. Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan.

Gal, Susan. 2002. "A semiotics of the public/private distinction." *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 13 (1): 77–95.

Ghamari-Tabrizi, Behrooz. 2016. *Foucault in Iran: Islamic Revolution after the Enlightenment*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Haeri, Niloofar. 2013. "The private performance of *salat* prayers: Time, repetition and meaning." *Anthropological Quarterly* 86 (1): 5–34.

Handman, Courtney. 2015. *Critical Christianity: Translation and denominational conflict in Papua New Guinea.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Hann, Chris. 2014. "The heart of the matter: Christianity, materiality, and modernity." *Current Anthropology* 55 (S10): S182–92.

Hirschkind, Charles. 2009. *The ethical landscape: Cassette sermons and Islamic counterpublics.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Houtman, Dick, and Birgit Meyer. 2012. "Introduction: Material religion—how things matter." In *Things: Religion and the question of materiality*, edited by Dick Houtman and Birgit Meyer, 1–23. New York: Fordham University Press.

Humphrey, Caroline, and James Laidlaw. 2004. *The archetypal actions of ritual: A theory of ritual illustrated by the Jain rite of worship. London: Oxford University Press.*

Katz, Marion. 2013. *Prayer in Islamic thought and practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Keane, Webb. 2002. "Sincerity, 'modernity,' and the Protestants." *Cultural Anthropology* 17 (1): 65–92.

———. 2007. *Christian moderns: Freedom and fetish in a missionary encounter.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Khan, Naveeda. 2012. *Muslim becoming: Aspiration and skepticism in Pakistan*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Luhrmann, Tanya. 2012. *When God talks back: Understanding the American evangelical relationship with God.* New York: Vintage Books.

Mahmood, Saba. 2001. "Rehearsed spontaneity and the conventionality of ritual: Disciplines of '*Salat*'." *American Ethnologist* 28 (4): 827–53.

———. 2005. *Politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Mittermaier, Amira. 2012. "Dreams from Elsewhere: Muslim subjectivities beyond the trope of self-cultivation." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.) 18 (2): 247–65.

Orsi, Robert. 2006. *Between heaven and earth: The religious worlds people make and the scholars who study them*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

———. 2012. "Afterword: Everyday religion and the contemporary world: The un-modern, or what was supposed to have disappeared but did not." In *Ordinary lives and grand schemes: An anthropology of everyday religion*, edited by Samuli Schielke and Liza Debevec, 146–60. New York: Berghahn Books.

Pandian, Anand. 2010. "Interior horizons: An ethical space of selfhood in South India." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.) 16 (1): 64–83.

Rabinow, Paul, ed. 1997. *Michel Foucault: Ethics, subjectivity, and truth*. New York: The New Press.

Robbins, Joel. 2001. "God is nothing but talk: Modernity, language, and prayer in a Papua New Guinea Society." *American Anthropologist* 103 (4): 901–12.

———. 2004. *Becoming sinners: Christianity and moral torment in a Papua New Guinea Society.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

———. 2008. "On not knowing other minds: Confession, intention, and linguistic exchange in a Papua New Guinea community." *Anthropological Quarterly* 81 (2): 421–29.

Schieffelin, Bambi B. 2008. "Speaking only your own mind: Reflections on talk, gossip and intentionality in Bosavi (PNG)." *Anthropological Quarterly* 81 (2): 431–41.

Schielke, Samuli. 2010. "Second thoughts about the anthropology of Islam, or how to make sense of grand schemes in everyday life." *Zentrum Moderner Orient* 2: 1–16.

———. 2015. *Egypt in the future tense: Hope, frustration, and ambivalence before and after 2011.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Seligman, Adam B., Robert P. Weller, Michael J. Puett, and Bennett Simon. 2008. *Ritual and its consequences: An essay on the limits of sincerity.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Targoff, Rami. 2001. *Common prayer: The language of public devotion in early modern England.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Trilling, Lionel. 1972. *Sincerity and authenticity.* Boston: Harvard University Press.

Yelle, Robert. 2013. *The semiotics of religion: signs of the sacred in history.* London: Bloomsbury.

Désagréger la sincérité: langage, médiation et intériorité dans une perspective comparative

Résumé : Cette collection HAU est un effort collectif et exploratoire visant à promouvoir l'étude comparative des fidèles de différentes traditions religieuses. Nous employons le concept de sincérité tel qu'il est défini et utilisé dans l'anthropologie de la chrétienté et nous étudions s'il prend sens ou non parmi la communauté juive ultra-orthodoxe de New York, au sein d'un groupe de femmes russes fidèles de l'Eglise orthodoxe, parmi un autre groupe d'iraniennes chiites, ou encore auprès de missionnaires luthérien en Papouasie Nouvelle-Guinée. La sincérité en ce sens, semble étroitement associée à l'autonomie, l'*agency*, la liberté et semble servir de prémisse à la notion moderne de subjectivité.Dans toutes les communautés étudiées, nous avons rencontré beaucoup d'anxiété autour de la notion de sincérité et de son incidence dans la construction d'une relation au divin. Dans cette collection, nous tentons de dissocier la notion de sincérité des concepts auxquels elle est associée et de ses conséquences, afin d'examiner les différentes notions d'intériorité impliquées dans les concepts locaux de sincérité, et de mieux comprendre l'anxiété ressentie par les croyants et les autorités cléricales. Nous suggérons que le fait de rendre compte de l'intériorité complète l'étude du rôle fondamental des rapports de force à l'origine de la formation du sujet religieux: en effet, les rapports de force ne déterminent pas entièrement comment, au fil du temps, le sujet trouve sa propre manière de forger cette relation. À travers l'étude de la modernité du Protestantisme et de son attachement à la notion de sincérité, nous montrons que, dans des périodes de changement, les idées, les suppositions et les pratiques qui définissent certains communautés comme pas tout à fait moderne deviennent des objets de réflexion, de débats, et de désaccords, au sein même des individus et dans leurs communautés plus largement.

Niloofar Haeri is Professor of Anthropology and Director of the Program in Islamic Studies at Johns Hopkins University. She has written extensively on the political and cultural dilemmas of the language situation in Egypt and on language ideology in the Arab world. More recently, she has been doing research in Tehran, Iran, among a group of Shi'a women, focusing on their ritual practices, such as the *salat*/*namaz*, and on the implications of the intermingling of the worlds of prayer and poetry in their lives.

Niloofar Haeri
Department of Anthropology
Mergenthaler Hall
Johns Hopkins University
Baltimore, MD 21218
USA
haeri@jhu.edu