

English Summaries

<https://doi.org/10.1515/zfr-2019-2007>

Botar fé no axé: Reflections on the Determination of a Spiritual Capital

Hannes Leuschner: Leuphana Universität, Universitätsallee 1, 21335 Lüneburg, Germany,
E-Mail: hannes.leuschner@leuphana.de

Since the beginning of the new millennium an increasing number of approaches have been designed to establish a concept of religious or spiritual capital in the discourse concerning neo-capital theories. This paper provides a brief introduction to the background of these theories in French and US-American traditions. It then discusses various approaches of defining religious and/or spiritual capital in accordance with patterns of common forms of capital analyzed by sociologists – e.g., social or cultural capital. A major problem for the currently existing approaches is that they tend to either render the term too secularly by reducing ‘religious capital’ to the social and cultural capital of religious groups, or treat the term too religiously by referring to a substantialized otherworldly power, which has importance only for the believer. A further problem with many approaches is rooted in a lack of consideration for differences between traditional concepts of religion and the contemporary shift to modern conceptions of spirituality, which tend to broaden the scope of what is perceived as religious. The modern conceptions of spirituality I have in mind can be characterized by less institutionalized forms of worship and laxer belief systems, which are precluded by widespread conventional dogma.

This paper combines the phenomenological sociology of Schutz and Luckmann (2003), which distinguishes between gradations of transcendence, with the taxonomy of the degrees of institutionalization of religions proposed by Daiber and Lukatis (1991). A sketch is provided according to which the terms ‘religious’ and ‘spiritual’ form a continuum, such that what we call a religion is a result of social negotiation of experiences of transcendence. Based on this working concept the paper proposes a differentiated vocabulary to describe resources negotiated by religious groups. It distinguishes between a spiritualizing capital, i.e., the capability and willingness to believe in something, and a spiritual capital, which concerns what a believer happened or decided to believe. A further distinction is also drawn between an esoteric religious capital, negotiated within a religious group with widely shared beliefs, and an exoteric religious capital, which can be negotiated beyond the limits of such a group.

The vocabulary presented in this paper was developed in Leuschner (2016a) while attempting to describe contemporary religious negotiations of the northeastern Brazilian Candomblé, a religious tradition that emerged in the course of the transatlantic slave trade and still presents one of the main religious options in the Brazilian religious field. Comparable to the Cuban Santería or the Haitian Voudou, the central element of Candomblé is the worship of African gods and other non-human or ancestral entities who take possession of psychics.

In the second part of the paper, the proposed concepts of the various types of capital are tested against (and further explained by) the results of recent field research in the religious field of Candomblé in the Bahian town of Santo Amaro da Purificação. A common saying in this area is: “Você tem de botar sua fé no axé” – you have to put your faith in the *axé*. *Axé* is the Yoruba-based term for a primordial spiritual energy that forms the crux of Candomblé belief system. The saying implies (and thereby accurately describes a reality of religious pluralism typical of Brazil) that one could decide to put one’s faith somewhere else as well, e.g. in the common Catholic belief or in the still fast-growing field of various new Evangelical Churches. The result is that the people’s faith appears to be some kind of good, which they can invest in different religious offers.

Finally, by relying on on-location discourses with Candomblé followers, the paper describes an assumed decline of the ‘real’ spiritual power of Candomblé in terms of an inflation of religious and spiritual capital, and a widely bemoaned monetization of formerly more solidarily conducted religious services and duties.

The Quran and the Arabic Script: The Oral Prophet and His Scribal Umma

Lirim Selmani: TU Dortmund, Lehnertweg 10–12, 44225 Dortmund, Germany, E-Mail: lirim.selmani@tu-dortmund.de

The evolution of the sacralization of the Arabic script is connected to the textual history of the Quran. The writing and textualization of the Quran transforms the Arabic oral culture into a scribal culture. The codification of the original oral Quran goes hand in hand with the sacralization of the Arabic script. The Quran is originally a *virtual Holy Scripture*, and after its textualization became a *written Holy Scripture* like the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Arabic script gains the status of a sacred symbolic system at the very moment of putting the Quran into writing, which many Muslims regard as an inverbation of the transcendent word of God. The Quran differs from the OT and the NT – according to its self-conception – in using the Arabic medium. It emphasizes several times that it

is an “Arabic Quran”. Its Arabicity, its Arabic linguistic form, merges with the content of the revelation to form a symbiotic unit. Multiple times, the Quran metalinguistically insists on its Arabic medium. It has been “sent down” in ‘*arabi*-mode, which is a specific classical Arabic and mantic variety that has become a vehicle for supernatural messages.

This Arabic sacral speech had the function to draw the attention of the listeners to the Quran’s supernatural origin. Later this very variety and the Arabic script as a visualization of Arabic has been preserved and mystified by Arab grammarians who turned Arabic into a *lingua universalis*. An Arabic Quran can then only materialize through the Arabic script. The writing down of the Quran is accompanied by a change from ritual to textual coherence. With the codification of the now no longer virtual, but material written script, the Quran’s corpus is closed, but opened for post-prophetic interpretative cultures. This step is executed by means of the Arabic script, which was substantially modified by early Islamic grammarians. The birth of the textual Quran marks the birth of the Arabic script, which soon commences its triumphant march.

With the written Quran, which Muslims call *muṣḥaf*, there is not only a codification, but also – perhaps much more importantly – the establishment of Islam as a scriptural religion that advances its propositionalization and institutionalization. With the written Quran, Islam joins the Jewish-Christian tradition: Muslims now also possess a “Scripture”; like Jews and Christians, they now belong to the monotheistic ‘scripture owners’, i.e. “People of the Book” (*ahl al-kitāb*), as the Quran describes them. Codification means freezing, the “door is closed”, the revelatory text is finished, nothing can be added to it, nothing can be removed from it. This freezing is transferred to the Arabic script, which – as a graphic medium of the word of God – cannot be altered. The content of the Revelation is sacred, and so is its medium. Therefore Muslims regard both the content of the Quran and the form, the language and script of the Quran as coming from God. The sacralization of the Arabic script (and the Arabic language) has consequences that reach into the present: diglossia in the Arabic World. The classical Arabic language and script counteract the development of the Arabic dialects, which many Arabic people regard as inferior.