SACRED CAPITAL: PIERRE BOURDIEU AND THE STUDY OF RELIGION

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This article offers a critical analysis of Pierre Bourdieu's work and its importance for the study of religion. Analysis and criticim of Bourdieu's theories with reference to the example of the Bāuls, a loose, eclectic tradition of wandering minstrels and self-proclaimed spiritual "madmen", which has flourished throughout Bengal (northeast India and Bangladesh) since at least the late nineteenth century, was chosen for two reasons: first, because much like Bourdieu, the Bāuls make frequent use of a "marketplace" metaphor to describe the larger realms of social interaction and religious discourse; second, because the Bāuls offer a powerful challenge to Bourdieu's work, demonstrating that there is perhaps far more room for subversion and critique of the dominant "social marketplace" than his model of society and culture seems to allow.

> There is a need to radically question the economic view, which individualizes everything—production as much as justice or health, costs as well as profits ... . Against this narrow, short-term economics, we need to put forward an *economics of happiness*. (Bourdieu 1998: 40)

> Prince Hasan has caught God fever in the marketplace. ...
> He dances, plays and sings this song of Love. (Bāul song; Dasgupta and Dasgupta 1977: 42)

Economics and religion, the marketplace and the temple: traditionally, scholars of religion appear to have felt very nervous about bringing these two spheres into too close a proximity. On one side, historians of religions trained in the lineage of Joachim Wach or Mircea Eliade have long warned that "reductionism" is the cardinal sin in the study of religion, which is claimed to be a *sui generis* or irreducible phenomenon. Hence, economic reductionism or "vulgar economism" would be the most heinous crime of all (see Eliade 1958: xi).[1] On the other side, those trained in Marxist and neo-Marxist traditions have typically wanted to explain religious myths and rituals

[1] "To try to grasp the essence of such a phenomenon by means of physiology, sociology, economics, linguistics, art, or any other study is false; it misses the irreducible element in it—the element of the sacred" (Eliade 1958: xi). For a good critique of the *sui generis* argument, see McCutcheon 1997.

either as ideological screens masking deeper material forces or as expressions of misrecognized social interests. In either case, the relationship between economics and religion, the marketplace and the temple, remains one of the most poorly theorized areas in the comparative study of religions.

The work of Pierre Bourdieu has recently emerged as one of the most influential models for the analysis of culture, a model that has been widely adopted, debated, and discussed across the academic disciplines. In part, the reason for his popularity has been his keen insight into the "economic" nature of human action; indeed, his over-arching metaphor to describe the cultural field is an economic one, in which social agents are described as competitors for various kinds of material and symbolic "capital" (Bourdieu 1985, 1987; Jenkins 1992: 86). Strangely, however, Bourdieu has not yet been taken up in any critical way within the academic study of religion (which does often seem to lag a decade or so behind the rest of the academy). Unlike Foucault, Derrida, or even Deleuze and Guattari —who have been discussed widely for their relevance to the study of religion—Bourdieu has only rarely been taken up by historians of religions (Milner 1994; Bell 1992).[2]

The reasons for this neglect are twofold. The first is that much of Bourdieu's work appears, on the surface, to be hostile to religion, or at least to reduce the dimension of the transcendent and sacred to the material dimensions of self-interest and pursuit of profit. As Bourdieu describes his own agenda, he wants to "utilize the economic model to extend materialist critique into the realm of religion and to uncover the specific interests of the protagonists of the religious game, priests, prophets and sorcerers" (1990b: 107).The second reason for this neglect is that Bourdieu rarely addresses the question of religion directly, and in the few cases where he does (1987b, 1991), he presents some of his least sophisticated and most reductionistic analyses. Hence many have concluded that Bourdieu's discussion of religion is among the least useful aspects of his work.

In this article I will critically analyze Bourdieu's work and its importance for the study of religion by exploring one religious tradition

[2] Murray Milner (1994: 1-17) has used Bourdieu's concepts of reproduction and capital to examine the class system in India. However, his approach is more that of a sociologist than that of a historian of religions. Catherine Bell (1992: 79-80, 176-177) uses Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* to examine religious ritual, but she does not offer a rigorous discussion of his work or a critique of its problems.

with which I have a good deal of personal experience: the Bāuls, a loose, eclectic tradition of wandering minstrels and self-proclaimed spiritual "madmen", which has flourished throughout Bengal (northeast India and Bangladesh) since at least the late nineteenth century. I have chosen this particular example for two reasons: first, because much like Bourdieu, the Bāuls make frequent use of a "marketplace" metaphor to describe the larger realms of social interaction and religious discourse; and second, because the Bāuls offer a powerful challenge to Bourdieu's work, demonstrating that there is perhaps far more room for subversion and critique of the dominant "social marketplace" than his model seems to allow.

I will begin by outlining a few of Bourdieu's major ideas—such as strategy, *habitus*, and capital—as well as the most important objections to Bourdieu work (part 1). I will then discuss the usefulness of Bourdieu's model for understanding the specific case of the Bāuls, a case that reveals in a striking way both the potential advantages and the problems with Bourdieu's ideas for the study of religion (part 2). Finally (part 3), I will suggest some of my own alternatives to the problems in Bourdieu's model. First, using some insights from Michel de Certeau (1984), I will argue that we need to pay more attention to the creative, "tactical" role of ordinary consumers within the social and religious marketplace; we need to appreciate the ability of the poor and marginalized to subvert, deform, or poach upon an oppressive cultural market where the prices are inflated and the scales are rigged. Second, I will also criticize Bourdieu's rather cynical, pessimistic view of human nature, which he sees as governed primarily by self-interest and the pursuit of capital. Instead, I will argue for the importance of *other-interest* in human action—that is, a concern for other human beings and the desire to create a more egalitarian, or at least less exploitative, form of human community. To conclude, I will discuss the importance of Bourdieu's work for rethinking the political and ethical role of the history of religions today.

1. *From material to spiritual capital: Key ideas in Bourdieu's work and their relevance for the study of religion*

> The science of economic practices is a particular case of a *general science of the economy of practices* capable of treating all practices, including those purporting to be disinterested ... and hence non-economic, as economic practices directed toward the maximizing of material or symbolic profit. (Bourdieu 1977: 183)

Spanning over three decades of consistent, prolific publication, Bourdieu's work is remarkably wide-ranging in its scope. It has also been the subject of a formidable body of secondary scholarship, both critical and sympathetic. Therefore, rather than try to summarize Bourdieu's *oeuvre* as a whole, I will briefly outline just a few of his key ideas that are of most relevance to the comparative study of religion—most importantly, his concepts of strategy, *habitus*, and capital, all of which have direct bearing on Bourdieu's understanding of religion.

1.1. *From rules to strategies: Bourdieu's intellectual agenda*

> To substitute *strategy* for *rule* is to reintroduce time, with its rhythm, its orientation, its irreversibility. (Bourdieu 1977: 9)

Much of Bourdieu's work, as he explains his own intellectual agenda, is an attempt to transcend the duality between subjectivism and objectivism, which, he thinks, characterizes much of modern sociology and philosophy. On one side, there is the subjectivist view of the existentialists and phenomenologists, who regard the human subject as autonomous and radically free, largely independent of social or material conditions. On the other side, there are the structuralists such as Lévi-Strauss and Althusser, who seemingly erase the subject altogether and replace it with a rigid system of objective rules and unconscious laws. Yet neither of these models can adequately account for the complexity and subtly of social action. Instead, Bourdieu offers a model that would take account of both the deep structures that underlie much of culture, as well as the key role of agency and creativity in human action (1977: 3-9, 106-109; Swartz 1997: 52).

In a crucial break with the structuralists, Bourdieu proposes a fundamental shift from *rules* to *strategies*. Human beings are not simply governed by deep structures and unconscious rules as Lévi-Strauss suggests; rather, they also have the ability to manipulate these rules strategically, in relation to their own personal and political interests. Thus in his research on the Algerian Berber societies, Bourdieu found that the structural rule ought to be that marriage should take place between parallel cousins. And yet, in practice this "rule" was followed only a mere three to four percent of the time; in the overwhelming majority of cases, families manipulated the marital rules strategically, bending, playing upon, and exploiting them in order to

negotiate the best possible marriage in terms of their own economic prosperity, status, and prestige (1977: 42-46). Similarly, Bourdieu suggests, all social action is based on these sorts of strategic manipulations of social rules. Rather than rule-governed automatons trapped in a static structure, human beings are strategic players who work creatively within the limits of social structures. Social action thus appears less as a static structural logic than as a temporal, dynamic, and changing series of improvisations, comparable to the jazz player's creative improvisations on the rules that structure a given piece of music (Fowler 1997: 2)

1.2. *Political mythology embodied:* Habitus, *the body, and the social body*

> Symbolic power works ... through the control of bodies ... . Bodily hexis is political mythology realized, *em-bodied* in a permanent disposition, a durable way of standing, speaking, walking and thereby feeling and thinking. (Bourdieu 1990a: 69-70)

Perhaps the most crucial element in Bourdieu's model of agency and his attempt to navigate between the extremes of subjectivism and objectivism is the concept of *habitus*. Originally developed by Marcel Mauss to describe the "habitual" and deeply incorporated nature of human action, *habitus* has become a key term used to explain the relationship between the individual human body and the larger social body (Mauss 1979: 101). For Bourdieu, the *habitus* lies at the crucial interface between the individual self and the larger social organism: it is the means by which the structures of the social order are "inscribed", encoded, or written into the individual body, in the most corporeal forms of gestures, accents, patterns of dress, hairstyle, eating, walking, and talking. Through the *habitus*, the "political mythology" of the social order is "made flesh":

> The source of historical action ... resides neither in consciousness nor in things but in the relationship between two stages of the social, that is, between the history objectified in things, in the form of institutions, and the history incarnated in bodies, in the form of that system of enduring dispositions which I call *habitus*. (Bourdieu 1990b: 190)

Above all, this inscription of the social body onto the individual works through physical disciplines. As most tightly controlled organizations, such as the military, sports teams, or monastic orders, have long known, one of the most effective ways of forming a particular kind of obedient self in union with the larger social order is through routinized, repetitive, physical drills:

> [T]here is a link between the body and ... '*esprit de corps*' ... . If most organizations—the church, the army, political parties—give such a place to bodily disciplines, this is because obedience is belief and belief is what the body grants even when the mind says no ... . Bodily discipline is the instrument *par excellence* of domestication ... . Thus is explained the place that all totalitarian regimes give to bodily practices which, by symbolizing the social, contribute to somatizing it ... . 'Spiritual Exercises' are bodily exercises. (Bourdieu 1990b: 167)

However, in response to his many critics, who see *habitus* as an extremely deterministic concept that leaves no room for resistance or change, Bourdieu also insists that the concept of *habitus* does not impose an absolute determinism. Rather, because action is always *strategic*, improvisational, and creatively adjusted to its social constraints, the *habitus* is always open to a certain improvisation and creative modification in response to changing historical circumstances. "Habitus is not the fate that some people read into it ... . It is durable but not eternal!" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 133)

1.3. *Interest, profit, and capital: Economics as the ruling metaphor for social action*

> Symbolic capital is ... economic or political capital that is disavowed, misrecognized and thereby recognized, hence legitimate, a credit ... which in the long run guarantees economic profit. (Bourdieu 1994: 75)

One of the most provocative—yet also problematic—aspects of Bourdieu's work is his use of the economic metaphor as an overarching framework to describe social action (Jenkins 1992: 86).[3] Here Bourdieu is at once extending and also critically modifying classical Marxism. For whereas Marxism remains reductively bound to a materialist view of social life, placing economic structures at the center of action, Bourdieu extends the notion of economic interest to ostensibly "non-economic" goods, that is, to the symbolic domain of culture. Not just strictly economic activities, but all actions are fundamentally interested and in a sense "economic", that is, concerned with the pursuit of profit and acquisition of material and symbolic resources. "Bourdieu draws from Weber's sociology of religion to

[3] "As arenas of struggle over valued stakes, fields are regulated by a relationship between supply and demand. This allows the mobilization of notions such as 'price' and 'cost' in relationship to the strategies ... of agents engaged in competition within the field ... . [T]he metaphor of the marketplace is a consistent thread throughout his work" (Jenkins 1992: 86).

posit that *all action is interested*, including symbolic pursuits. He extends the logic of economic calculation to *all* goods, material and well as symbolic" (Swartz 1997: 66).

The key to Bourdieu's "general science of the economy of practices" is the central concept of "capital". In contrast to Marx's definition of the term, Bourdieu uses capital to refer not only to economic wealth, but also to the non-material resources of status, prestige, valued knowledge, and privileged relationships. In short, it refers to "all goods, material and symbolic, that present themselves as rare and worthy of being sought after in a particular social formation" (Bourdieu 1977: 178). Like economic capital, however, symbolic capital is not mere wealth that is hoarded and stockpiled; rather, it is a *self-reproducing* form of wealth, a kind of "accumulated labor" that gives its owner "credit" or the ability to appropriate the labor and products of others. Bourdieu then distinguishes between several varieties of capital: in addition to economic capital, there is social capital (valued relations with significant others), cultural capital (valued information or educational qualifications), and symbolic capital (the other forms of capital when recognized as "legitimate", in the form of prestige and honor) (Bourdieu 1986: 252-253; 1987: 34).

Symbolic capital is itself the product of a kind of "social alchemy", a process of mis-recognition, through which material capital is transformed and legitimated in the form of status or distinction (Bourdieu 1990a: 129). For mere economic capital must be masked or concealed; otherwise it would reveal the arbitrary nature of the distribution of wealth in the social hierarchy. When transformed into symbolic capital—in the form of prestige, honor, or nobility—economic wealth becomes "legitimate", even "natural", as a sign not of its owner's arbitrary birth and inheritance, but of his innate superiority (Bourdieu 1994: 75). This is the process at work, for example, in the purchase of an expensive piece of art, which confers the mark of "taste" upon its owner, or in the investment in a good education, which bestows "cultivation" and cultural capital. As such, the dynamics of the social field are determined largely by the strategic maneuvers of agents in their competition for these symbolic resources: "Symbolic capital is the product of a struggle in which each agent is both a ruthless competitor and supreme judge ... . This capital can only be defended by a permanent struggle to keep up with the group above ... and distinguish oneself from the group below" (Bourdieu 1990a: 123). For Bourdieu, it seems, we are all en-

gaged in a fairly brutal game of status, each of us vying over the scarce resources of prestige and material goods, and none of us ever truly secure in our own tenuous place in the hierarchy: "social life ... is a race of all against all" (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1993: 39).

1.4. *Sacred capital: Bourdieu on the religious field*

> Without going so far as to say, with Durkheim, 'Society is God,' I would say: God is never anything other than society. What is expected of God is only ever obtained from society. which alone has the power to justify you, to liberate you from facticity, contingency and absurdity ... . The judgment of others is the last judgment; and social exclusion is the concrete form of hell and damnation. It is also because man is a God unto man that man is a wolf unto man. (Bourdieu 1990b:196)

Next to the economic metaphor, the religious metaphor is one of Bourdieu favorite ways to describe the nature of social practice. Thus, symbolic capital is the effect of a "transubstantiation" of mere economic wealth into the seemingly natural qualities of taste and distinction; the educational system is for the upper classes a "theodicy of their own privilege"; artistic works are "consecrated" as fine art by the guardians of high culture, and so on. Bourdieu's own analysis is thus intended as a "heretical reading" of culture's sacred texts that will "desacralize objects which have become the focus of veneration", such as fine art and education (Bourdieu 1984a: 497; see also Fowler 1997: 44). Ironically, however, Bourdieu has written very little specifically on religion as a distinct field of practice. And the few pieces he has published—such as "Genesis and structure of the religious field" (1991) and "Legitimation and structured interests in Weber's sociology of religion" (1987a)—do not appear to be his most nuanced or sophisticated works. Indeed, his tendency toward reductionism and determinism often seems to get the better of him when he turns to the religious field, which is for Bourdieu the quintessential form of misrecognition and symbolic violence.

In principle, Bourdieu's aim is to apply the same sort of sociological critique to the religious sphere that he does to the artistic sphere. Just as historical sociology aims to "remove the work of art from its pedestal, where it touches the transcendent", and to situate it "through its artistic ancestry and its author's being in relation to time and space" (Fowler 1997: 64-65), so too Bourdieu's analysis would remove religion from the transcendent, ahistorical sphere and situate it concretely in culture and social struggle. Like all cultural phenom-

ena that claim to be "disinterested" and transcendent, religion is, in Bourdieu's eyes, always inherently "interested" and this-worldly (Bourdieu 1987a: 122). In fact, it would seem that religion is for Bourdieu the ultimate form of mystification that transforms this-worldly political and economic interest into allegedly other-worldly ideals. For it is through religious forms and symbols that arbitrary social relations are transformed into super-natural relations; through the divine sanction of religion, a given political arrangement or economic system is made to appear "natural", as if inscribed into the very fabric of the cosmos. Thus,

> The heart of the system of production of religious ideology ... is the most specific ... principle of ideological alchemy by which the transfiguration of social relations into supernatural relations operates and is therefore inscribed in the nature of things. (Bourdieu 1991: 5)

In short, Bourdieu wants to extend Max Weber's work by developing a "political economy of religion" that would bring out "the full potential of the materialist analysis of religion" (Bourdieu 1990b: 36).

Like other social fields, the religious field is for Bourdieu a competitive marketplace. A fundamentally interested and contested terrain, it is governed by the struggle over material and symbolic resources, specifically over "sacred capital" or the authority to administer the goods of salvation and to exercise power over the laity (1991: 22).[4] The primary competitors in this struggle are priests and prophets, who vie for the authority to supply religious goods and services (grace, forgiveness, salvation, etc.) to their laity-consumers. While the church and its priests strive for monopoly over the goods of salvation, through a kind of bureaucratic spiritual hierarchy, the prophet emerges as a "petty independent entrepreneur of salvation", who claims to offer new and improved spiritual products that devalue the old ones of the traditional church (Bourdieu 1991: 22-24).

The actions of both the priest and prophet, however, rest on a fundamental misrecognition. For, while their real interests are clearly this-worldly struggles over material resources and power, these inter-

[4] "As a result of their position in the structure of the distribution of capital of strictly religious authority, the various religious claimants ... can mobilize religious capital in the competition for the monopoly over the administration of the goods of salvation and over the legitimate exercise of religious power as power to modify the relations and practices of lay persons by inculcating in them a religious habitus" (Bourdieu 1991: 22).

ests are mystified and transubstantiated into other-worldly ideals of a "spiritual" nature.

> Since the very basis of the effect of consecration resides in the fact that religious ideology and practice fulfill a function of recognition-misrecognition, religious specialists must necessarily conceal that their struggles have political interests at stake ... . The symbolic efficacy that they can wield in these struggles depends on it and therefore they have a political interest to conceal and have to hide from themselves their political interests. (Bourdieu 1991: 20)

On the social level, the primary role of the church is to legitimize, reinforce, and reproduce a given social hierarchy and political formation: the church gives a divine sanction and legitimacy to the existing socio-economic system, while at the same time it creates the religious bureaucracy—the priests, monks, and theologians—necessary to reproduce it. "In a society divided into classes, the structure of the systems of religious representations and practices belonging to the various ... classes contributes to the perpetuation and reproduction of the social order ... by contributing to its consecration" (Bourdieu 1991: 19). Because of its general monopoly on sacred capital, the church and its priests have the power to impose a specifically religious *habitus* upon the laity. Through a wide array of "spiritual exercises", from prayer and rosaries to sacraments, from bodily disciplines such as genuflection and kneeling to modes of dress and sexual conduct, the church has the power to inscribe and thereby reproduce the social structure upon the individual body (1987a: 126).[5]

The prophet, on the other hand, emerges as the radical voice of challenge to the existing social and symbolic order, offering a revolutionary vision for an eschatological destruction and re-creation of the ways things are. Calling for apocalyptic death and renewal of the cosmos, the prophet implicitly challenges the sociocosm and the sacred authorities that support it. And yet, for Bourdieu, the prophetic call to revolution is always a flawed and failed one. Bound, as he or she is, by the symbolic forms of religious tradition, the prophet cannot recognize the truly political nature of his or her own revolt, and

[5] "Competition for religious power owes its specificity ... to the fact that what is at stake is the monopoly of the legitimate exercise of the power to modify ... the practice and world of lay people, by imposing on and inculcating in them a particular religious habitus. By this I mean a lasting, generalized and transposable disposition to act and think in conformity with the principles of a (quasi) systematic view of the world" (Bourdieu 1987a: 126).

so falls prey to the "flight of thought" into mysticism, symbolism, and prophetic dream, rather than working actively toward real material change (Bourdieu 1991: 37-38).

In sum, Bourdieu proposes to offer a more sophisticated interpretation of religion, one that would move beyond a simple Marxist reduction of the sacred to the material sphere, and offer more insight into the specifically symbolic dimension of the religious field. Yet, he seems to have finally given us a rather pessimistic and static view of religion. It is a model that offers little active role to ordinary laypeople, who are largely portrayed as passive consumers of the goods purveyed by spiritual bureaucrats and entrepreneurs; and it is one that offers little hope that religion might be used not simply to reproduce, but also to change or transform the existing socio-political order.

1.5. *The mirror of reproduction: Problems and criticisms of Bourdieu*

> A whole set of presuppositions is being imposed as self-evident: it is taken for granted that maximum growth and therefore productivity and competitiveness, as the ultimate and soul goal of human actions or that economic forces cannot be resisted. (Bourdieu 1998: 30-31)

> [Bourdieu] consistently says he is doing one thing while actually doing something else (and usually something which negates or undermines his stated project). (Jenkins 1992: 175)

Bourdieu's analysis of religion is an especially good example of many of the basic problems that run through his approach to culture as a whole. Over the last two decades, a variety of powerful objections have been raised against his work and his view of social action, some of them rather superficial, and some of them quite profound.

The most common criticism of Bourdieu is that, despite his claims to avoid the errors of structuralism and his emphasis on the strategic nature of social action, his view of society still seems overwhelmingly top-heavy and deterministic. While he does an excellent job of examining the process of reproduction in society, the ways in which existing class formations and political hierarchies are maintained, he seems much less able to account for *transformation and change* in the face of real historical events. Hence, many critics argue that Bourdieu tends to reduce social actors to unconscious "dupes" within a rather static structural system, and hence to reduce social practice to a "celebration of mindless conformity", which merely reproduces the

existing social order (Jenkins 1992: 97). "The role of consciousness is almost totally eclipsed; his actors seem doomed to reproduce their world mindlessly without its contradictions leaving any mark on their awareness" (Comaroff: 1985: 5).[6] Above all, as Fowler comments, Bourdieu tends toward a deeply pessimistic and neo-Machiavellian view of society, which leaves little room for any kind of genuine revolution or lasting resistance against the reproduction of social domination (Fowler 1997: 5, 177). This is particularly clear in his analysis of religion, which offers no real agency to the ordinary lay-consumers in the religious marketplace and no real hope that religious forms could be used to stimulate change, rebellion, or revolution against the status quo.

Now, both Bourdieu and his defenders have countered that this is not a fair criticism. For throughout his work, Bourdieu emphasizes the inventive, strategic nature of action, embodied in the *habitus*, which is never deterministically closed, but always open to change (Swartz 1997: 212). Moreover, it is not true that Bourdieu denies the possibility of resistance; indeed, in his later work, he makes a powerful call for resistance against the tyranny of the market. Rather, he is simply not very *optimistic* about it, observing that reproduction is in most cases far more common than revolution. More important, he is also suspicious of naive claims to resistance and the to "misplaced belief in illusory freedoms" that are in fact more subtle forms of domination (Bourdieu 1990b: 15). But in any case, the question of resistance does seem to be one of the least well-developed aspects of his work.

While the charge that Bourdieu is deterministic and top-heavy is perhaps not entirely justified, there is a more serious problem with his work, namely his fundamentally *economic* view of human action. Ironically, Bourdieu had originally proposed his own model largely as a counter to rigid Marxism or "vulgar economism". For Bourdieu, the economic realm is itself but one of many "fields" in the social order, alongside the political, religious, or artistic, each of which have their

[6] As de Certeau argues, Bourdieu's concept of strategy remains oddly limited. For Bourdieu, strategies are largely unconscious and not subject to intentional calculation; they are "the capacity for rule governed improvisation" that goes on beneath the surface of conscious agency. Thus de Certeau concludes, "there is no choice among several possibilities, and thus no strategic intention ... there is only an assumed world as the repetition of the past ... *Docta ignorantia*, therefore, a cleverness that does not recognize itself as such" (1984: 56).

own laws of exchange and forms of capital (Bourdieu 1984b: 5). And in his later work, he is severely critical of economic reductionism or the view that economic action is the end of all human existence (Bourdieu 1998: 30-31). Yet ironically, Bourdieu himself uses a fundamentally economic metaphor to describe all human action in all its many fields. We are, for Bourdieu, essentially interested, acquisitive, competitive creatures, each of us struggling for the accumulation of capital in order to secure an optimal position within the social hierarchy. As a variety of critics point out, this seems to be a remarkably bleak and cynical view of human nature, as well as in contradiction with his own critique of classical Marxism and economic reductionism (Gartman 1991: 421-427; Honneth 1986: 55-66). As Caillé argues, Bourdieu reduces social practice to a "hidden game of material interests" in which all action is reducible to a fundamental drive to pursue interests and accumulate power (Caillé 1992: 109-111).

> There is a certain irony in Bourdieu's economy of practices: though sharply critical of reductionist forms of Marxism for not according sufficient importance to the symbolic dimension of social life, Bourdieu's own view of action offers a more thoroughly materialist account than the forms of Marxism it so sharply criticizes. (Swartz 1997: 72)[7]

In fact, some critics argue that by viewing all social action as *interested* and concerned with *profit* Bourdieu ironically "turns everyone into a *capitalist*" (Karabel and Halsey 1977: 13).

Here I would suggest much the same critique of Bourdieu that Jean Baudrillard has made of Marx's work. As Baudrillard argues in his *Mirror of Production* (1975), Marx's critique of capitalism, as brilliant as it is, bears with it a tragic flaw: for while it attacks the capitalist reduction of human beings to exploited laborers slaving under an unjust economic system, Marxism only reinforces and naturalizes the view of human beings defined in economic terms. Though it is a powerful inversion of capitalism, it remains bound to an extremely reductive one of the human being as *homo faber*, a laborer, who is defined primarily in terms of his economic production. In this sense,

[7] In his work on the class system in India, Murray Milner (1994: 11) argues that Bourdieu makes the mistake of reducing all "capital" ultimately to material or economic capital. In so doing he leaves out the possibility that people might seek nonmaterial forms of capital, such as honor, sacredness, aesthetic taste, etc., not as disguised ways to attain economic capital, but as ends in themselves.

Baudrillard argues, Marxism is imperialistic, insofar as it imposes its view of human being as producer onto all other cultures and defines them in terms of economic development (Baudrillard 1988: 113-115). Or, in other critics' words:

> The Marxist model ... tyrannizes earlier or future societies because it absorbs them into its own likeness. The Marxist sign of production extends to the world. History equals the history of the modes of production. Marxism thus becomes imperialistic. All societies have to account for themselves in relation to the productivist model. (Horrocks and Jevtic 1999: 73)

Rather than impose a Marxist economic model onto the rest of the world, Baudrillard suggests that we use other cultures to critique and rethink this totalizing model itself. "Instead of exporting Marxism ... we [should] bring all the force and questioning of primitive societies to bear on Marxism ... . Perhaps then we will break this ... self-fetishization of Western thought" (Baudrillard 1988: 115).

So too, Bourdieu's "political economy of social action" should be subjected to a similar kind of critique—what we might call a critique of Bourdieu's "mirror of *reproduction*". In a sense, Bourdieu's model is even more problematic than Marx's, because Bourdieu has turned us all not simply into laborers, but into *capitalists*, self-interested beings who seek to accumulate and maximize our own symbolic and economic capital. At the same time, he has also extended this "capitalist" model beyond the material realm to the symbolic, cultural, and religious realms, so that, in effect, *all action at every level becomes capitalist*. Hence, following Baudrillard's critique of Marx, I would suggest that we need to stop imposing these kinds of economic models onto other cultures; instead, it might be more useful to bring the "force and questioning" of non-Western cultures onto this economic model itself. With a view to this end, I now turn to the case of the Bāuls.

2. *The marketplace of the world and the bazaar of love: Bodily practice and sacred capital in the Bāul songs of Bengal*

> You've come into this world, but you don't know the value of money [ṭākā]
> Money is such a thing that it's virtually equal to Allah himself!
> You will not find any sort of scale of measure like money in this universe. ...
> If I go to a holy man, I find that he too has money.

> No one pays any respect to those who have no money.
> And those who have thousands of rupees become king.
> Even a murderer goes unpunished if he has enough money! (Bāul 1970: 13)

Now that I have briefly outlined a few of Bourdieu's key ideas and their potential uses in the study of religion, let me apply them in one particular case with which I have some extensive first-hand experience—the Bāuls of Bengal.[8] Although the historical origins of the Bāuls are shrouded in mystery—with some scholars dating them back to the sixteenth century (Bhaṭṭācārya 1981) and others tracing their origins to the much more recent period of the late nineteenth century (Urban 1999)—it seems clear that the Bāul tradition reached its height of popularity during the colonial era, toward the end of the nineteenth century. Although the term *Bāul* appears occasionally in some early texts, such as the sixteenth-century *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, the earliest known reference to a distinct sect called "Bāuls" is not until 1870 (Datta 1987: 232; Salomon 1995; Urban 1999).[9] Today, the most famous poet in the Bāul tradition, and surely one of the most popular of all Bengali folk heroes, is Lālan Sāin or Lālan Fakir (1774-1890). Having composed over 300 songs, Lālan is said to have died at the age of 116, and has since become something of a national hero. Particularly through the influence of Rabindranath Tagore, who used Lālan's music to compose India's national anthem, the Bāuls have become a kind of a "folk icon" (Capwell 1986: 20).

From their origins, the Bāuls have held a profoundly ambivalent place in the Bengali imagination. They are, on one hand, beloved for

[8] There is much debate over the etymological origins of the term "Bāul". The most common view is that it derives from the Sanskrit term *vātula* or *vyākula* meaning mad or upset; there is also a Hindi variant, *Baura*. Others, however, think it is from the Persian word *āul*. The first use of the term appears in the *Kṣṇavijaya* of Śrī Mālādhāra Basu, to mean a "carefree and disheveled nature"; it also appears in the *Caitanya Caritāmta*, in which Caitanya is called *Bāul* or mad with love (Bhaācārya 1981: 1-3). For collections of Bāul songs, see Jhā 1995; Dās and Mahāpātra 1958; Mansur Uddīn 1942. Among the large body of secondary literature on the Bāuls, see Bhaṭṭācārya 1981; Openshaw 1997; Dimock 1968; Capwell 1986; Salomon 1991, 1995; Urban 1999.

[9] Openshaw argues that the term *Bāul* is now so misused and problematic as to be worthless as a scholarly category: "Due to varied appropriations ... the word has no analytical value from a sociological point of view ... and is at times positively misleading" (1997: 297). Instead, Openshaw uses the Bengali phrase *barttamān panthī*, that is, those who follow the path of *barttamān*, or what can be ascertained directly through senses, rather than through mere hearsay or inference.

their haunting, beautiful music and romanticized as embodiments of the free, unfettered spirit of Bengali folk culture. Yet, on the other hand, the Bāuls have long been suspected and persecuted for their alleged immorality, sexual promiscuity, and use of intoxicants. During the height of Muslim fundamentalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Bāuls were attacked and beaten as corruptions of genuine Islamic tradition and adulterous minglings of Hindu and Muslim cultures (Salomon 1995: 268; Urban 1999).

A large part of the reason for the Bāuls' ambivalent place in the Bengali imagination is their controversial social vision. Drawn primarily from the poorer lower classes of rural Bengal, the Bāul tradition offers both a strong critique of the class system and a spiritual path for marginalized groups on the fringes of society. "Socially the Bāul tradition can be interpreted as a series of rebellions by isolated individualists against caste and class system" (Bhattacharya 1978: 30). The Bāuls typically reject conventional social and religious institutions, claiming to be neither Hindu nor Muslim, though eclectically drawing both from Hindu Tantric and from Muslim Sufi traditions alike. A homeless wanderer and self-proclaimed outcast, the Bāul owns nothing but a simple patch-work coat, his long hair bound in a top-knot, carrying with him only his singled-stringed instrument, the *ekara*. Ignoring basic social conventions and taking delight in overturning the laws of mainstream religion, the Bāul is an openly iconoclastic figure. "A Bāul is one who, dressed in a tattered garment made of remnants of clothing ... of both Hindus and Muslims, wanders incessantly living on whatever those who listen to his songs give him ... . The Bāul is thought mad because he goes deliberately ... against the current of custom" (Dimock 1966: 251). Willfully inhabiting the "topsy-turvy land" (*ulṭa deś*), the Bāul may violate any social convention for the sake of spiritual love. "Reverse are the modes and manners of the man who ... is a lover of true love; none is sure about the how and when of his behavior ... Awkwardly wild are his manners and customs ... . He is as satisfied with mud as with sandal-paste ... . He builds his house in the sky, even as the fourteen worlds are burnt to ashes" (Dasgupta 1968: 163). God, for the Bāul, is found not in temples or mosques, but within the individual human being, where ee dwells in the most intimate form of the Man of the Heart (*maner māṇus*). Hence the most direct means to realizing the divine lies not in outward ritual or institutional ceremony, but rather through physical

practice, journeying inward to discover the *maner māṇus* who lies hidden within every heart (see Jhā 1995: song 340; Salomon 1995).

2.1. *Bodies of ecstasy: Refashioning the body and the* habitus *in Bāul practice*

> Explore the nature
> of your own body,
> My unfeeling heart
> Unless you know
> Your very substance
> Worshipping God
> is of no avail. – Song of Radhashyam (Bhattacharya 1978: 110)

Much of the Bāuls' spiritual practice centers around the human body (*deha*). For the Bāuls, as for other mystical traditions of Bengal, the human body is considered to be the supreme locus of the Absolute Reality and the supreme vehicle to liberation. Imagined as a microcosm, a mirror of the universe in physical form, the body contains its own vast "interior landscape", complete with all the heavens, hells, mountains, rivers, and gods. According to a song of Radhashyam, "The body is the dome, Of the seven heavens, The nether-world, And the earth we live in" (Bhattacharya 1978: 110). Yet at the same time, in Bourdieu's terms, the body is also very much a sociocosm or embodiment of the social organism, inscribed with the structures and forms of the culture in which it is embedded.

In Bengal, as in most of India, there is a deep and intimate relationship between the individual body and the larger social body. As Partha Chatterjee observes, caste and class are themselves fundamentally "bodily" phenomena: "Caste attaches itself to the body, not the soul" (1993: 194). As Ronald Inden and Ralph Nicholas have shown, Bengali society is traditionally imagined in the form of a physical organism, which is held together by bonds of love and common bodily substances, shared between individual bodies. Through the ten *saṃskāras*, the sacraments or "life-cycle rites" (marriage, first impregnation, baptism, initiation, etc.), each individual body is progressively transformed and assimilated into the greater totality of the social body. One's bodily substance, in short, determines one's rank and status within the social hierarchy. Through the *saṃskāras*, the fluids and substances of the individual body are transformed in order to unite it with the greater body of the community. "Every *saṃskāra* is a transformative action that refines and purifies the body, initiating it into new statuses and relationships by giving it a new birth" (Inden

and Nicholas 1987: 37). In Bourdieu's terms, we would say that the *saṃskāras* serve to inscribe the larger structures of the social order onto the human body, literally incorporating them, in the form of the *habitus*, into the physical nature and deportment of the individual.

The most important of the *saṃskāras*—particularly marriage (*vivāha*), first impregnation (*garbhādhāna*), and procreating a son (*puṃsavana*)—center primarily around the bodily fluids such as semen, menstrual fluid, milk, and blood, substances which are manipulated in order to construct a socialized bodily identity. *Vivāha*, in particular, is the most important means of defining caste and rank in Bengali culture, for it ensures the proper union of individual bodies within the greater social order (Inden and Nicholas 1987: 23). When joined in marriage, the male and female are believed to share the same bodily fluids, the same blood, tears, and sexual fluids. Therefore, an improper marriage threatens the whole delicate balance of the social hierarchy, bearing "the capacity to ruin the entire order of *jatis* in the community ... . The improper combination of coded bodily substances entailed the improper combination of worship and occupational substances as well" (Inden and Nicholas 1987: 52).

The second and third *saṃskāras* also center around bodily fluids, though now in relation to procreation and the hope for a male child. Both sacraments use fluid-symbolism in order to influence the conception of the fetus, hoping to alter its composition and to determine its gender. According to traditional Bengali beliefs, a child is created by the mingling of blood and seed in the womb, a predominance of male seed producing a boy and a predominance of female blood producing a girl. Thus, the second and third *saṃskāras* work upon these fluids in the hope of influencing their flow and ensuring the birth of a male child. In the rite of first impregnation, for example, the husband touches his wife's navel and gives her a drink from the five products of the cow. So too, during the rite of procreating a son, the wife must drink symbolic "seminal foods", such as yogurt with lentils and barley seeds, in order to "increase the seminal portion of her child". The birth of a healthy male child is thus crucial to the social order, for it is the physical embodiment of the union of husband and wife and "concretely embodies their one body relationship" (Inden and Nicholas 1987: 52-54).

As Glen A. Hayes has shown, many of the esoteric traditions of Bengal, such as the Bāuls and Sahajiyās, also developed a series of rituals that work upon the fluids and processes of the individual

body—perhaps what we might call a series of "alternative sacraments" or esoteric *saṃskāras*. Like the conventional Hindu *saṃskāras*, the Bāul and Sahajiyā rituals work upon the substances of the body in order to reform it and reintegrate within a greater community or family, that of the guru and the lineage of the esoteric tradition. Yet, these alternative sacraments are designed to create not a conventional social body but, rather, an alternative, spiritualized, and divinized body, the *siddha-deha* or *aprakṛta deha* (Hayes 337; cf. Urban 1995, 2001).

Going beyond Hayes, however, I would argue that esoteric sects such as the Sahajiyās and Bāuls do not simply adapt the traditional *saṃskāras* passively and unreflectively; rather, they intentionally *manipulate and transform* them, often inverting them, in order to create an alternative self and social body. By no means passive blocks of wood inscribed with the larger structures of the social body, as Bourdieu's model of the *habitus* might suggest, the Bāuls in fact manipulate the individual body in order to reject the conventional social order itself. For, as Comaroff suggests in her study of body-symbolism in the South African Zionist movement, human beings are not simply condemned to reproduce the values of the dominant social body; rather, "the human imagination is independently reflective and exists in a dialectical relationship with the very ... forms which give it life" (Comaroff 1985: 79). Thus, if the substances of the body can serve as the basic symbols of the social order, these same substances can also be manipulated by dissident groups in order to challenge or subvert the social order. This is nowhere more apparent than in the case of the Bāuls, who aim to achieve not only a new bodily identity, but also a new communal identity. Their "alternative sacraments" do not seek to create a socialized body and *habitus*, incorporated into the conventional economic order. On the contrary, they aim to *deconstruct* the conventional social body, creating in its place a new secret body, with a reformed *habitus*, liberated from the dominant world of caste and labor.

Many of the Bāuls' practices, in fact, involve deliberate transgressions and systematic inversions of the categories that define the conventional social order. While the ordinary Bengali is incorporated into the social body through the ritual manipulation of physical substances, the Bāul often manipulates these same substances in radically transgressive ways in order to transcend the conventional social order itself. One of the most infamous of Bāul practices, for example,

is known as the "Four Moons" (*cāri-candra*), which involves the literal (not symbolic) consumption of four bodily substances: semen, menstrual blood, urine, and feces. Imagined as analogs to the four elements, these four substances represent the substance of the universe itself, and the consumption of them thereby reintegrates the Bāul into the Supreme Reality (Salomon 1995: 196; Jha 1995: 65-108). "Blood (*śonit*) semen (*śukra*), feces and urine—these four come from the father's seed and the mother's womb. Therefore one should take these back into the body, rather than allowing them to go to waste" (Datta 1987: 232). From the orthodox Hindu standpoint, this is surely the height of impurity, which would normally render the individual polluted in the most extreme way. Yet for the Bāuls, this systematic violation of the laws of purity and impurity is the most powerful sign that they have transcended the conventional social order. They have "overcome aversion, shame and fear" and so attained "the stage of non-duality and non-discrimination" (Datta 1987: 94). In sum, the consumption of these polluting substances is an extreme, but symbolically powerful means of breaking down the normal socialized *habitus* and opening the possibility for birth into an alternative social body.

Even more extreme forms of transgression take place in the Bāuls' esoteric sexual rituals. Largely adapted from older tantric traditions of Bengal, Bāul practice involves a ritual form of intercourse that in many ways deliberately reverses the normal flow of bodily fluids and normal relations between the sexes. According to the Bāuls' view of the human body, the Supreme Self or "Man of the Heart" (*maner māṇus*) dwells in the top of the head, resting in the highest energy center which is imagined as a radiant thousand-petalled lotus (*sahasrār*). During the three days of a woman's menstrual period, the Supreme Self descends from the top of the head to the lowest energy center called the *mūlādhār*, the meeting place of the three rivers (*triveṇī*), where the Supreme Self appears in the flow of menstrual blood. This is the optimum time for Bāul sexual practice. For the aim of Bāul practice is to unite with the female and then to "catch" the Supreme Self by separating him out from the menstrual blood and then drawing him back up through the penis into the male body. Once this divine "fish" has been caught within the waters of the *triveṇī*, the Supreme Self must be drawn upward "against the current" through the male's body until he is rejoined with the thousand-petalled lotus at the top of the head. The resulting bliss is known as

"catching the Uncatchable, catching the thief or being dead while alive" (Salomon 1995: 195-196). All of this, moreover, is explicitly described as an inverted form of sexual union, one that goes in the contrary direction, against the current, and so leads not to normal domestic life in society, but to supreme liberation from society and the world of rebirth. The result is not the birth of an ordinary child, as a symbol of the union of male and female in accordance with the traditional *saṃskāras* and the fulfillment of their obligations to society; rather, it is the birth of a new non-material body or perfected body (*siddha deha*), which is neither male nor female, but both, combined in immortal, androgynous bliss. Thus, Lālan Fakir sings,

> As the man and woman in me
> Unite in love
> The brilliance of beauty
> Balanced on the bi-petalled
> Lotus in me
> dazzles my eyes ...
> My skin and bone
> are turned to gold.
> I am the reservoir of love. (Bhattacharya 1978: 88-89)

Ultimately, by engaging in these alternative sacraments the Bāul is incorporated into a wholly new social body. The Bāul becomes part of a very different social order, one governed not by class or wealth, but by the rejection of the conventional social body. Reborn into a new family, with a new father or mother (the *guru*) and siblings (*guru-bhāis* and *guru-bons*), the Bāuls who practice these "spiritual disciplines" have effectively deconstructed and reconstructed their own *habitus*, removing themselves from the mainstream social body and incorporating themselves into an alternative social organism with its own unique *habitus*. And this also means removing themselves from the dominant social "marketplace" and engaging in the business of a new spiritual market.

2.2. The marketplace of the world and the bazaar of love: Economic metaphors and mercantile discourse in the Bāul songs

> Where did you get your scriptures, sacred texts, Veda and Purāa?
> Seduced by hearsay and inference,
> you keep worshipping and meditating
> While the guru revels in the upturn in his business. – Bāul song of Maṇi (Openshaw 1997: 303)

One of the most common metaphors used throughout the Bāul songs —and throughout Bengali popular literature as a whole, in fact—is the image of the marketplace or bazaar (*hāṭ* or *bājār*). Not unlike Bourdieu, the Bāuls typically describe the world of society, human interaction, and even religious life as a vast competitive marketplace, a realm of buying and selling, haggling, cheating, and thievery. Yet, in contrast to Bourdieu's model, which portrays the laity primarily as passive consumers with little agency in the religious marketplace, the Bāul songs show us clearly that ordinary men and women can also appropriate the forms of spiritual marketplace, often in quite subversive and deviant ways. Indeed, they often invert and deform the image of the market into a powerful source of indigenous critique of the dominant religious and social order.

Whether in the form of the *bājār* (the permanent market for general merchandise), the *hāṭ* (the local occasional market), the *ga j* (the wholesale market for bulk goods), or the *melā* (the annual fair), the world of the market has long held a central role as both a material locus and a key metaphor in the Bengali imagination (Sen 1998). As Sudipta Sen suggests, the marketplace of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Bengal was the nexus in a complex web of relations that permeated all levels of culture, a meeting point of economic forces, political power, and religious patronage. Amidst a dispersed and shifting political realm, it was the marketplace that bound together the many diverse fields of power, economic, religious, and political alike. "The marketplace ... was not just a site of transaction, but a knot in the fabric of social mediation" (Sen 1996: 19).

Not only were there intimate connections between political power and control of the market, but there was an equally close relationship between religious patronage and the bazaar. The marketplace shows us just how difficult it is to separate the economic and religious fields, how material, social, and religious capital are all bound together in a complex fabric (Sen 1996: 26). Thus we find that throughout the literature of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Bengal, the image of the marketplace often serves as the most basic image for the world as a whole—a fitting symbol for the complex exchanges within a highly mobile, fluid, transient society. Not only in travel literature and secular accounts, but also in religious texts, the market represents the knot in a fabric of political, religious, and economic relations, and thus a key symbol for power as a whole. "The marketplace stood as

a powerful metaphor of worldly authority for the ruling elite" (Sen 1996: 30-31).

Yet, simultaneously, the image of the marketplace could also become a potential source of subversion and critique. As Mikhail Bakhtin suggests, the marketplace holds a unique place in most cultures: as a realm of social interaction that transcends most ordinary social barriers, it brings together men and women of all classes in a common sphere of exchange, allowing an unusual freedom to speak frankly and critically.

> The marketplace ... was a world unto itself ... . [A]ll performances in this area, from loud cursing to organized show ... were imbued with the same atmosphere of freedom, frankness and familiarity ... . The marketplace was the center of all that is unofficial: it enjoyed a certain extraterritoriality in a world of official order and ideology. (Bakhtin 1984: 153-154)

So too, as Guha has shown in his study of peasant resistance in colonial Bengal, the marketplace was a special site of critique, a realm where the lower classes could speak out against the wealthy upper classes. Because it is a place "where people gather en masse for trade and entertainment", the marketplace always represented a potential threat to the ruling powers: "the bazaar was clearly identified in colonialist thinking with the origin and dissemination of rumor and subversive discourse among the lower classes" (Guha 1983: 258).

This ambivalent status of the marketplace, as both a center of power and as a potential site of contestation and critique, also holds true on the religious plane. Not only was the marketplace a key metaphor for political dominance, but often it was also used as a metaphor for religious dominance and spiritual authority. One of the most remarkable uses of the market metaphor appears in a work attributed to the poet Narottam Dās, a poem entitled *Hāṭ Pattan* ("The foundation of the marketplace"). Here the great Bengali saint, Śrī Caitanya, is transformed into a kind of holy businessman who founded the spiritual marketplace of the Vaiṣṇava tradition in order to distribute the commodities of love, song, and prayer throughout the world:

> A market and post were set up by the quay,
> and the flag went up, a warning to the sinful.
> Storehouses of four *rasas* in every direction,
> secured all around with the name of Hari.
> Guards sat chanting and chanting that name.
> One could buy or sell in this market at will. (trans. Sen 1996: 31)

Caitanya's chief disciples are then appointed as the various agents, clerks, and brokers of this market; and the host of devotees flocking to the holy bazaar become the merchants and traders, selling their divine merchandise of songs in praise of Kṛṣṇa.

The image of the marketplace, however, could also be given a far more critical and edge; indeed, it could also be used by lower-class heterodox or so-called "deviant sects" as a very negative and critical image. As Sen points out, the songs of these deviant sects often subvert the image of the "official marketplace", cynically depicting it as a world of illusion and suffering, a realm of thieving, chicanery and greed: "[I]n the songs of other sects—particularly ones that question or subvert kingly rule or prescribed religious leadership—the marketplace appears as a classic metaphor for material illusion in mortal life" (Sen 1996: 32).

2.3. *Thievery in the bazaar of love: Mercantile imagery in the Bāul songs*

> The bazaar has been controlled.
> Oil is under control, sugar is under control,
> the government has controlled humans as well!
> Meat is ten rupees a kilo, fish is almost twelve, grains not less than six.
> Seeing eggs at eighty paise a pair,
> the Brahmin has started to keep poultry! – contemporary Bāul song (Bhattacharya 1978: song 9)

Nowhere is this critical use of marketplace imagery more prominent than in the songs of the Bāuls. Like the earlier Vaiṣṇava traditions, the Bāuls make frequent use of the imagery of the marketplace: buying and selling, moneylenders and brokers, bankers and thieves. Yet, they do so in a far more critical sense that in many ways subverts that of mainstream religious and social institutions. For the Bāuls, the image of the market functions on two levels simultaneously, on both a practical socio-economic level and on a symbolic religious level. In its more concrete economic sense, the image of the "bazaar of the world" (*bhava-bajār*) has very direct implications, describing the actual lives of men and women laboring in colonial Bengal. It serves as a critical commentary upon the lives of the poor lower orders of the slums and bazaars of the cities. In the words of Lālan:

> When you deal in the market of the world,
> you think you buy rich rubies, diamonds, pearls—
> you really only buy brass beads, my friend. ...

> "My house," "my goods"—like this our days go echoing by.
> We eat the poison of our possessions, and when wealth is lost we weep.
> What good will weeping do when lost, my brother? (Bhaṭṭācārya 1981: song 63)

Often, the Bāuls appropriate the earlier Vaiṣṇava image of Caitanya's "marketplace of love", though giving it a far more pessimistic and negative interpretation. As we see in the following song of Lālan's, the story of the rich merchant who hopes to trade in the marketplace of love becomes the story of the deluded soul who squanders his life in the pursuit of false hopes and vain illusions.

> You brought the merchant's treasure here
> and squandered it, you Madman!
> For what you owe, you'll go down to death's kingdom. ...
> The Creator, that Wealthy Merchant,
> who stocks all sorts of precious jewels, had mercy on you.
> But, now you've lost that treasure, O my mind, ...
> You came to the market of bliss, saying, "I'll engage in trade,"
> but now you're flat broke. (Jhā 1995: song 219)

As Śaktinath Jhā suggests, the Bāuls often use the imagery of the bazaar and the sorrows of the poor Bengali merchant to describe the sad fate of those who seek happiness in the material world. Just as so many petty shopkeepers of the colonial era were reduced to abject poverty when the British capitalists and wealthy moneylenders took control of the market, so too the human soul wanders in the endless debt and poverty of this mortal realm of *saṃsāra*:

> The East India Company monopolized control over business in this era, and many small merchants had to take loans from Moneylenders or businessmen, then lost their wealth and fell into poverty ... . The metaphor of the wealth of small merchants becoming exhausted appears many times in these songs ... . Because of thievery or disasters, the small merchants fell into poverty ... . The Fakir religion is their last refuge (Jhā 1995: 218).

Yet, at the same time, the Bāuls are clearly using the market metaphor as a weapon not just of social critique, but also of *religious critique*, as a means of reflecting upon and making fun of the dominant spiritual institutions of Hinduism and Islam. The songs are filled with often humorous, at times scathing, attacks on the hypocrisy of the religious life around them—the useless mumbo-jumbo and chicanery that fills the temples and mosques, but only obscures the true presence of the divine within the human heart (Dimock 1966: 263).

Thus, all the conventional rituals, pilgrimages, and saint-cults are so many devious schemes within the spiritual market. They benefit only the greedy merchants, namely, the lazy Brahmins and Mullahs who profit in this spiritual trade.

> What business can be done from image worship in this Bengal!
> No other place has [such] worship, it's [just] a waste of money ....
> How much money is spent at all these pilgrimage centers in India.
> How cunningly the priest-touts come like gurus with [lists of] names and places
> So many people in this country are starving.
> But in their case [the priests/ gurus] money is forked out. (Openshaw 1997: 306)

Instead, the Bāuls seek an alternative kind of spiritual marketplace. The Bāul wanders in search of the merchant's shop that lies beyond caste and religious distinctions, where Muslims, Hindus, and Christians all share together in the same sweets of divine love. This is a shop where money is useless and only compassion is of value.

> I am impatiently searching the
> the simple address
> of that particular shop
> where Allah, Hari, Ram, Kali, God
> take meals from the common plate ...
> where knowledge-posset and duty sugar
> are being dabbed by Buddha and Nanak
> where by dint of kindness and forgiveness
> the religion-based sweets develop
> These can't be purchased through payment of money
> Whereas these can be eaten without any payment
> The proper way of knowing the whereabouts of the real owner
> can be known through meditation and prayer. (Sarkar 1990: 179)

The true wealth or "capital" that he seeks here is neither the economic capital of the moneylenders nor the "sacred capital" of the Brahmins and Shaykhs; rather, it is the most intimate treasure of the "Man of the Heart", that true wealth that is the presence of the divine within every human body (see Mansur Uddīn 1942: song 3). Indeed, we might say that the Bāuls are not seeking a form of "sacred capital" in Bourdieu's sense, but almost a kind of "anti-capital", for they value poverty and humility in place of economic wealth, self-abnegation in place of self-interest or personal profit.

> With a beggar's humility
> I have come to your doors,

O benign bearer of pains
No one is ever turned away
from your home of unending stores.
You have all the riches
In the worlds of god, demon and man
And of much have you given
Without my demand
No more do I need any wealth
O my master, Give me your feet. (Bhattacharya 1978: 104)

In sum, the Bāuls' use of the market metaphor serves as a clever double-bladed weapon. On one hand, it really does describe the unhappy lives of many poor men and women, living in the slums and bazaars, with their dreams of a new, liberated marketplace free of thieving brokers or treacherous moneylenders. On the other hand, it also serves to criticize mainstream religious institutions, while offering the vision of an alternative spiritual marketplace: the love-bazaar of the Bāul path.

In marked contrast to Bourdieu, the Bāul songs show us that ordinary consumers in the spiritual marketplace are far from passive followers of monopolizing priests or entrepreneurial prophets; rather, they are both aware of and critically reflective upon the dominant social and religious institutions around them. Still more strikingly, they are also able to appropriate and subvert the very metaphor of the "marketplace" itself. In the Bāul songs, the image of the bazaar becomes simultaneously a weapon to attack the futility of the dominant social and religious structures around them and a way to imagine a more egalitarian other-world, a bazaar of love, that transcends the greedy hypocrisy of the bazaar of the world.

I would suggest, therefore, that we follow the lead of Michel de Certeau by building on Bourdieu's notion of strategy and by more fully developing the possibilities for struggle and change. We need to ask, in short, how do lower-class, marginalized members of society struggle to achieve capital or power? How do the poor "make do" within a social field that is dominated, within a market where all the prices are inflated and the scales are rigged? Modifying Bourdieu's model, de Certeau argues that there are not only a variety of *strategies* at play in the social field— that is, techniques by which the dominant classes struggle to accumulate power and capital—but there are also a wide array of *tactics*—that is, the more "everyday" struggles of the dominated classes by which they appropriate and turn to their own advantage the structures of the dominant social order. These are

what de Certeau calls the more subtle *tactics of consumption*, the ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong and ordinary social consumers "poach" on the property of others. In such cases, ordinary social consumers can subvert the discourse and structures of the dominant order, not by rejecting them, "but by using them with respect to ends foreign to the system they had to accept ... . Their use of the dominant social order deflect[s] its power, which they lack the means to challenge ... . [T]heir difference lay in procedures of consumption" (de Certeau 1984: xi-xii).

3. *In search of other-interest: Alternative visions of community*

> Listen man, my brother,
> human beings are the truth above all truths,
> there is nothing higher. – song of Candidas (Jhā 1995: 102)

> Now that the great utopias of the nineteenth century have revealed all their perversion, it is urgent to create the conditions for a collective effort to reconstruct a universe o f realist ideals, capable of mobilizing people's will without mystifying their consciousness. (Bourdieu 1998: 9)

Thus, the spiritual practices and songs of the Bāuls offer a powerful challenge both to Bourdieu's model of the *habitus* and to his view of the religious "marketplace". But most importantly, the example of the Bāuls also poses a serious challenge to Bourdieu's economic model of social action and his central notion of "interest". As we saw above, there is a basic tension and seeming contradiction in Bourdieu's work, hinging around his use of the economic metaphor. On one hand, Bourdieu sees all action as fundamentally *interested*, that is, concerned with the pursuit of some kind of capital, whether material or symbolic. The social field is a fiercely competitive game, a struggle of all against all. "Interest is ... what gets people moving, what makes them get together, compete and struggle with each other" (Bourdieu 1990b: 88). Yet, on the other hand, particularly in his later work, Bourdieu strongly criticizes any form of economic determinism that would reduce human beings to mere self-interested consumers, what he calls "the commercial substitute for the citizen", governed by the "undivided reign of the market" (Bourdieu 1998: 6). "What is at stake now is winning back democracy from technocracy. We must put an end to the reign of the expert in the form of the World Back or the IMF, who impose without discussion the version

of the new Leviathan, the financial markets" (Bourdieu 1998: 25-26). Hence, there does seem to be in Bourdieu's work an implicit, yet never fully articulated concept of "interest" that would go beyond mere self-interest and turn to a larger concern for the collective. As he argues in *Acts of Resistance*, we need to fight against the crippling definition of the human being as a mere consumer or subject of the marketplace and, instead, recognize the "universal" interests of human happiness and well-being: "Against this narrow, short-tern economics, we need to put forward an *economics of happiness*, which would take note of all the profits, individual and collective, material and symbolic, associated with activity" (Bourdieu 1998: 40). Thus we are left with a fundamental tension and unresolved contradiction in Bourdieu's work: on one side, there is a rather cynical view of human nature as inherently self-interested and motivated by the pursuit of profit, that is, a seemingly "capitalist" view that reproduces the economic determinism that he professes to repudiate. Yet, on the other side, there is the hope for a more universal social concern, transcending individual interests and seeking some larger ideal of collective happiness.

The Bāul songs offer a powerful vision of a different kind of "interest", one not limited to individual self-interest and the pursuit of personal profit, but aimed at an alternative model of community. Rejecting the artificial divisions created by religious and social institutions, the Bāul seeks the *maner māṇus* concealed within every human body:

> Oh my mind, do no think for any discrimination based on caste
> Open the Puranas and see there is only one caste which is Man
> just see that Purusha and Prakrti [male and female]
> are the two human divisions
> then why is there such excessive eagerness in Veda, Bible and Koran
> to establish human differentiation? (Sarkar 1990: 176)

Hence, the ideal of the Bāul life is to realize this divinity within one's own body and to recognize its presence within all others. Rejecting the hierarchies of conventional social and religious institutions, the Bāul becomes part of a new community, a community of the poor that transcends the material and symbolic capital of wealth, status, birth, and class.

At the same time, however, we should avoid romanticizing groups such as the Bāuls as embodiments of some kind of utopian or egalitarian ideal. While there is much to admire in the Bāuls' songs and

their vision of the divinity of all human beings, there are also some less noble aspects of actual Bāul communities. As Bourdieu reminds us, we must always be wary of the "misplaced belief in illusory freedoms" that are in fact only more subtle forms of domination (Bourdieu 1990b: 15). Resistance and domination are seldom either clearly distinct or mutually exclusive, but typically bound up in a complex network of struggle and contestation (Bourdieu 1990b: 155). Thus one could indeed apply a Bourdieuian critique to the Bāuls and find all sorts of interest, competition, and struggle going on within their particular cultural-religious field. (In fact, I have done so elsewhere in my own work on related religious groups of Bengal [Urban 2001].) In his detailed ethnographic study of Bāuls in West Bengal, for example, R. M. Sarkar has shown that the Bāuls' egalitarian ideals are not always put into practice in their own communities. Not only are there internal divisions among different kinds of Bāuls, but, perhaps most fundamentally, there is often asymmetry between the sexes. Theoretically, female Bāuls should have status and power equal to that of the males; and, in fact, there are many powerful female Bāuls who hold authority over sizable Bāul communities. Yet very often, in practice, female Bāuls are treated primarily as consorts (*sevadāsīs*) in the Bāuls' esoteric sexual practices (Sarkar 1990: 71-74).

In short, the actual communal life of many Bāuls is often less than ideal or egalitarian, but in some cases seems to reintroduce new asymmetries of power. But my point here is not that the Bāuls are entirely without self-interest, but rather that self-interest is not the only motivating factor here (or for any human being); rather, there is also a powerful impulse toward other-interest and the imagining of other forms of community that are less exploitative or oppressive. The vision of an egalitarian, non-hierarchical social order, free of the divisions of class, wealth, or gender, survives throughout the haunting imagery of the Bāul songs. Yet, it is always in tension with the rival forces of self-interest, patriarchy, and the competitive struggle over both economic and symbolic power.

4. *Conclusions: The political roles of the sociologist and the historian of religions*

> [S]ociology frees us by freeing us from the illusion or freedom, or, more exactly from the misplaced belief in illusory freedoms. Freedom is not something given: it is something you conquer—collectively. (Bourdieu 1990b:15)

> O mind take off your bride's veil,
> and leave your home behind
> to proceed to the market of desires.
> Why neglect your goal with the pride of your clan?
> When taken to the cremation ground,
> repentance will burn your ego. – Song of Lālan (Bandopadhyay 1989: 68)

The case of the Bāuls provides us with an excellent illustration of both the useful applications and the serious limitations of Bourdieu's work for the study of religions. Most fundamentally, I would suggest that we ought to follow Bourdieu in his critique of the artistic field, by applying the same of kind of rigorous interrogation to the religious field that Bourdieu applies to that of aesthetics. Just as he calls for the "barbarous reintegration of aesthetic consumption into the world of ordinary consumption (against which it endlessly defines itself)" (1984a: 100), so I would call for the reintegration of religion into the world of ordinary consumption, into the realms of politics, economics, and history against which it endlessly defines itself. Yet, in contrast to Bourdieu, I would also argue that religion does not only play a reproductive role in legitimating the dominant status quo in a given social-political formation; rather, as we see in the songs of the Bāuls, it can also have a critical role in challenging and even openly rejecting the existing social order.

Thus, in contrast to Bourdieu's emphasis on "strategies", I would follow de Certeau by looking at the more subtle "tactics", or the ways in which ordinary consumers resist, subvert, and struggle against the forces of the dominant social or religious marketplace. Likewise, whereas Bourdieu emphasizes the ways in which the structures of the larger social body are inscribed upon the individual body, in the form of the *habitus*, I would emphasize the ways in which individual agents deconstruct, transform, and reconstruct their own *habitus*, removing themselves from the dominant social order and reincorporating themselves into an alternative communal body. Finally, in contrast to Bourdieu's fundamentally economic model, I would argue that human beings are not always or solely governed by the pursuits of self-interest or acquisition of capital. Rather, they are also capable of pursuing various kinds of other-interest by seeking alternative forms of community, quite apart from a hierarchical and asymmetrical socio-economic structure.

However, perhaps the most important aspect of Bourdieu's work

for the study of religion lies in his view of the political role of the scholar. Throughout his work, Bourdieu has insisted that the academic field is every bit as much an interested, a competitive, and political field as any other. Academics have their own forms of capital, both symbolic and material, for which they struggle, and they too struggle to maintain their own position in a volatile hierarchy. "The theories, methods and concepts that appear as simple contributions to the progress of science are *also* always 'political' maneuvers that attempt to establish, restore, reinforce, protect or reverse a determined structure of symbolic domination" (Bourdieu 1971: 121; cf. Bourdieu 1988). Particularly in his later work, moreover, Bourdieu has also emphasized the political role of the sociologist as a critical analyst of culture. By unmasking the subtle forms of misrecognition and symbolic violence that comprise most of human society, the sociologist is exercising a fundamentally political power. As Swartz states: "There is a political dimension to Bourdieu's conception of what sociology should do in the modern world ... . Acts of research ... are acts of struggle, conquest and victory over taken for granted assumptions about social life: scientific research is a struggle against all forms of symbolic domination" (Swartz 1997: 261). Yet, at the same time, the sociologists themselves are by no mean exempt from these political effects. On the contrary, like any other social agent, sociologists are implicitly tied to wide range of political structures and processes, which must also be acknowledged and brought to light. This is the basic aim of Bourdieu's reflexive sociology, a sociology that would reflect critically upon the social status and political position of the scholar him- or herself (Bourdieu 1989, 1988). Or, in other words, "socioanalysis simultaneously requires reflexivity, that is a systematic and rigorous self-critical practice" (Swartz 1997: 11).

Historians of religions would do well to adopt a similar kind of politically-engaged and reflexively self-critical stance. With Bourdieu, I would argue that scholars of religions cannot help but be interested agents with all sorts of political social, economic, and symbolic commitments. And I would argue that we must be as open, honest, and up-front about our political commitments as possible, always subjecting them to scrutiny, critique, and the possibility of change. As Bruce Lincoln observes, "[i]f myths tell stories about the long ago and far away for purposes of the place and moment in which these stories are told, the same may be observed regarding other forms of narrative, scholarship included ... . Scholars are no different from other human

beings. They exist within a time, a place and a social institution ... . Such processes can never be perfectly neutral ... and disinterested" (Lincoln 1991: xvi-xvii; cf. Urban 2000). Moreover, I would also agree with Bourdieu that one of the most important political effects of a critical study of religions would lie in the analysis and unmasking of the asymmetries, hierarchies, and oppressive power relations that are often entangled with religious ideals. For, as Bourdieu repeatedly reminds us, the most "disinterested" and "otherworldly" of ideals are often inextricably entwined with the most this-worldly of interests.

However, in contrast to Bourdieu, I would argue that we need to look closely at the more positive role of religious practices, both in the critique of conventional social structures and in the imagining of alternative forms of human relations. The Bāul songs offer powerful criticisms of the hypocrisy that governs mainstream religious institutions, pointing out the ways in which sacred authority is used to marginalize various social or economic groups. The Bāuls are quite aware of the ruthless law of the marketplace that governs both social interaction and religious authority. Hence, I would suggest that Bourdieu's rather top-heavy model needs to be complemented by one like de Certeau's, which allows more room for the subversive tactics by which ordinary consumers manipulate, by-pass, or deform the strategies of those in power (see Urban 2001).

Finally, the Bāuls also suggest ways to use the discourse of both religion and the marketplace in new, often subversive and liberating ways, as a means to transform conventional social relations and to imagine a new kind of community. It is true that we need to avoid romanticizing groups such as the Bāuls as noble champions of some kind of pure, unfettered human spirit. But that does not mean that we cannot still look to them for evidence of a different kind of human interest, an other-interest that transcends the individual desire for personal profit, status, or capital. Although never fully realized in living practice, and although always threatened by the forces of greed, self-interest, and patriarchy, this vision of an alternative, more egalitarian, or at least less oppressive kind of community survives throughout these beautiful, at times bitingly ironic religious songs.

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