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Syncretic Processes and the Definition of New Religions¹

SIDNEY M. GREENFIELD & ANDRÉ DROOGERS

ABSTRACT *This paper presents a model that we suggest makes it possible to identify, bound, and set off new religions. We begin from the perspective of the scholar, which we extend to include the discourses of those written about and the relationship between the two. After setting out some epistemological issues related to the study of science and arguing that in contrast with the natural sciences where a single paradigm tends to dominate thinking and research at any point in time, in the social sciences, multiple partial images of the world tend to prevail simultaneously, some recent contributions in areas as diverse as praxis theory, cognitive anthropology, and postmodernism are reviewed. Praxis approaches are then related to thinking about the relationship between the local and the global in terms of economics, the state, and entrepreneurship. After a brief examination of the diversity of the actors who participate in religious activities, a model of what we call the 'syncretic process' is developed that enables us to propose when a new religion comes into being.*

Introduction

This paper addresses a problem which we believe to be of major theoretical interest to those who study religion and specifically 'new religions'. How does one identify, bound, and set off from others what may be considered to be a new religion? Our answer is presented in the form of a model of what we call the 'syncretic process' (see Greenfield & Droogers, 2001). Struggling through the various, and at times contradictory, ways in which the concept of syncretism has been used in the literature² while preparing an edited volume of papers from a seminar on religious syncretism, we found it necessary to reconceptualise the range of phenomena to which the term may usefully be applied.

We should note that we began our examination from the perspective of the scholars who study the subject, taking due note, however, that the people about whom we write usually have their own discourses on the subject, while also at times contributing to those of the scholars. After presenting a framework within which to examine scholarly perspectives, we extend it to include the discourses of those studied and the relationship between the two. Following Victor Turner (1967: 50), we refer to this multiplicity of meaning systems, both within the scholarly community and within and across the symbolic systems of those studied, as 'multivocality'.

We begin with a few words about some epistemological issues needed to understand present-day debates about the syncretic process and new religions. Six theoretical orientations that are the ingredients of our model follow. Each is

customarily associated with a distinctive, and at times contradictory, theoretical position unrelated to the study and definition of new religions. Yet when we discuss our model, it will become clear that the six theoretical orientations provide an eclectic answer to the question of how a new religion can be identified and set off.

Metaphors and Paradigms

In his now classic study of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, the late Thomas Kuhn (1970: 3–4) asks how someone, ignorant of the history of science, would examine electrical or chemical (or other) phenomena, if inclined to do so. “What must the world be like”, he queries in his closing argument (Kuhn, 1970: 173), “in order that man may know it?”

To answer the question requires the presentation of a symbolic system. That is, a mental picture, expressible in words that form an image of what the world is like, must be formulated. Many alternatives are possible. The specifics of any one selected then serves as the building block on which an understanding of the chemical, electrical or, for that matter, any other unknown and abstract phenomena can be developed.

The simplest and most often used answer to Kuhn’s question is, of course, to be found in metaphor (see D’Andrade, 1995; Fernandez, 1986, 1991; Quinn, 1991; Quinn & Holland, 1987). By likening the world to something already known, such as a simple flower or tree, or as complex as a popular game or even a biblical passage that is well known to the members of a particular community, the scholar, scientist, or lay member of a group being studied may begin to formulate specific questions, the answers to which provide introductory insights and understandings.

For science, Kuhn reminds us, effective research

scarcely begins before a scientific community thinks it has acquired firm answers to questions like the following: What are the fundamental entities of which the universe is composed? How do these interact with each other and with the senses? What questions may legitimately be asked about the entities and what techniques employed in seeking solutions? (Kuhn, 1970: 4–5)

As the answers are far from absolute, he acknowledges that they are arbitrary. They derive from the particular image of what the world is like, which the members of the scientific community have adopted.

“The existence of the paradigm”, Kuhn continues, “sets the problem to be solved; often the paradigm theory is implicated directly in the design of the apparatus able to solve the problem” (Kuhn, 1970: 27).

Kuhn then shifts from his initial examination of an isolated individual asking about natural phenomena to the group level, turning specifically to the members of the scientific community. The metaphor they come to share enables each to ask similar questions, the answers to which expand their collective understanding of their shared field or subject of interest.

Once a paradigm, defined as “an accepted model or pattern” (Kuhn, 1970: 23), is agreed upon, individual scientists turn to ‘puzzle solving’, posing questions the hypothesised answers to which can be tested. This requires further

agreement as to terms, called 'concepts' that enable them to relate observed events—data—to the conceptual categories of their paradigm.

Taken cumulatively, the answers to the many questions asked and puzzles solved fill in the blanks or unknowns in the paradigm or model. This in turn expands the scientific community's knowledge of what the world is like and hence its ability to explain the phenomena of interest to it.

Not all puzzles can be solved, however. Occasionally, scientists encounter anomalies that defy their agreed paradigm. If the anomalies are of a sufficient magnitude, they may bring the utility of the paradigm itself into question. With the consensus shattered, one or more individuals may propose an alternative image—ideally incorporating previous knowledge—that will account for the anomalies.

In the natural sciences, where a single paradigm has tended to dominate studies of particular subject matters or disciplines, the proposal of new imagery to deal with anomalies has invariably led to conflict between members of the scientific community. This process of paradigm replacement is what Kuhn (1970) refers to in his title by speaking of 'scientific revolutions'.

While each of the natural sciences has tended to be dominated by a single paradigm (at any specific point in time), the social sciences have seen the simultaneous presence of multiple images of what the world is like, each competing with others for supporters. Instead of a single community of scholars sharing a consensus as to what the world is like and how it is to be conceptualised so as to formulate questions and solve puzzles by agreed upon techniques, there are instead small groups, and at times even isolated individuals, each working in terms of an image that has often little relationship to the ones used by others. Each is often but a partial picture that has not been elaborated, as are the paradigms in the natural sciences.³

Some Divergent Theoretical Positions

Our intent is not to offer yet another view of the world that will in turn generate new questions. Instead, we review some recent thinking that we will use to develop a model that in our judgement will enable us to demarcate new religious groups. First, however, a warning that we have tried to incorporate in our own thinking: steer clear of making unilateral choices from dichotomous alternatives, a problem that in our judgement has plagued so many debates within the social sciences.⁴ Discussion of theoretical perspectives has unfortunately long suffered from oppositional thinking and focusing on one term in a pair of dichotomies.⁵

Praxis Theories

Praxis theories appear to us to be an important attempt to go beyond dichotomies.

The term 'praxis'—or 'practice'—refers to a range of thinking that in one way or another elaborates the aphorism first made by Berger and Luckmann: "*Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product.*" (Berger & Luckmann, 1972: 79, italics in the original) The specific terms, concepts, and methods used in the application of praxis theories vary widely and it is difficult

Figure 1. The Triangle of Signification.

as yet to identify a Kuhnian community of scholars contributing to this contender to paradigmatic status. Even if Bourdieu (1977), Giddens (1984), Falk Moore (1977), Ortner (1984), Sahlins (1985)—to mention only a few—do not speak the same ‘language’ and do not necessarily refer to each other’s publications, they all seem to be looking for some way to show that actors (individuals in social settings) are influenced by, and are subjected to, social and symbolic structures. In addition, they agree that these structures provide a repertoire of meanings that can be used to interpret events. This may lead the actors to create new meanings that in turn modify or change the social and symbolic structures. This may be summarised in what we will call the ‘triangle of praxis’ or ‘the triangle of signification’—signification in the sense of the process of meaning-making and not as meaning itself.

Praxis theory is necessarily reflexive. It is also historical and processual and provides a context for the analysis of common events and everyday experiences. Another of its features is that asymmetrical relations, and hence power, can be easily identified. This combination of features, which were formerly focal aspects of distinct theoretical frameworks, is an indication of the eclectic nature of praxis approaches. Similarly, praxis theories, it seems to us, may be used eclectically, no matter how the emphasis and terminology are used by individual writers. Further, it can be used to analyse both the researchers, with respect to their social and symbolic structures (i.e. scientific theories), and to the beliefs and structures of those they study.

Cognitive Anthropology

Recent publications in what is called ‘cognitive anthropology’ (Bloch, 1991; D’Andrade, 1995; Strauss & Quinn, 1994), we believe, contribute to the elaboration of a methodology for praxis theory.

If the relationship between actors and structures is a dialectical one, we may ask how the former objectify and internalise the latter. Put differently, how do structures prescribe the behaviours of individuals and how may they be changed by those who participate in them? If cultural knowledge is a prerequisite for social participation, how does this knowledge come into being? Also, how is it changed so as to change society and its structures in turn?

Individual experience through events, it appears, is the motor for what is called the 'production and reproduction of structures and their meanings'. D'Andrade's notion of schema is useful here. He defines it as "the organization of cognitive elements into an abstract mental object capable of being held in working memory with default values or open slots which can be variously filled with appropriate specifics" (D'Andrade, 1995: 179). A liturgy for a church service can serve as an example, representing continuity from Sunday to Sunday, but being filled in differently at each concrete service.

The notion of connectionism (Bloch, 1991; D'Andrade, 1995: 138ff; Strauss & Quinn 1994: 285–287) adds another dimension to the concept of schema by showing the complexity of human thinking, which is viewed not only as open to the (so-called) sentential logic of serially organised verbal propositions, but also—much more importantly—able simultaneously to consult parallel schemas as "collections of interconnected neuronlike units" (Quinn & Strauss, 1994: 286). The schemas need not be complete; they may be what Bloch refers to when he speaks of "chunked networks of loose procedures and understandings" (Bloch, 1991: 185). The networks are used to classify experiences through pattern recognition (D'Andrade, 1995: 140). Somebody walking into a church service may recall earlier memories of what usually happens in liturgy. Moreover, different interpretations can be compared and integrated. Incomplete reconstructions can be repaired. That person may come to the conclusion that modern liturgy is quite different or that nothing at all has changed or that memory deceives. Whereas serial or sentential logic recodes experience into symbols, parallel connectionist logic transforms experience into connections between neuronlike units (D'Andrade, 1995: 140). The two forms of logic lead to two ways of learning, with the serial one being more explicit and much quicker, since it can be verbalised in terms of rules. The connectionist one, in contrast, leads to more permanent results and, once learned, leads to more rapid and automatic execution (D'Andrade, 1995: 144). The visitor to the church service may discuss what he experienced afterwards with a regular participant asking for the rules, whereas his interlocutor may have difficulty justifying what seems obvious.

One consequence of connectionist logic is that it enables us to see culture as a process rather than as content (D'Andrade, 1995: 146). Moreover, verbalisation and expression in language, rules, and other symbol systems are but a small part of the story: symbols are viewed as resultant with regard to the parallel activation of schemas and not as the causes of behaviour (D'Andrade, 1995: 149). Human beings are therefore viewed as equipped to produce a culture that combines continuity and rupture, interpretation and re-interpretation, tradition and innovation. In short, they can live with dichotomies and make sense of them. One implication of the connectionist model is that it may show us a way that goes beyond the relativism of cultures so that people from different places (geographical and temporal) might understand each other.

Postmodernism

In its positive forms, postmodernism may contribute to reflexive praxis theory and research.

The distinction Rosenau (1992) makes between sceptical and affirmative postmodernists is useful, if we are careful to avoid generalisations about a school of thought that itself denies the possibility of generalisations. We believe that postmodernism is best seen as a form of reflexivity that has provided insights that should be taken seriously, but not overly seriously. The first lesson to be learned is that at least at present we should be careful to avoid over-generalisations based on all-embracing theories. A second insight is that the researcher is involved in the construction of knowledge. Consequently, it is advisable to pay special attention to the tools and literary styles that are available for use in research and its reporting. Thirdly, we can learn from postmodernists to make fun, at least occasionally, of otherwise respectable, objective, measuring, and rule-formulating science. Doing so softens the oppositional contrast between science and religion, which, it seems, would be pleasing to social scientists who study religion—whether they are believers or not (Rosenau, 1992: 6, 10, 148–152). Sceptical postmodernists include religion in their criticism. Yet, without requesting their blessing we may say that postmodernism has altered the debate on the relation between religion and science (Berry & Wernick, 1992).

Praxis Approaches and the Relationship between the Local and the Global

A wave of recent publications on globalisation has drawn attention to the limitations of terms, such as 'westernisation' and 'modernisation' (e.g. Beyer, 1994; Featherstone, 1990; Friedman, 1994; Hannerz, 1992; Robertson, 1992). Their authors also criticise what they see as an excessive focus on societies and states by their colleagues. The entire world, they contend, including the west, is subject to processes that involve more than modernisation. Some states, for example, are subject to fragmentation, whereas others may be absorbed into larger entities. The specifics of these global processes rest, however, to a large extent in their local manifestations. Relations between local events and these external processes must be studied, conceptualised, and analysed. In addition, de-territorialised social and cultural forms are emerging, both globally and locally, especially by means of the technology of electronic communication. The new forms result from a much more diffuse process which is not necessarily linked to a society or a power centre. In a way globalisation might be thought of as another example of the attempt to bridge old dichotomies: the global and the local are interwoven and interdependent to such a degree that Robertson speaks of 'glocalization' (Robertson, 1992: 173). Tradition and modernity are thought of as occurring simultaneously and as being interrelated. Furthermore, the national and the supra-national link up in relations of interdependence.

With regard to religion, globalisation thinking emphasises not just privatisation, as did modernisation theory, but envisions new opportunities (Beyer, 1994).

Economics, the State, and Entrepreneurship

Globalisation did, of course, not begin at the end of the twentieth century with electronic technology. The entry of proselytising Christianity, which introduced new views of the universe, ritual behaviours, and social practices with increased

intensity into many world areas in the past five centuries, provides one example. The emergence and spread of the nation state is another, while the expansion of the world economy is a third. All three resulted in the imposition of new structures that linked local-level life to forces and structures imposed from the outside. It is interesting that the attention of scholars first centred on the extra-local manifestations and processes, as can be seen in the development of religious studies (from a European-Christian perspective) as a discipline and the appearance of economics and political science as academic fields. This may explain the opposition between the local and extra-local, with the assumption in modernisation theory that the former influenced the latter. Anthropology, we might note, developed after these other disciplines. As a result, when anthropologists reported the results of their primarily local-level studies, their discipline often presented the perspectives of their informants who usually viewed these forces as external impositions that introduced changes into local-level life.

One dimension of the interdependence of the global and the local, if we return to our earlier discussion of power, is that external religious, economic, and/or governmental structures often become constraints on the choices available to local-level actors. They initiate and may bring about changes in previous meaning systems and behavioural practices. The processes described above in which individuals cognitively internalise and then reconceptualise and transform structures are especially helpful here. Elsewhere, in other literature, this is referred to as 'entrepreneurship'.

Joseph Schumpeter (1949 [1934]) first introduced the term when trying to comprehend change in, and growth of, economic structures. He defined economic development (growth or directional change in the economy) as "the carrying out of new combinations" (Schumpeter, 1949: 66). The individuals who made the new combinations he called 'entrepreneurs' and the process they engaged in became (for him and generations of economists, businessmen, and government leaders to come) 'entrepreneurship'. One of the authors of this paper previously applied the term to broader social processes (Greenfield & Strickon, 1979; 1981). We suggest that the thinking proposed here for revising the study of contact between diverse peoples and social groups, and the new (syncretic?) structures and meanings that may be produced, may also be applied to the study of entrepreneurship. Likewise, thinking in terms of entrepreneurship may make possible a better understanding of the interdependence of the global, the national, and the local.

The introduction of the world economy, with its system of monetary rewards and markets, into local communities, in addition to the often reported negative impact it has, also provides new, previously non-existent, opportunities for local-level actors. Material items and/or other aspects of previously held beliefs and behaviours (traditional culture) may be transformed into marketable commodities (new combinations) that can be sold outside the local community to the material benefit of one familiar with both local practices and demand at the national or global level. An example is to be found in the incorporation of musical elements from the once local-level religious practices of *Candomblé* in Brazilian popular music and then marketed by performers and record companies in music markets all over the world.

Another type of entrepreneurship occurs when once isolated, local-level people are forced to become part of a national society and to compete for a place in it and perhaps for control of state structures. The modern nation state, with its idea of a sovereign government that makes laws, provides opportunities for making new combinations. Which of the numerous, often religiously, linguistically, and culturally diverse groups who inhabit the territory of a nation (especially of a new nation) is to be or is to be represented in the government? The answer is of importance in that it will bring benefits to some and perhaps hardship to others. Where the electoral process determines who is to govern (to be the government), the mobilisation of the votes of members of local-level groups is often led by entrepreneurs, who by re-defining (re-inventing?) themselves, their groups, and their identities, may gain access to power and resources of benefit to them and their followers. The symbols that emerge in the contest for political power may often define the identity of individuals who—through circumstances beyond their local-level control—come to be members of groups that may not have existed even in the recent past. Alternatively, in some local groups unable to achieve electoral success, entrepreneurs may still be able to re-define themselves and their group so as to be able to enter into coalitions with local-level groups from other regions. This might strengthen the position of both groups politically or in some contexts obtain for them benefits under programmes initiated by competitors, as in the case of affirmative action programs. At times, the deliberate mixing (syncretism?) of symbolic elements might be a winning strategy, while at other times, an emphasis on authenticity and purity of tradition could work better.

The Actors

We have noted that unlike the situation in the physical and biological sciences, in anthropology and the social sciences, the objects of study, the actors in the religious and other social settings studied, hold their own views of what the world is like that may explain for them aspects of their beliefs and behaviours. These views may, and often do, differ from the theoretical frameworks used by the scholars who study them. Kenneth Pike (1967 [1954]) coined the terms 'emic' and 'etic' to refer to these usually contrasting explanatory models (Lett, 1996: 382–383). His distinction may be used to separate the scholars from the communities of actors they study.

In terms of the triangle of signification presented above (see Diagram 1), at least two are possible in all research situations; the actors in each may differ among themselves in the way they comprehend the same set of facts. Both parties may have political, economic, and other convictions that influence their perception and interpretation of events. Some of those of the participants have been noted in the discussion of globalisation and entrepreneurship.

In the field of religious studies, two further sub-sets of actors may be distinguished. Religious leaders, at times in response to aspects of globalisation and other changing circumstances, may develop public discourses that contribute to one or more of the entrepreneurial ventures outlined above. Their followers, in turn, may make their own adaptations that may differ from those of their leaders.

A Model of New Religions

The six divergent elements must now be fused into a multivocal model that may be applied to the formation of new religions. One presupposition we have been working from is that much of what scholars tell us about believers may be applied to them as well. The reference to Kuhn has, moreover, shown that what may be said about scientists and scholars may also be applicable to believers. Thus, academics are not the only ones to invent paradigmatic images of what the world is like in order to understand it. Believers also use metaphoric images to comprehend the world around them, which they share with a community of like-minded people. Root images, in both science and religion do, however, not endure for ever. Changes may occur that lead to what we call 'paradigm shifts' and hence to scientific and religious revolutions. New religions, we propose, are the results of such a process. New images are constructed and the new understandings they make possible are then shared. In the case of new religions, they are of a transcendental nature, with the presuppositions accepted as real beyond doubt. In this respect, believers differ from scholars who treat their presuppositions as hypothetical and are aware of their axiomatic nature.

The context in which the process referred to occurs may be clarified by means of praxis theories and the triangle of signification. This view of new religions, we believe, takes us beyond dichotomous thinking. It enables us to examine how actors and structures are dialectically related and to examine the role that power mechanisms may play.

Connectionism offers a more specific view of the schemas that are current in new religions and on the delicate balance between continuity and rupture. New religions propose new schemas, most often serial and verbalised in the beginning, but simultaneously appealing to parallel and internalised routines, either stemming from older sources or developed later within the context of the new religion itself.

From postmodernism this interpretation of new religions takes the insight of the constructed nature of both religious and scholarly knowledge. This very paper represents the construction of a scientific model depicting a religious process. Besides, by softening the contrast between religion and science, postmodernism legitimates such a comparison.

New religions are usually found in contexts in which both globalising and localising tendencies make themselves felt. This facilitates the emergence of diffuse and less institutionalised forms. While old frameworks, such as societies and states, continue to serve as contexts, new social constellations are often the setting in which new religions take form. Although modernisation was assumed to correlate with secularisation, religious revitalisation and/or the emergence of new religions appears to be as probable an outcome, especially in the third world.

The summary of ideas on entrepreneurship enables us to view the founders of many new religions as a special kind of entrepreneur, who at times may also have an economic or political message. Under the conditions imposed by new economic and political structures, they may produce new symbolic combinations that may at times even be commodified. By moving between the global, national, and local levels with a new view of what the world is like, they may also offer solutions to problems which are endemic in the new setting.

Finally, the emic/etic distinction enables us to emphasise the importance of distinguishing between categories of actors and their corresponding views, without neglecting the possibility of comparison between them. The similarities already noted between scholars and believers are an example of the value of this perspective. Moreover, the distinction between sets of actors enables us to differentiate between leaders and followers as well as between entrepreneurs and clients.

Conclusion

In this paper we have brought together a number of divergent ideas from a variety of unrelated theoretical perspectives that are usually not taken to be part of the same framework of analysis. Yet, in our view, the advantage of proceeding in this way is that the phenomenon of new religions may be understood more clearly. Towards that end, we conclude by offering the following definition derived from our model and analysis: *a new religion may be thought of as a group of actors (people in a community) sharing a transcendental paradigm, who have come together as the result of the efforts (most often) of a religious entrepreneur who offered them a view of what the world is presently like that integrates global and local, traditional and innovative, reflective and practical elements in a way that constitutes for them a new schema that may also serve their political, economic, and other goals.*

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NOTES

1. The present paper is the revised version of a paper prepared for the 11th International Congress of CESNUR, Amsterdam, 7th–9th August, 1997.
2. Syncretism was first used by Plutarch to describe the temporary coming together of the quarrelling inhabitants of Crete in the face of a common enemy. His image of what the world was like was of warring groups. The Greek word from which the English syncretism is derived refers to people joining in battle. Erasmus later employed it metaphorically to refer to an agreement between people with seemingly disparate opinions. The new referent was ideas and beliefs. Seventeenth-century theologians then gave it a negative connotation by using it for what to them was the undesirable reconciliation of Christian theological differences. Syncretism for them became a threat to 'true' religion. This negative judgement was set aside in the second half of the nineteenth century, when students of the History of Religions used the word to acknowledge the mixing of religious elements from diverse sources, including Christianity,

which had occurred and continues to take place (Droogers, 1989; Rudolph, 1979; Stewart & Shaw, 1994). The term was then taken up by Melville J. Herskovits (without recognition of its uses by other disciplines) in the early years of the twentieth century and used as a centrepiece in the analysis of culture contact. When the Boasian framework lost its place as the dominant anthropological paradigm, it took on different meanings according to the view of what the world was like according to British Structural-Functionalism, Modernization Theory, Marxism, Structuralism, Symbolic Anthropology, etc.

3. We do not propose to review the numerous theories that have been offered as candidates to be a disciplinary paradigm. We only wish to remind the reader that there have been several. Each contains its own key images, called 'concepts', which enable its picture of the world to be related to empirical events or phenomena. Moreover, proponents of each tend to ask different questions, or, in Kuhn's terms, formulate different puzzles to be solved by different methods and techniques. This situation, as might be expected, lends itself to considerable confusion and misunderstanding. To complicate matters, scholars often do not make explicit in their writings the image of the world from which their research derives. They also often neglect to relate the concepts they use to the images or theories to which they subscribe. Instead, the practice tends to be to cite others who agree with them and select specific quotations to illustrate partial images applicable to specific, limited problems. Insiders familiar with the literature can invariably discern the theoretical imagery used in any particular study. Outsiders, including students, often cannot. Furthermore, criticism of alternative images and the studies based on them is at a premium. Far too often, theories, and their core images, are developed and defended by criticising an alternative, without necessarily making explicit what is being proposed in its place. Criticism often takes the form of attacks that may be personal rather than of theories and their applications. Arguments tend to be *ad hominem*, exacerbating the splits between the supporters of the competing theoretical positions.
4. There is a parallel here with the debate of the definition of religion. Many of the dichotomies that have plagued that debate turn up in the discussion of syncretism: objective versus normative, static versus dynamic, temporary versus permanent, specific versus holistic, erudite versus popular definitions, etc. In the case of religion as a concept, the confusion has not led to widespread abandonment or change in the term. On the contrary, the addition of new theoretical frameworks has only enlivened debate.
5. Some examples are the emphasis of structural-functionalists on harmony and cohesion, while Marxists look for contradiction and conflict. Where structural-functionalists study the working of autonomous social mechanisms, action theorists prefer to do research on the role of persons in society. While members of this community of scholars drew attention to the importance of order, continuity, and system, others emphasised indeterminacy (Falk Moore, 1977), the inchoate (Fernandez, 1986), risk (Sahlins, 1985) and rupture. Whereas to some symbols are instrumental primarily in so-called social dramas (i.e. Turner, 1974), others (like Geertz, 1973) view symbols as vehicles of culture. Where cultural ecologists show the importance of habitat, others point to the decisive role of habitus (Bourdieu, 1977), etc.

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