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Revised Bibliography

SPIRIT POSSESSION: WOMEN AND POSSESSION

Spirit possession has largely been interpreted by scholars as a phenomenon that impacts "traditional people," the poor, the uneducated, and women. The conjunction of spirit possession with oppressed or vulnerable persons has produced theories that Susan Starr Sered has called "deprivation theories" (1994, pp. 190–191) that begin with the assumption that possessions are abnormal behaviors and result from social, physical, and mental deprivations. From a feminist perspective, deprivation theories are suspect, and a revaluation of spirit possession suggests that: (1) the cross-cultural and transhistorical prevalence of accounts of spirit possession present a familiar rather than an exotic model of religious subjectivity to most human communities across the broadest spectrum of history; (2) the capacity to be possessed by an ancestor, deity, or spirit is best approached, as Sered and Janice Boddy (1989) argue, as an ability, like musical or athletic ability, although in the case of spirit possession it is likely that the person being possessed does not choose to develop the ability to receive the spirit but rather cannot choose otherwise in the face of the spirit's demands; and (3) possession is the formal root of religious experience in general, in that

spirit possession is exemplary of the situation in which humans negotiate with a will that is not of human origin. These three revaluations are examined below after attending to the translational issues involved in employing spirit possession as a category of comparative study. A survey of the thematics of power found in possession studies concludes the entry.

Spirit possession can refer to a spectrum of experiences in which the person involved negotiates with or is overcome by a force such as an ancestor, deity, or spirit that employs the human body to be its vehicle for communicating to human communities. Ann Grodzins Gold provides a useful definition and discussion of the term *spirit possession* in her study of possession in rural Rajasthan (1988, p. 35): "any complete but temporary domination of a person's body, and the blotting of that person's consciousness, by a distinct alien power of known or unknown origin." This definition highlights the problem of subjectivity and agency; the possessed person is not a conscious individual but rather has a blotted consciousness and has become an instrument for the will of an alien power. While the term *spirit possession* is rarely used outside of the Western European tradition, Gold argues that the term does not "radically violate indigenous categories and does facilitate controlled comparisons with similar phenomena in other linguistic regions" (p. 39) if, she emphasizes, regional nominations are brought to bear. Applying Gold's logic, the term *spirit possession* is used below with caution, noting: (1) the importance of translating specific linguistic terms (discussed below); and (2) that the term *possession* carries with it many overdetermined connotations regarding Western notions of property and subjectivity as epitomized in the idea of a self-possessed individual.

TRANSHISTORICAL AND CROSS-CULTURAL CONTEXT. Spirit possession exists on all continents and throughout most of Western history as well. In part because of the often spectacular nature of possession accounts and because spirit possession demands a witness or a community response, we have evidence of spirit possession in legal, medical, historical, literary, and theatrical texts. As Western missionaries and academics began recording information about other cultures, the force and vivacity of spirit possession repeatedly drew authors to describe and discuss possession, producing a tremendous volume of materials. A proliferation of spirit possession ethnographies in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries indicates that spirit possession is a major force in a globalized world because the practice survives dislocations and relocations of culture, and women predominate in these accounts. This prevalence of material is particularly important in the study of women's religious lives because the records provide information when other references are minimal or nonexistent. Important examples include the maenads of Greek antiquity who appear in Greek tragedies such as Euripides' *Bacchae*; women possessed by the *mono no ke* spirit described in *The Tale of Genji*, a masterpiece of medieval Japanese literature (Bargen, 1997); and the *dybbukim* of medieval Eastern European Hasidic Jews described in the acclaimed play *The Dybbuk*, by S. Y. Ansky. The diaspora

hosts of African and syncretic spirits found in vodou, Santería, and Candomblé in all regions of the African diaspora (Brown, 1987; Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 1997) have figured prominently in anthropology and literature of the diaspora. Where information is scarce about women's lives in Asia and the Pacific, we have information about Korean housewives participating in *Kut* rituals (Kendall, 1985) and the *tangki* of Taiwan (Wolf, 1992). Islamic traditions in the Middle East, Saharan Africa, Pakistan, and India describe women's predisposition to possession by *jinn* and regional spirits such as the *hantu* of Malay (Ong, 1987) and emphasize how women's possession activities are tolerated, although authorities address women's need to maintain vigilance through prayer and sanctity to avoid possession. With an increased emphasis on the study of women's lives, as well as the lives of the poor and lower castes in Hinduism has come a wave of studies of spirit possession (Egnor, 1984; Inglis, 1985; Gold, 1988; Stanley, 1988) by the gods and goddesses of Hindu traditions. In most indigenous traditions some elements of spirit possession continue to appear, as with African traditional religions (Mbiti, 1991), including those regions of Africa where Muslim and Christian influences are strong (Boddy, 1989; Maaga, 1995; Stoller, 1989 and 1995).

The controlled comparison of similar phenomena across traditions allows one to identify culturally specific models of religious subjectivity. Indigenous terms for the dynamic and role of the possessed person are rich with conceptual and rhetorical depth, related to receptivity, the mandatory element of the human's agency in a possession. In many vodou traditions the possessed person is considered to be a *chwal*, or horse, who is mounted by her spirits (Brown, 1987, p. 54), an activity that is often sexualized. In her study of Hinduism, Kathleen Erndl (1984) notes that the Goddess plays those whom she possesses and that the Punjab word for a theatrical play, *khel*, is the same word used to describe a possession. David Lan (1985, p. 59) notes that among the Korekore, a Shona group in Zimbabwe, the spirits are considered to grab their mediums, who may be referred to as *homwe*, which means "pocket" or "little bag." In all of these instances, a complex model of human agency is evoked by the notion that the human will and consciousness have been overcome, and that the human body has become receptive to the intervening agency of the possessing spirit.

RECEPTIVITY TO POSSESSION AS GENDERED ABILITY. In contrast to deprivation theories, Sered argues that women's preponderance in possession traditions can be related to their roles in nonautonomous experiences such as childbirth and their receptive role in heterosexual intercourse (1994, pp. 190–191). From this perspective, receptivity to the interventions of ancestors or deities is understood as an element of a feminine-gendered ability. From an androcentric perspective, receptivity has often been negatively evaluated as passivity, but spirit possession requires a shift in perspective critical of the claims that a self-possessed, impermeable subject is the norm of human experience. Whether male or fe-

male, possessed persons are likely to be evaluated for their receptivity. The gendered configurations of spirit possession take many forms. Women are possessed by male and female deities, men are possessed by male and female deities, and in all cases gendered tropes are employed. For example, in the Hasidic tradition (Schwartz, 1994, p. 72.), the name for the possession of a male was *ibur* (pregnant), and such a possession was highly valued by the community, while possession of women was widely interpreted to be malevolent possession by *dybbukim* and was not considered *ibur*. Helen Hardacre (1992) discusses the prominent role women have had in Japanese new religious movements founded since 1800, noting the gender transformations that were central to the theology of Deguchi Nao, whom Hardacre calls a genius of Japanese religious history. Nao was a middle-aged woman whose theology, written by her younger, male colleague while she was in a trance, turned traditional Buddhist wisdom on its head, proclaiming that Nao was The Transformed Male who signaled the arrival of a new era.

SPIRIT POSSESSION AS EXEMPLARY RELIGIOUS SUBJECTIVITY. The subjectivity of the possessed woman is radically non-autonomous, but rather than seeing this as an aberration it can be viewed as exemplifying religious subjectivity in general. The broad spectrum of roles humans have played in religious history, from mystics to prophets, are all variations on this very central theme. Hence Marilyn Robinson Waldman and Robert M. Baum (1992) compare the subjectivity of a Diola woman prophetess who reached adulthood at the beginning of World War II on the border between French Senegal and Portuguese Guinea with the subjectivity of the prophet Muhammad in that both channeled communication from an extrahuman source to oppose the status quo. From this perspective, it is not important to create categorizations in which people can be placed; rather, the spectrum in which people experience themselves negotiating with a force of nonhuman origin is the common, formal ground of religious subjectivity in general.

What makes spirit possession unique is the degree to which the human has become an instrument for the will of the intervening agency. In terms of voice, for example, Michel de Certeau (1988) makes the following observation in his study of the seventeenth-century nuns of Loudun, whose nunnery was disrupted by a series of possessions:

That the possessed woman's speech is nothing more than the words of her 'other,' or that she can only have the discourse of her judge, her doctor, the exorcist or witness is hardly by chance . . . but from the outset this situation excludes the possibility of tearing the possessed woman's true voice away from its alteration. On the surface of these texts her speech is doubly lost. (p. 252)

If, at the formal level, we are dealing with speech that is doubly lost, we are dealing with a model of subjectivity that is radically instrumental (as with a flute that is played, or a hammer that is wielded) rather than with an individual who

is speaking. As a model of subjectivity it is the instrumentality rather than the autonomy that marks the possessed person's speech and actions. Social psychologists and ethnopsychologists have suggested that the difference found in the model of subjectivity of a possessed person and the model of subjectivity employed by modern psychology (that of an individual whose sickness is located in an individual psyche) leads to different levels of community-wide mental health. In her study of possession in India and in his study of possession in African American communities, Waxler (1977) and Csordas (1987) argue that possessions often function pragmatically to heal community problems, perhaps more effectively than modern psychiatry in some instances.

The speech of possessed persons is not only doubly lost but is often replete with critical, symbolic value, leading some ethnographers studying spirit possession to employ psychoanalytical interpretations of the speech in a way similar to the analysis of dreamwork. Willy Apollon (1999), Susan J. Rasmussen (1995), and Judy Rosenthal (1998) bring contemporary French psychoanalytic theory (Jacques Lacan) to the analysis of possessed language. Postcolonial literary scholars (Cooper, 1992; Henderson, 1993) have noted the significance of the possessed woman as a literary trope that signifies the experience of having multiple languages and heritages speak through a subject, particularly women. Spirit possession metaphorically depicts the sensibility of postcolonial subjectivity, a subjectivity that is not pure but rather spoken-through by many forces. By the turn of the twenty-first century, questions of agency, voice, and body theory had coincided with a growing effort by historians and ethnographers to produce a significant number of possession studies, granting the "Third World woman" a profound position in possession studies. Signifiers of possessed subjectivity that cross the historical spectrum of case studies include nonautonomous models of agency, heteroglossia, and volatility that attracts the attention of a community and relates to gendered notions of the ambivalent power of receptivity.

THEMATICS OF POSSESSION AND POWER. From a revalued approach to the power of possession, it is the work, war, and performance of possessions that merit analysis. In each scenario the possessed body's power is exerted in ambivalent ways, deeply implicated with the social symbolic of the community. In Malaysia, for example, indigenous possession traditions have survived, and accounts of possessed women in multinational free trade zones have caught the attention of news media and scholars. Possessed women work in free trade zones. The women stop work when possessed by *hantu* (ambivalent ghosts or spirits) and weretigers (akin to werewolves) in the factories. Aihwa Ong (1987) analyzes these possessions from a feminist and materialist perspective. Similarly, in *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (1980), Michael Taussig interprets indigenous spirits as a critical reaction to commodity fetishism in South America. The danger is that these materialist analyses dismiss the possessing ancestors or spirits as mystifications, a categorization that might be more comfortable from a materialist perspec-

tive but that elides the agency of a pouncing *hantu* or the devil in a dollar. If, on the other hand, religious subjectivity is itself understood to be a kind of work, then the efforts made by the Malay women to decrease their vulnerability to the spirits through prayer and vigilance indicates that they are working with the forces of global capitalism and the forces of possessing spirits. So also, the devils associated with the dollars of international mining companies in South America are not merely symbols to be interpreted, but rather are working forces in the religious lives of the miners.

In terms of the wars engaged by possessed women's bodies, there are two central types: gender conflict and territorial conflict. Doris Borgen (1997) argues that spirit possession was a woman's weapon in medieval Japan because a woman who was spoken-through by a possessing spirit could say things to public audiences that women were not otherwise tolerated for saying. Ann Braude (2001) discusses the spiritualism that coincided with the women's suffrage movement, noting that women who were inspired by the spirit were allowed a public forum in which to speak. These approaches can suggest that possession is a guise for political struggles. From a revalued perspective, however, the religious person is approached as a training and disciplining person, whose body is prepared to enact the will of its deity, and thus there is no viable distinction between a religious and a political struggle. In the case of the Shona in Zimbabwe, spirit possession by powerful land-governing ancestors (*mhondoro*) was largely the remit of men, but two women who were possessed by the spirit of Nehanda, a female ancestor of an early Shona dynasty, were central to the struggle for indigenous rule (Lan, 1985; Keller, 2001). In two *chimurengas*, or battles for freedom (1890 and 1950–1970), an older woman possessed by Nehanda significantly inspired and focused the fight against colonizers. The Nehanda *mhondoro* from the first *chimurenga* was tried and hung by the British, using old British witchcraft laws, but was revered for her claims that her bones would rise again to secure victory. Nehanda was revered in the songs of the socialist-inspired armies of the second, successful *chimurenga*, and the Nehanda *mhondoro* of the second *chimurenga* inherited the potent legacy of the first Nehanda. Territorial wars and gender wars have been waged through the body of a possessed woman who serves as an instrumental agency in the struggles for power that religious bodies have been trained and tempered to engage.

As Gold notes (1988, p. 37), the performative elements of possession have received great attention in Sri Lanka and across South Asia. Possessions are inherently performative. Without an audience, the possession has not effectively transpired because the possessed person is not conscious during the event to report on what has happened. Also, possessions are often violent, volatile, laden with sexual innuendo, and dramatic in the knowledge they produce. While anthropologists have invoked performance theory to explore this element of the power of possession, the question of subjectivity is again raised because performance theory largely begins

with the assumption that an actor wills herself into a performative mode. Most possession traditions have rigorous tests with which they judge the validity of a possession in order to assure that it is *not* a performance by an agent. Not only are rigorous tests applied by the communities, but, as Gold notes, in Sri Lanka as well as in rural Rajasthan, the theatrical traditions of these communities show high levels of critical analysis in their employment of possessions in plays. Some plays depict fake possessions, which the entire audience recognizes as fake and laughs at, while other theatrical performances might spontaneously produce possessions that the audiences regard as authentic. Gold identifies "ethno-performance theory" (p. 37) as the cultural backdrop against which the performative power of possession has long been analyzed by these traditions.

Viewed as a prevalent and exemplary model of religious subjectivity in general, the specific historical and geographical accounts of spirit possession provide resources for expanding the horizons against which women's religious subjectivity is understood and evaluated in the context of instrumental struggles for power and meaning.

SEE ALSO Gender and Religion, articles on Gender and African Religious Traditions, Gender and North American Indian Religious Tradition; Human Body, article on Human Bodies, Religion, and Gender; New Religious Movements; Religious Experience.

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SPIRITS SEE ANGELS; DEMONS; DEVILS; FAIRIES; GHOSTS; MONSTERS

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE. Throughout history, religious traditions have noted that those people who long for a transformative or complete understanding of themselves and of their place in the world must somehow find a teacher or set of teachings to help them along. That guide may be a person, an idea, or a set of values; whatever it is, it establishes the orientation and outlines the procedures the seekers should follow in order to make real the transformation for which they hope. Many traditions further maintain that, having found (or having hoped eventually to find) that guide, the seeker then must practice various regimens that will help him continue along the way to ultimate transformation. Such endeavors constitute spiritual discipline, the means by which people find their fullest potential in the context of any particular religious ideology.

The practice of spiritual discipline marks the notion that one who is in search of the guide is not only a human being but also a human “becoming,” one on his or her way toward an ideal. Images of such discipline, therefore, often include themes of movement or passage. Mahāyāna Buddhists describe the spiritual endeavor as *bodhicaryāvatāra*, “entering the path to enlightenment”; Jewish traditions speak of religious norms as *halakhah*, “the way to go”; and traditional Hindu literatures outline the three sacred “paths,” *marga*, of proper action, proper meditation, and proper devotion. Not infrequently, religious systems refer to the sacred cosmos as a whole with terms meaning “the Way,” like the Chinese *dao*.

The perfection such a person seeks may take a number of forms, each reflecting the fundamental worldview presented by the pertinent religious system. It may be the fulfillment of being or the return to nonbeing; it may be personal or impersonal; it may be the enjoyment of the good life or the release of the good death. Whatever the goal, spiritual disciplines claim to offer their adherents the means by which the religious ideal may be reached.

Without discipline, the seeker founders. The Šūfī mystic Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī spoke perhaps for many religious tradi-

tions besides his own when he noted that “whoever travels without a guide needs two hundred years for a two day’s journey.”

CONNOTATIONS OF THE TERM. The word *discipline* is a particularly apt one. To some people it rings of punishment, which in some cases is the point. But this certainly is not the primary meaning of the term, which carries a good number of connotations. The scope of its etymological cousins shows the broad applications the term can have in the study and practice of religion.

The word *discipline* may be derived through one of two ways, or, more likely, in a semantic combination of the two ways. It may come from the Latin *discere*, “to learn,” and thus be directly related to the English word *disciple*, “one who follows the instructions of a teacher.” *Discere* itself reflects the Indo-European root **dek-* (“take, accept”), which also appears in the English *decent*, *docent*, *docile*, *dogma*, and *dogmatic*; *doctrine*, *doctor* (“one who teaches doctrine”), and thus *indoctrinate*; as well as *dignity*, “to be acceptable,” and *decorous*, “elegant, worthy of respect, graceful.”

Perhaps the word comes from the Latin *disciplus*, “pupil,” from *discapere*, “to grasp,” in the sense of “to take hold of mentally” and thus “to understand.” If so, then the word *discipline* derives primarily from the Indo-European **kap-* (“grab hold of”) and is related to such words as the English *captive*, *capture*, and *captive*; *accept*, *precept*, *concept*; and *participate*. Often that sense of *reception* (a related word) is described as a safe and protected experience, as would be the sense of the Germanic derivative of the root **kap-*, **hafno*, appearing in the Old English *haefen*, which leads in turn to the modern English *haven*, “place of refuge.”

To be disciplined, then, is to be caught up by the teachings of a guide—whether that guide be a person, an ethic, a community, a historical tradition, or a set of ideas—and to organize one’s behavior and attitude according to those teachings. The person who undertakes such discipline may be understood, then, to be a disciple of that which is felt to be true, a captive of that which is valuable. Religious traditions do not tend to view this as “punishment.” Rather, they generally stress the notion that this very captivity allows one to become who he or she really is, or really could be. As Zen Buddhists have long noted, one is most free when one is most disciplined.

TYPES OF SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE. Just what kind of teacher the student follows and what type of relationship exists between the two varies from tradition to tradition and within each tradition itself, so any typological classification of spiritual disciplines runs the risk of oversimplification. Classed very generally, however, the different kinds of spiritual discipline may be understood as heteronomous, autonomous, or interactive in nature. (Within these types one can discern various modes of discipline, to which this article shall return.) These three should be understood as ideal types only: Analysis of different examples of actual spiritual endeavors