De-Centering and Re-Centering: Rethinking Concepts and Methods in the Sociological Study of Religion

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Four conceptual and methodological edges or areas of study are outlined. They are located near what have been the boundaries between the sociology of religion and other subfields, where we believe a potential exists to encourage a wide range of scholars to revisit some central concepts. Paying attention to these edges—as a means to de-center to re-center our debates in new ways—not only broadens and deepens our knowledge of the "religious," it encourages us to reexamine long-standing conceptual tools, unquestioned assumptions, and accepted methods in the sociology of religion. We illustrate these edges through a review of recent literature and examples drawn from our current empirical projects.

Keywords: sociocultural contexts, Christocentrism, everyday religion, critical analysis.

INTRODUCTION

It is fair to say that the sociology of religion is going through a period of self-reflection (Poulson and Campbell 2010; Smilde and May 2010; Smith 2008). In the last 50 years, sociological studies of religion have shifted from their focus on secularization to the widespread influence of "the new paradigm" and rational choice—to what Smilde and May (2010) call "paradigmatic reflection." Although debates about these interpretive frames, especially rational choice, are far from over, many scholars are questioning the basic state of the field. Riesebrodt (2008:25) claims the sociology of religion is in "crisis" as scholars work with "diverse concepts of religion that are basically incompatible with each other and with our theories" and that fail to explain world events. Smith (2008:1563) describes the field as in "an ill-defined transition stage" in which "many scholars are moving beyond some of the field's burning concerns of recent years but have not yet clearly redefined the major issues, challenges and goals for the future."[1] There is also a sense that the social sciences have paid insufficient attention to religion, especially

[1] Several recent handbooks and articles provide an overview of these debates, including Beckford and Demerath (2007), Clarke (2009), Dillon (2003), Smith (2008), Smilde and May (2010), and Poulson and Campbell (2010). For earlier

given its prominent role in world affairs, and that, perhaps as a result, many current debates in the sociology of religion take place in isolation from the rest of the discipline.

By outlining four edges or intersections where the sociology of religion meets other disciplines and debates, we hope to ease this marginality and emphasize the connections between sociologists of religion proper and those investigating religion from other starting points. We also want to bring into focus how the conversations and modes of inquiry taking place at these borders de-center many taken-for-granted ways of thinking about religion. Taking a fresh look at these concepts allows us to rethink what counts as religion and to expand both the range of questions we ask and the theories and methods we use to answer them. When we unpack the assumptions about religion and social life that many of these theories, categories, and methods are based on, we bring new insights to our debates, thereby re-centering them in new and exciting ways.

In the first section, we draw on the collaborative work we are doing with Courtney Bender to define these generative intellectual edges and move beyond them (Bender et al. 2011). They include: (1) provincializing the United States, or understanding how U.S. history and socio-cultural contexts create a particular type of religious life; (2) moving beyond Christocentrism; (3) considering religion outside of congregations; and (4) encouraging scholars to critically consider the role of religion in society rather than simply assuming it to be positive.

We seek to show how work on non-Christian religions, on religion in non-U.S. contexts, on religion outside of congregational settings, and/or work that questions the social role of religion challenges us to reconsider current and long-standing ideas and to connect with debates in other social sciences. What is revealed about the self, pluralism, or modernity when we look outside the United States or outside Christian settings? What do we learn about how and where the religious is actually at work and what its role is when we unpack the assumptions embedded in these overly familiar categories? What kinds of methods help expose our blind spots and how do the insights they yield help us re-center the sociology of religion?

Our goal is to establish a space for vibrant scholarship about religion that is broadly and creatively conceived and firmly integrated into other debates. We then illustrate, through case studies, how new insights can be gained by pushing beyond our edges, thereby broadening our understanding of the multiple ways religion is present and constructed around the world.

DE-CENTERING AND RE-CENTERING: FOUR EDGES

Provincializing the United States

In their recent review of 30 years of sociological scholarship on religion, Smilde and May (2010) found that over 70 percent of all journal articles focused on religious dynamics in the United States. Similarly, Poulson and Campbell (2010), reviewing articles published in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* and *Sociology of Religion* between 2001 and 2008, reported that less than 20 percent showcased research on a non-Western geographic region. Although this is somewhat understandable—these are U.S.-based journals—we need to reflect on how this parochial focus shapes our understandings of what "religion" is. We also need to recognize in what ways it limits our ability to engage in scholarly as well as policy conversations outside the country (Smilde and May 2010).

Postcolonial scholars such as Chakrabarty (2000) call for scholars to "provincialize Europe" as a way of understanding non-Western religious practices on their own terms. We make a similar call to U.S.-based sociologists of religion by asking them to consider how history, nationalism,

assessments of the state of the field and its history, see Beckford (2000). He cites overviews by Demerath and Roof (1976), Wuthnow (1988), Sherkat and Ellison (1999), and Willaime (1999).

and approaches to management of ethnic and religious diversity influence how we understand religion in the United States and its connections to religions around the world.

This is not just a matter of increasing the number of studies on Islam or Hinduism but of studying religious phenomena beyond U.S. borders and their relationships with each other. It is about being willing to take a hard look at how U.S. history and cultural structures influence the kinds of religious expressions scholars have traditionally paid attention to and how they have interpreted them.

The Christian (read Protestant) values and organizational forms that pervade many aspects of U.S. political and civic life provide one example of this hidden provincial bias. According to historian Peter Dobkin Hall (1998:101), "far from being a 'second-order phenomenon,' religion, in particular liberal Protestant values, were integral in the development of American corporate technology. The rationales and methods of bureaucratic and corporate organization actually emerged from the domain of religion and spread from there to the economic, political and social institutions."[2] These Protestant Christian templates profoundly shape religious and secular organization and practice, the role of religion in public life, and research about it. They narrow the range of scholarly focus and filter the analysis through American narratives and frames.

The first assumption to be exposed, then, relates to how Christian (read Protestant) templates influence how we think about what constitutes religion. A second deeply held assumption is our national self-image as a country of immigrants founded on principles of religious pluralism. According to Ammerman (2009), the United States is relatively unique in that it is a highly religious country, with a high degree of religious pluralism, yet with little religious conflict. Although this characteristic may on the whole be positive, accepting the status quo uncritically sidesteps the question of who defines pluralism and which groups benefit the most from particular definitions. According to Bender (2011), although sociologists of religion are fluent in various narratives about religious pluralism, each shares a basic epistemological position, from which American public and civic life are seen as providing "open" and "free" ground to all religious groups. Religious groups are mistakenly understood to be inherently bounded and packageable so it is possible to have pluralistic relations between them. De-provincializing U.S. religion requires confronting how U.S. religious and secular structures and norms make some forms of religion appear natural and normal and others "deviant."

The idea of American exceptionalism also affects how researchers compare religious life in the United States to other nations. The notion that the United States was an experiment, a light unto the nations, populated by independent, rugged individuals also feeds a belief in America's religious uniqueness. America's desire to fulfill its "manifest destiny" by exercising moral leadership, argues Ignatieff (2005:25), "is something more than the ordinary narcissism and nationalism that all powerful states display. It is rooted in the belief that the liberty exercised in the United States was of universal significance, even the work of Providential design." Our point here is not to deny the benefits of religious freedom. It is to underline the historical particularity of liberal values, to raise for consideration how ideas about American exceptionalism have influenced religious scholarship, and to question the exportability of these narratives and frames to analyses of non-U.S. contexts.

In the same way, assumptions regarding the proper content of religion—as values, beliefs, and practices having to do with morality, identity, and the afterlife—must be challenged by comparative research. Asad (1993) did this in his social history of the concept of religion as an

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[2] Norris and Inglehart (2004:17) also make this argument with respect to Europe. They say that even though less than 5 percent of the Swedish public attends church weekly, there is "a distinctive Protestant value system that they hold in common with the citizens of other historically Protestant societies such as Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Germany and the Netherlands . . . . Even in highly secular societies, the historical legacy of given religions continues to shape worldviews and to define cultural zones."

autonomous cultural sphere in Europe (see also Hall 2009). Studies of religion in the global South where many people struggle to make ends meet also reveal, in the case of certain evangelical and Pentecostal Christian sects currently flourishing there, how religion is employed in projects of everyday survival and to improve self and family (Brusco 1995; Burdick 1993; Smilde 2007). We need to understand these forms of religiosity on their own terms, however, rather than assuming they are instrumental, cynical, and unstable. Doing so also brings into focus aspects of religious practice that have always been present in the industrialized West but were hidden or obscured because we viewed them through a filtered lens.

Finally, revising our conceptions about the geographies of religious experience can also move scholarship forward, although U.S. sociologists of religion are hardly the only ones guilty of this blind spot. Much research erroneously assumes that forces at work inside U.S. borders are the primary drivers of U.S. religion (Levitt 2007). However, religious bodies, objects, and ideas are often and unabashedly on the move, skillfully ignoring and circumventing national boundaries. Rather than assuming that religious life stays primarily within contained spaces (be they religious traditions, congregations, or nations), we might gain analytic purchase by starting from the assumption of circulation and connection. We could see religion not as a cohesive, rooted whole but as a loosely constructed assemblage of actors, objects, and ideas traveling at different rates and rhythms in to-be-determined geographies (Levitt, Lucken, and Barnett 2011). Studies by various scholars reveal dense social and organizational webs of connection, power, and influence that directly challenge the national boundaries of religious life and show that religious identities are not constructed using only national repertoires (Chen 2008; Hagan 2008; Kurien 2007; Levitt 2007; Mooney 2009; Stepick, Rey, and Mahler 2009; Vásquez and Marquardt 2003; Wuthnow 2010; Yang and Ebaugh 2001). This approach also demonstrates how similar religious terms and practices assume very different meanings in different contexts (Chong 2008).

Beyond Christocentrism

Christocentrism is foreshadowed in the previous section but we emphasize and expand upon it here as a second edge because it is so omnipresent. In sociological studies, past and present, religion most often refers to Christianity and, more specifically, to a narrow range of Christian forms practiced in the United States over the last few centuries. Smilde and May (2010:14) report that between 1978 and 2007 just over 50 percent of the articles about religion published in sociology of religion journals dealt with Christianity. Poulson and Campbell (2010:38) also found that 82 percent of the articles published between 2001 and 2008 in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* and *Sociology of Religion* dealt with Christian communities (see also Beyer 2000). As scholars turn to religious phenomena in other parts of the world and as their work becomes more historically grounded, the limits of this Christocentrism become increasingly clear.

Research on Islam, for example, shows how politics can be a central religious interest and issue, not an unnatural intrusion as suggested by some Christian teaching (Arjomand 1993; Asad 2003; Moaddel 2005). Research on Hinduism reveals not a consistent, coherent set of beliefs but a way of life in which the sacred and the profane, the religious and the cultural are often difficult to distinguish (Kurien 2007; Levitt 2007). Research on Buddhism reveals that networks of reciprocity and commitment can often be more important than ethical discourse (Friedrich-Silber 1995). Smith's (1982) research on Judaism emphasizes the importance of sacred places and rituals and calls into question how much Judaism can be understood as a "cultural" tradition modeled along Christian lines (see also Goldschmidt 2006). The foregoing examples demonstrate how uncritically using a Christian frame to understand non-Christian religious forms is not always a good fit. Even recent research on Christianity drives home the internal diversity of practice and meaning within the category of "Christianity"—particularly among Catholics (Carroll 2007; Orsi 2005).

Despite these acknowledged variations, Christian templates still strongly influence sociology in general and the sociology of religion in particular. For example, there is a paradigmatic pattern of individual Christian conversion at adolescence, based on St. Augustine's confessions, that has been replicated everywhere and in all ages (Casanova 1994). However, how do the coming-of-age ceremonies in other religious traditions actually compare to this Christian model? Or we might ask how the reformist projects of the *Tablighi Dawa* or of Neo-Hindus compare to those of the Christian entrepreneurial-evangelizer who also strives to spread a purified, reformed version of faith? Can we identify paradigmatic patterns within the discursive traditions of Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism to see if these or similar patterns have perhaps shaped hegemonic Christian models and discourses? The results of such thought exercises might drive home just how analytically dangerous and ultimately dishonest it is to try to fit all religious expressions into Christian boxes. They might also reveal how much the interaction and mutual influence has been a two-way street.

Religion Outside of Congregations

Looking at religious practices outside of congregations is a third area of inquiry or "edge" with clear potential to bring new insights and energy into sociological studies of religion. Many studies, like those focused on post-1965 immigrants to the United States, assume that congregations are the natural home for religious expressions with their leaders, administrative structures, and organization (Cadge 2008). This assumption not only fails to capture a whole range of non-Christian collective religious forms, it also overlooks many religious expressions that manifest themselves in informal and allegedly secular contexts.

As an increasing number of scholars note, religious life takes place not only inside the walls of the mosque or the church but in so-called secular venues as well, such as the workplace, the schoolyard, on the bus, and in the hospital. Cadge (2009, forthcoming; see also Cadge, Ecklund, and Short 2009) argues that religion is alive and well in the allegedly secular, scientific halls of research hospitals and among pediatric physicians. Michael Lindsay (2007) has shown that evangelical networks permeate the upper reaches of the American political, educational, and media elite. Other scholars highlight how progressive activists use religious discourses and practices as important resources in their work (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2008; Nepstad 2008; Smith 1996; Wood 2002).

In all of these cases, neither the congregation, nor any other religious organization, is the primary location where religious practice occurs. Many of these studies also illustrate how courts or legislative bodies not only "create" religion but how these institutions construct and regulate religion in a variety of large and small ways (Sullivan 2009). Immigration issues, diplomacy, tax codes, land-use and zoning regulations, and state licensing boards are just some of the arenas where the scope of the religious and its proper place are determined.

Some of this work goes even farther by reconceptualizing the religious groups that have been treated as the logical and natural actors in American sociology and political theory. Most studies of pluralism, for example, have taken the stated distinctions between religious traditions for granted and also assumed these boundaries to be salient for people "on the ground" in their religious lives and practice. A promising step forward is research that brings to light the internal incoherence of religious groups, the unusual cross-religious coalitions and partnerships that arise between allegedly strange bedfellows, and the ways in which governments and history shape the management of religious difference among various self-evident and supposedly natural groups. A recent volume edited by Bender and Klassen (2010) takes as its point of departure that the organization and boundaries of religions are neither normal nor natural and that their relation to each other within various state formations are produced rather than given. They also show how various public groups, scholars, politicians, and commentators use scholarly narratives of

religious pluralism and the "new religious diversity" to focus and dramatize their anxieties about the future of modern democratic engagements, personal liberties, and minority rights.

Critical Engagements

Finally, we stress the need to question the social role of religion rather than simply assuming it contributes positively to believers' autonomy and agency or to general social well-being. Smilde and May's (2010) analysis also revealed that between the 1970s and 1990s, positive sociological portrayals of religion rose whereas negative depictions declined. Since 2000, both positive and negative portrayals have increased. The terrorist bombings of September 11, civil wars in Yugoslavia, ethnic tensions in South and Southeast Asia, sex scandals in the Catholic Church, and the high profile of evangelical Protestantism during the second Bush administration probably refocused scholarly interest on religion and created a context that tolerated its critique.

We see these developments as positive. Contemporary treatments of religion as empowering or socially beneficial were an important counterpoint to the excesses of old-fashioned Marxist portraits of religion as an opiate of the masses and to the knee-jerk modernist predictions and portrayals of inevitable religious decline. However, in what some have called a postsecular world, in which there is less doubt that religion remains a vital social force, does it still make sense to see it as generally positive? Religious studies scholar Orsi (2005) has challenged scholars to round out their portraits by using a "tragic" register that recognizes the often limited and limiting effects of religions on people, as well as their capacity to empower.

Overstating religion's positive impact steers us away from confronting how religious practices contribute to patriarchy, racism, nationalism, militarism, and a host of other social and political ills. Recent studies have made some headway by showing how religion simultaneously enables and disempowers. Emerson and Smith (2000), for example, argue that evangelical Protestantism is an important site for interracial encounters, although they also discuss its limits and counterproductive effects (see also Marti 2005). Moon's (2004) work on religion and sexuality also teases out how Christianity both encourages and inhibits acceptance of homosexuality. The more nuanced, measured work reflected in these studies more accurately captures religion's role and, by so doing, opens the way for more meaningful conversations within and between social science disciplines.

CASE STUDIES

Evidence of how these four edges demand a rethinking of central concepts in sociological studies of religion are best illustrated through examples. In addition to the many studies cited above, in this section we provide two more fully developed examples from our own work that reveal how religion insinuates itself into unexpected places and how unpacking well-worn sociological categories allows us to see the religious in new ways.

Religion in the Halls of Medicine

Paying attention to religion outside of congregations opens up a range of questions about how, where, and in what forms religion is present in other areas of American life and what implications that presence might have for society as a whole. Although scholars have certainly considered the role and significance of religion in First Amendment jurisprudence, voting behaviors (Manza and Brooks 1999), public conflicts over controversial moral issues (Adamczyk 2009; Froese, Bader, and Smith 2008), and social movement activism (Casanova 1994; Oberschall and Kim 1996), they have been more hesitant to investigate how religion is present and constructed in secular organizations. Perhaps, as Demerath and colleagues (1998) suggest, classic secularization

arguments, positing that institutional differentiation would lead religion not to be present in secular organizations, dissuaded scholars from looking for it. Bender and others, however, have pointed to the fallacy in such arguments, showing that, in Bender's (2010:182) words, the "binaries of religious and secular institutional differentiation are inadequate to our analysis of religious life in America."

Wendy Cadge's research has recently focused on the presence and construction of religion and spirituality in large academic medical centers. She investigates where religion and spirituality are present in these secular medical organizations, how they are constructed, how differences are negotiated, and how staff members understand and respond to religion-related issues. Answering such questions involved: tracing historical antecedents; analyzing national Joint Commission policies; visiting chapels, meditation rooms, and other areas in hospitals specifically set aside for religious or spiritual purposes; interviewing hospital chaplains, the professionals most often responsible for religion and spirituality in healthcare settings; and talking with medical staff about how they understand and respond to religion and spirituality both professionally and personally (Cadge forthcoming).

Hospital chapels as well as prayer and meditation rooms are particularly rich sites for observing how religious differences are negotiated inside of secular institutions. They are strategic sites that capture what Levitt (2011) has referred to as religious ideas and practices "in motion," pointing to shifting notions of religion and spirituality, inclusivity, and diversity at play in the minds of the people who design and regulate the spaces. Clearly, religion is not just a property of individuals, nor of organizations and/or nation-states, but also of the public spaces where religious ideas collide. Religious practices taking place outside of congregational settings in secular sites such as hospitals must be negotiated not as secondary but as fundamental components of what religion is.[3]

Cadge visited these spaces in all of the teaching hospitals in one state and was immediately struck by the wide variation in how they were furnished, named, and used. A vice-president at Simon Medical Center,[4] for example, aptly described that hospital's two chapels as "little remnants of past worlds." Built years ago to reflect two different religious traditions, the chapels still retain their original appearances down to the cross, stained glass window, pews, and, in what had been the Protestant chapel, denominational hymn books. At Overbrook Hospital, not far away, the original chapel has been moved and renovated several times in recent years. It now houses 20 movable chairs, artificial plants, a piano, and no fixed religious symbols. A sign on one wall points toward Mecca for Muslims wishing to pray. Prayer rugs and texts from a range of religious traditions are available on a shelf at the back of the room.

Taken as a group, most chapels Cadge visited had transitioned over time to be what chaplains describe as more welcoming, flexible, and inclusive in terms of religious practices and objects. Sometimes, as at Creek Hospital, religious symbols from various faiths diversify a chapel that was originally designed as a Christian space and used primarily for Catholic services. When the current director arrived, she prompted a redesign to, in her words, create a multi-faith "space that's accommodating [to] a variety of religious traditions" and furnished with symbolic objects from a range of religious traditions. An ingenious system of curtains and pulleys was built at the front of the chapel so that a large cross with images on it (for Catholics), or a plain wooden cross (for Protestants), or the Star of David (for Jews) could be displayed at the front of the room separately from the other two. A sign also points toward Mecca, and prayer rugs and prayer times for Muslims are available on a shelf at the back, as well as prayer shawls and Sabbath candles for Jews, cushions for Buddhists, and scriptures, including the Koran, Old Testament, and several

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[3] Aspects of this section appear in Cadge (2011).

[4] All hospital names are pseudonyms.

translations of the New Testament. The materials needed for Catholic and Episcopal communion are also available in the chapel.[5]

Creek Hospital is far more diverse in its offerings than most. It is more common to find chapels and prayer rooms in which fixed and denomination-specific religious objects have simply been removed during renovations. New interfaith spaces have typically been built around what directors of chaplaincy departments describe as more neutral and welcoming symbols of water, light, and nature. At Central Hospital, a confessional booth, baptismal font, and organ were pushed against back walls, indicative of their infrequent use. Stained-glass sun catchers with images of flowers and insects were on windows at the front, the focal point of the room. At Queen's Hospital, a three-paneled, stained-glass screen in geometric patterns was the main image in the chapel. The director explained the stained glass saying, "I like to think of it as a metaphor for pastoral care at the hospital: a prism that serves people of many different faiths, a symbol of peace and hope." At Main Hospital, following directives from his supervisors, the chapel had to be called a "meditation room" and could not "have any visible signs of any particular faith or denomination," explained the director. Devoid of religious symbols, the space was oriented around a round, blue-and-yellow stained-glass art piece hanging prominently at the front of the room.

As chapels have shifted over time from being mono-religious to either multi-religious or, more commonly, interfaith (or what chaplaincy directors call neutral spaces), the ways hospital chapels are used have also shifted. Although many chapels were initially built as places to hold religious services within a particular religious (usually Christian) tradition, most are today used primarily as places people can stop for a few minutes to rest, meditate, or offer a prayer. Religious services that are now held, usually in a wider range of traditions or as interfaith services, are sparsely attended. As patient stays have declined and the health conditions of those admitted to hospitals become more acute, the patients are no longer the ones who use the chapels. "The nature of healthcare has changed," one director explained. "If patients are able to get down to a service [in the chapel], they're in a cab going home . . . . They'll never see any other place in the hospital but the OR and their bed." Thus, it is primarily staff and family members who stop in chapels to sit quietly, cry, sleep, or pray silently by themselves. In almost all of the chapels Cadge visited, she also found communal prayer books that invited people to write and leave a prayer, worry, or concern. These books were often a focus of activity as people entered, wrote a prayer, and then sat for a few minutes before leaving (Cadge and Daglian 2008; O'Reilly 2000).

To summarize, the history and development of these hospital chapels suggests a very slow process of institutional isomorphism as ideas about the appropriateness of "interfaith" or neutral chapel spaces rather than tradition-specific chapels slowly circulated, probably more through the networks of hospital chaplains, who tend to work together on their designs and renovations, than through hospital administrators. Rather than multi-faith spaces with symbols from a range of religious and spiritual traditions, hospitals have more often created what they call interfaith or neutral spaces focused on new symbols, usually of nature and art, though sometimes continuing to reflect underlying Christian templates and assumptions.[6] These templates most likely reflect two influences: first, the assumptions about religion held by the disproportionate number of (liberal) Protestant chaplains who lead chaplaincy departments and make decisions about chapel spaces, and second, what Wuthnow (1998) and Roof (1993) have described as Americans' broader mix-and-match approach to spirituality and religion writ large. Perhaps this trend reflects Americans'

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[5] Pointing to the need for tradition-specific spaces, the director of chaplaincy at this hospital also spoke of how she and her colleagues support the creation of such spaces. "For instance," she explained, "we have the only succa [Jewish space used during Sukkot] in the medical area, and we had a blast building it, and the doctors and families and patients come from all over the medical area to eat and have text study."

[6] This is also the case in some U.K. prisons (Beckford and Gilliat 1998).

increasing comfort with mixing different religious ideas outside the boxes of their religious organizations, or perhaps it suggests an approach to religion that tries to emphasize similarities across different traditions rather than pointing out differences in how meanings are assembled.

In either case, hospital chapels stand as one example of many spaces outside of congregations where religion and spirituality are negotiated in so called secular American institutions. These chapel space case studies show what is overlooked in approaches to religion that do not look beyond congregations to understand the multiple ways religion is present and negotiated in contemporary American life. Consider, then, other seemingly secular organizations—such as universities, military bases, airports, and prisons—where chapel, prayer, or meditation space is also set aside and must be designed and used. Cadge's study raises questions about who makes decisions concerning these spaces, how they are actually used, and how people from different spiritual and religious backgrounds (including none) are (or are not) included. Beyond such specifics, these spaces show that people think about and act on their spiritual and religious beliefs outside of their religious congregations and that in the American context this often involves negotiating differences with others in space as well as in other aspects of practice.

Religion in Rooted Motion

Our second case study addresses two of our other edges—Americanness and Christianity—and develops analytic categories and methods for studying religion in motion. It shows how circulating elements from outside the United States shape "American" religion and Christianity but also how national narratives and institutional arrangements transform and constrain their growth when these elements take root in U.S. soil.

Rather than assuming the geographies and boundaries within which religious life is enacted, Peggy Levitt, Kristen Lucken, and Melissa Barnett conducted interviews of 60 18- to 29-year-old second-generation Hindu and Muslim Gujarati-origin young women attending undergraduate and graduate programs in the Boston area to investigate how the children of immigrants construct their religious identities.[7] They found that the young women created religious identities using elements from across the world. They wove together what they imagined their parents' religious upbringing to be with their own real and imagined experiences of religious life in the United States, India, or England. They also incorporated real and imagined understandings of U.S. religious traditions other than their own, most notably white Christianity. They drew upon references from what they thought of as global youth culture, global Indian culture, and Gujarati-ness in India and/or in different parts of the United States, using materials from different sites (i.e., Gujarat State, Boston, London, Syria) and layers (i.e., local, regional, national, and global) of the transnational social milieus in which they resided.

Some of the young women were *American centric*, locating themselves primarily within the context of the United States. American institutions, culture, diversity management regimes, and history exerted the strongest influence over their religious identities. In contrast, the *Indian-centric* group drew upon ideas, practices, and material objects from India to construct a religious identity they wanted to espouse. A third group categorized as *global secular* felt part of a worldwide community of secular, often upper-class individuals living around the world. A last group, the *diasporic-religious*, embraced membership in a religious community spanning the globe, including India and the United States as well as England, the Middle East, and South Africa.

Although the young women in this study constructed religious identities in reference to religious traditions from around the world, they did so from their rooted positions in the

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[7] An article based on this research, "Religion in Rooted Motion: Negotiating Religious Identity Across Time and Space Through the Prism of the American Experience," is currently under review.

United States. American cultural frames and organizational arrangements strongly shaped their religious constructions and their interpretations of them, both enabling and constraining religious movement.

What expectations rooted in and shaped by American concepts of pluralism, diversity, and what it means to be "religious" channeled the pace and direction of religion on the move among these young women? How did American- and Christian-centric notions about religion affect how religion "comes to ground?"

For one thing, many respondents not only felt they had permission to be religious, "racial," or "ethnic," but also were encouraged or, in some cases, expected to be. According to Johnson (2007) and Kurien (2007), to make a place for themselves in the United States, minorities have to embrace the terms of abiding, unchanging cultural and racial notions University life is a microcosm of the larger society in which resources and recognition are distributed to religious and ethnic groups that are easily identifiable, bounded, and assumed to be internally cohesive. Diversity is managed and controlled in a similar way on college campuses, and the study respondents became fluent in its language and what was expected of them when they went away to school.

This was both a positive and negative experience. Some women felt that joining the South Asian or Muslim Student Association put them in contact with students they had a lot in common with, who often came from similar backgrounds. From those associations, they figured out what they believed in and learned to practice it in more formal ways. What had been, for many, private, infrequent religious expressions became regular, orchestrated group-based study and prayers. This, they felt, was a logical part of taking responsibility for their own religious lives away from their families. They felt proud that they had learned about the formal trappings of their faith.

Other respondents felt trapped by the expectation of their ethnic peers and others that they would know and care about their ancestral home and faith. Not infrequently they felt put in the position of "spokesperson" for Hinduism or Islam. If they did not know enough, they felt pushed to learn more. If they did not want to be part of an "identity-based" group, no clear alternative door was available through which to become part of the larger community.

These respondents' experiences also reflect the overwhelmingly Christian, if not Protestant, bias of the U.S. religious context. Interfaith relations on campus are organized among groups expected to fit easily categorized packages, similar to Christian denominations. Groups are structured similarly and receive comparable sets of resources to make interfaith relations easier. Most respondents felt that interfaith activities were, by and large, a good thing and represented attempts by well-meaning people to accommodate religious differences. They recognized that only a decade ago, there were probably only Christian or Jewish groups on campus at best. Yet, some also remarked that other ways to be religious or practice religion are possible. They resented being pushed into a particular style or form. "Does the price of admission, of being visible," one young woman asked, "mean that you always have to look and act like a Christian?"

In sum, these second-generation Gujarati-American young women attending school in the United States drew upon cultural elements from around the world to construct religious selves, accessing them through travel, technology, memory, imagination, or by participating in ethnic and religious groups. The elements they used traveled through American-inflected cultural frames and organizational forms. They took shape in social settings permeated by U.S. assumptions about religious pluralism and ethnic and racial diversity. Thus, "religion on the move" has its limits. Cultural structures strongly influence the pace and ease of travel, as well as how religious ideas and practices ultimately land and take root.

Conclusion

In this article, we propose ways of de-centering U.S. sociology of religion by seeing how it is being challenged at its edges. Our goal is not simply to diversify what we study. Rather, we

hope that questioning conventional categories and wisdom will lead us to creatively rethink core concepts and to engage more fully with sociology in general. This would, in essence, return us to sociology's roots when, over a century ago, seminal thinkers such as Marx, Weber, and Durkheim addressed central sociological questions by studying religion.

Disciplines and subdisciplines are, of course, more than just malleable sets of ideas. Change never comes easily. Poulson and Campbell (2010) argue that the "institutional parochialism" characteristic of the sociology of religion also characterizes many other sociological subfields. They suggest that processes of institutional isomorphism, plus the fact that it is easier to access U.S.-based, already-existing data sets, impedes change. We agree and would add to this list the continuing support of Christian denominations and foundations that, although much appreciated, also contributes to a persistent overriding focus on Christianity and on congregations.

Nevertheless, as decades of social movements scholarship suggest, conservative isomorphic pressures on institutions are powerful, but not insurmountable. Indeed, we see signs that hints of the changes we call for here are already underway. More scholars are more willing to look at religion critically—to talk openly about its positive and negative aspects, rather than simply maintaining scientific neutrality or focusing exclusively on the positive. Smilde and May's (2010) data show an increase and diversification in socioevaluative engagements. Work on religious phenomena outside of congregations and on religious life outside the United States also seems to be on the rise. In addition, some graduate programs provide the resources needed for students to study the languages and cultural contexts required for broader understandings of religions outside of the United States (see also Poulson and Campbell 2010). Integrating scholars from other disciplines working on religious dynamics is essential to diversifying our center. Some of the ideas we put forward here are "models of" whereas others are "models for" what we hope to see in scholarship moving forward.

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