THEME SECTION

Divine kinship and politics

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From the mouth of God
Divine kinship and popular democratic politics

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Abstract: This article proposes "divine kinship" as an analytical tool with which to explore the relation between the divine, "the people", and their political leaders and advance an ethnographically led comparative anthropology of democracy. More specifically, using the political ethnographies of five localities—North India, Venezuela, Montenegro, Russia, and Nepal—we discuss *lived* understandings of popular sovereignty, electoral representation, and political hope. We argue that charismatic kinship is crucial to understanding the processes by which political leaders and elected representatives become the embodiment of "the people", and highlight the processes through which "ordinary people" are transformed into "extraordinary people" with royal/divine/democratic qualities.

Keywords: charisma, divine kinship, political hope, vernacularization of democracy

Hocart (1970) and Frazer ([1890] 1993) used the universal motif of divine kingship to compare emerging forms of political authority across the globe. This theme section proposes *divine kinship* (without the middle "g") as a comparative analytical tool with which to explore popular democratic politics cross-culturally. Broadly, we use the term "divine kinship" to refer to the mapping of relations between human and divine beings (kin, ancestors, heroes, gods). By focusing comparatively on these ideas and practices as they occur in diverse social settings around the globe, including the Euro-American West, we aim to pave the way for a distinctively anthropological method for the study of democratic popular politics, which deploys cross-cultural comparison to identify new questions regarding the nature of the relations between kinship, religion, and mass politics.

A comparative ethnography of "divine kinship" within and across different democratic settings can productively unlock the relations between the divine, the people, and their elected representatives, thereby producing new insights relevant not just to the discipline of anthropology, but also to political theory and religious studies more generally. Our starting point involves returning to "divine kingship" and classical understandings of political/religious authority in order to pick up a number of threads abandoned by more recent work on the anthropology of democracy and the state. We also draw on emergent work linking kinship, religion, and genealogies (Cannell 2011; Sahlins

2011a, 2011b; Viveiros de Castro 2009) and on the "moral economy" (Narotzky and Smith 2006; Hann and Hart 2011).

Over a decade ago, Spencer (2003: 468) remarked that anthropologists had retained a "lingering attachment to a curiously acultural, or anti-cultural, vision of political anthropology." Meanwhile, kingship was treated more as a problem of ritual and symbol than as an issue for political anthropology. In a similar vein, Hansen and Stepputat (2006: 300) observed that a persistent conceptual gulf between the modern and the traditional has proved difficult to overcome, and even recent work on kingship says little about how royal sovereignty and ritual actually connect and combine with modern forms of governance (for an exception, see Balzani 2003). They suggest three reasons for the poor articulation of classical anthropological work on premodern kingship in the subsequent anthropology of the state and democracy. First, in the classical literature, primitive societies were not viewed as historical formations; second, the tendency is to focus on symbolic forms and social cohesion at the expense of power; and finally, the specificity of modern forms of power remains poorly understood and reflected upon.

We argue that the persistence of these analytical discontinuities results partly from a reluctance to engage with different cultural understandings of power and their implications, particularly when these blur the political/kinship/religious distinction in the realm of political modernity. Secularism postulates a clear break between religion and "the political", but in most democratic settings this break is little more than a political aspiration (Asad 2003). Nevertheless, as Cannell (2010: 85) observes, "the implicit claims for a hierarchical ordering of reality in modernity, in which the political is seen as more real than the religious, continue to create disjunctures in the range of debate." She points to a deeper ambivalence within anthropology toward religion itself, whereby religious phenomena are often explained "on the basis that they have no foundation in reality, but are epiphenomena of other 'real' underlying socio-logical, political, economic causes" (Cannell 2006: 3), and links this to the modernist ideas of the discipline's founders and the suggestion, running through their work, of "being just after religion." An ethnographic approach, she argues, is particularly well placed to address this problem.

There is a well-developed anthropological literature that looks at the intersections of moral and kinship frameworks with economic life. The twentieth century, Hann and Hart (2011: 168) argue, can be seen as a universal social experiment to reimagine society as the product of impersonal institutions and mechanisms; yet, despite "a huge cultural effort" to separate the personal from the impersonal, we continue to "experience society as both personal and impersonal at once." An examination of business practices in Catalonia leads Narotzky and Smith (2006) to discuss how "logics" or "spheres of value" framed as separate and distinct by analytical convention are, in reality, fundamentally blended, diffuse, ambiguous. For instance, religion, kinship, and labor are interwoven and inflect the workings of the local Catalan economy in crucial ways. Such amalgamation, they argue, should be seen as the rule rather than the exception. Although this work focuses on economic life, and Cannell (2011) concentrates her comments on religion and kinship, we argue that political life would benefit from a similar exploration of the implications of complex hybrid value constructs. The construct of divine kinship offers an ideal comparative tool around which such a project can be built because it brings together the key themes of kinship, politics, and religion and allows a cross-pollination of debates that so far remain largely separate.

Over the last decade, as anthropologists began exploring democracy, formal political institutions, and macropolitical areas of inquiry, debates have shifted from traditional themes of clan, caste, tribe, kinship, and kingship to political phenomena such as communal and religious violence (Kapferer [1988] 1998), integralism in the European Union (Holmes 2000), elections in Bosnia (Coles 2007), in India (Banerjee 2007), and across regions (Pels 2007), and democratic

practices in the United States (Holland et al. 2007), Poland (Kalb 2009), Venezuela (Coronil 1997), India (Hansen, 1999, 2001; Michelutti 2008), Chile (Paley 2002), and Mozambique (West 2005). We aim to contribute to this literature by documenting how *nonpublic* domains of social life shape political life—rather than on focusing on the working of democratic local institutions, elections, political rituals, and democratic procedures. The guiding idea of this thematic special issue is that a comparative ethnography of divine kinship can provide a fresh and original approach to studying democracy from an anthropological perspective.

Popular sovereignty is the centerpiece of democratic ideologies and practices, but how is it actualized using locally available idioms? Here, we do not focus on democratic rituals, but rather on how democratic ideas travel to specific localities and how they surface in nonpolitical contexts. We ask how they change domains of life that are not specifically connected to politics—and how, in turn, changes in these domains affect politics. The novelty of our approach lies in highlighting and focusing on this circularity: how political and sociocultural and religious forms affect each other, how politics changes culture, not just how culture changes politics. A focus on everyday conceptions and practices of "divine kinship" thus offers a useful entry point for understanding the relationships between formal/institutional and informal political spheres, whose everyday dimension is often left out not only by the "top-down" institutional analyses of political scientists and economists (Evans et al. 1985) but also by anthropological analyses of "democracy". We thus envision an anthropology of democracy grounded in earlier holistic canons of ethnographic method and simultaneously capable of charting the dynamics of "the political" in different culturally and historically situated contexts.

In her book *The Vernacularisation of Democracy,* Michelutti (2008) argues that the main premise for anthropologists studying modern politics is that "democracy" should be regarded as one of many traditional ethnographic topics

(kinship, religion, kingship) that ethnographers study to unpack the sociocultural institutions and practices of the societies under investigation. The hypothesis behind this approach is that the moment democracy enters a particular historical and sociocultural setting it becomes vernacularized, and through vernacularization it produces new social relations and values that in turn shape "the political". Hence, "democracy" should be studied both as the product and the producer of innovative sociopolitical relations. The general idea to retain from this approach is that the popularity of democracy across the world is because it has been appropriated by sociocultural groups and adapted to their needs. At the same time, this influences other aspects of society—particularly processes of identity formation, kinship, popular religion, religious texts, and epic narratives. The object of an anthropology of democracy conceived thus would be "processes of vernacularization of democracy" rather than the technologies of democracy (see, e.g., Pels 2007), or the gap between the promises and the on-the-ground achievements of democracy (cf. Paley 2002).

The term "vernacularization" is not new. Among others (Hansen 1996; Merry 2006; Pollock 2006), it was used by Ginzburg ([1976] 1992) to argue that medieval persecutions were successful owing to resonance from below—the result of a complex mix of ideology, ethnic associations, affect, and historical accident that enabled top-down, elite-led initiatives to have such widespread, devastating effect. However, Michelutti's usage in the field of democratic cultures adds a new emphasis by stressing the twin circular processes at the heart of vernacularization, whereby "the people" routinely transform and adapt democracy to their needs. This "feedback loop", which produces transformation that cannot be controlled or directed from above, is fundamental to theorizing the relation between kinship, religion, and democratic politics cross-culturally. Michelutti exemplifies her argument by showing how, among the Yadav caste of North India, vernacular idioms have significantly contributed to the internalization of democracy in this community's consciousness and, in turn,

the internalization of democracy has informed changes in the morphology of their caste/community, affecting whom they worship, whom they marry, whom they vote for, and how they perceive politics and political leaders.

The most obvious weakness of an ethnographic approach to the study of processes of vernacularization of democracy is one of scale and comparability. Democracies are huge empirical objects, and attempts to generalize from localized ethnographic settings can seem simplistic. Democracy is, on one level, an abstraction, but there is a need to move beyond making this obvious point. At the same time, it is an institutional apparatus—but the ethnographic approach, while good at understanding the cultural implications of democracy, is weak at assembling vernacular understandings together into some greater whole, and in providing comparable analytical tools. Nevertheless, as Adam Kuper (2002: 162) observed, "whatever its difficulties, cross-cultural comparison remains a necessity" because it is a key basis of anthropology's theoretical program. Our aim here is hence to focus on the development of an analytical toolbox with which to explore processes of vernacularization of democracy comparatively.

In this respect, "divine kinship" is useful because it highlights how people create linkages between the transcendent and immanent, past and present, myth and history, kin and strangers, leaders and followers. Divine kinship establishes and encompasses all these linkages that, crucially, are also central to the concept of popular sovereignty at the core of the democratic idea. Hence, understanding how divine kinship can be read as a sign of the political can unlock a number of problems in the anthropology of democracy and the state and their relations with "nonpublic domains"—religion, kinship, and ideas and practices of personhood, hope, and its temporalities as well as more charismatic types of leaderships.

In developing our comparative project focused on processes of vernacularization, we start from the assumption that local understandings of "divine kinship" are always the re-

sult of complex locally and historically situated interactions. However, we do not postulate a separation, within the world religions we discuss, between "remote theological wellsprings" and popular forms of religiosity. We retain in focus both the more universal theological and liturgical themes and their local applications (or lack thereof), asking how theological principles inform folk, as well as more cosmopolitan, versions of a faith, which often coexist and intersect within the same spaces. A further point of comparison between world religious traditions concerns the institutional structures and the dynamics through which these, together with theological principles and semiotic ideologies, shape economies of knowledge, expertise, and charisma, indirectly or directly informing political and economic action. Pollock (2006) is particularly interesting in this respect. He explores the rise and fall of Sanskrit, charting what people have done with texts in terms of "cosmopolitan" and "vernacular" eras, attempting to understand the language of the gods in the world of men and the vernacularization of political culture across South Asia and Europe.

Before proceeding, a quick clarification of our usage of the term "democracy" is in order. The ethnographies included in this theme section explore local folk (vernacular) understandings and practices of democracy collected in settings with democratic regimes, but we are not interested in assessing the "quality" of democracy in these contexts. Plenty of literature in comparative politics and anthropology takes this evaluative approach—the concept of "divine kinship" should not be understood as an extra tool with which to evaluate processes of democratization or a lack thereof. Our interest is in developing an ethnography-led approach that seeks to understand vernacular democracies on their own terms and to develop analytical tools that enable us to effectively compare them anthropologically. This includes taking seriously the claims actors make about themselves and their folk understandings of the political—rather than dismissing them as reactionary or "untrue"—and tracing the consequences of these claims in terms of the actual

workings of vernacular democracies as they are, not as they ought to be. There is no shortage of research on the political instrumentalization of religion, on religious extremist and fundamentalist incursions into the political sphere—but this literature regards such religious activity as a *political* phenomenon. Our approach highlights instead how a more diffuse everyday religiosity, which is blended with kinship and politics, informs the lives of ordinary people and of the political leaders (the representatives) they elect.

Divine kinship and the rule of "ordinary people"

One of the crucial aspirations of democracy is "to make the bodies of all men and women the subjects, rather than the object of power" (Spencer 2007: 137). This proposition is accompanied by a related tantalizing and improbable promise: "that rule ought to be by ordinary rather than extraordinary people" (Dunn 1992: v, quoted in Spencer 2007). Contemporary political power and legitimacy derive largely from the ability to act in the name of the people (Laclau 2005), but constructions of this key element of the political imagination, and of the ties that bind people and government, vary widely across the world. Jonathan Spencer writes:

We all know there is a link between representative and represented, but we cannot specify what form that link may take. It may be a link of common substance: fathers and kings may like to think of themselves as embodying those they are said to represent. Or it may be a contractual link, in which the representative is only temporarily mandated to put forward the views of those she represents, while those represented retain the right of recall at the first sign of their views being misrepresented. (1997: 12)

Additionally, "there is a huge scope for different ways in which to construe the idea of the 'people' as well as the idea of 'representation' which supposedly binds them to the government" (1997: 12).

Popular sovereignty is based on a series of linkages encompassed by the idea of divine kinship, making it worthwhile investigating how its varied cultural configurations inform the ways in which people build ties between the past, present, and future, the transcendent and the here and now, kin and supernatural beings, identity and alterity. The comparative ethnographies presented in this theme section show how divine kinship comprises genealogies of kings, queens, and revolutionary figures, communities' gods, or the sacralized bodies of saints. These are particularly interesting to us because their theories and practices suggest a wider range of possible relations between people, gods, and "the political" than are revealed by more conventional analyses of rites, temple worship, "traditional" forms of divine kingship, or ethnographies of democratic procedures or democratic rituals such as elections.

The institution of democracy may put an end to traditional kingship, but the divine kinship connections and leadership styles underpinning the institution persist as enchanted imaginative tropes that are part of a vibrant mundane reality. The ethnographies included here reflect on localities where divine kinship is performed and experienced in varied, often contrasting ways: a socialist democratic Krishna in India, the world's largest democracy; spirit mediums and incarnated Bolivars in Venezuela's socialist revolution; Orthodox monks rallying under the banner of heroic ancestor saints in pitched political-religious battles within newly sovereign Montenegro; Orthodox divine genealogies inflecting locality and nation building in the postsocialist "third way" Russian democracy; and human rights challenges to the institution of the living "state goddess" in the Nepalese republic. Importantly, they show how the elected democratic leaders must be simultaneously "ordinary and special", and part of this specialness must be shared with those they represent (common folk, voters, supporters, kin). How, then, does one become the "embodiment of the people" in each context, and how are ordinary people transformed into extraordinary people? How is charisma attributed and distrib-

uted and "potentially embedded in people, things and situations" (Hansen and Verkaaik 2009: 54)?

To answer these questions we revisit a recurrent argument of classical kingship studies—that the fundamental idea underlying this institution is the separation of one human being from others. Being set apart is the very crux of kingship, a leitmotif marked by the recurrence of a set of rituals that allow an individual to be extracted from the kinds of economic, political, and kinship relations that bind "ordinary" people, and made into a person (or nonperson) who is literally extraordinary—outside conventional society—through the cultural device of an installation ritual (Quigley 2005: 4). Kingship and kinship are in this sense fundamentally opposed (de Heusch 1997).

In democratic contexts, links of kinship are not severed by rituals, but links of common substance are replaced by contractual links that are then vernacularized into local sociocultural and religious structures and produce powerful theories of popular sovereignty, ideologies of kinship, affect and intimacy, charisma and leadership. Understanding the dynamics behind this process is crucial for any ethnographic study of democracy.

Our approach builds on recent studies of popular/divine genealogies, kinship, and religion (Cannell 2011; Sahlins 2011a, 2011b; Viveiros de Castro 2009). Cannell (2011) argues that recent studies of "Western kinship" have reflected an unintended secularist bias, partly owing to the influence of Schneider (1968), who dismissed religion (as well as the dead) as fundamentally irrelevant to the understanding of American kinship. She outlines a set of assumptions in the anthropology of Christianity that made anthropologists see genealogy as "not religion," "not about ancestors" but about (attenuated) kinship and "self," and therefore as essentially secular. Her analysis of popular genealogies and religiosity in contemporary Britain suggests that

[it] may therefore be time to attend to the unexpected and serious aspects of hobbyist genealogy as one moral terrain for the mutual construction of social life by the living English and their ordinary ancestors, and to put aside the myth that the modern "self" floats free of obligations to others, or indeed, of the past. (Cannell 2011: 467)

In a similar vein, Sahlins (2011a, 2011b) recently proposed the idea of kinship as "mutuality of being," intended to counteract an excessive biological focus in kinship studies and explore the practices and ontologies through which others—ancestors, gods, spirits, kin—become part and parcel of a person's makeup. We are not just isolated biological beings, but also composites of kinship. Sahlins points out that "the capacities of partibility and hierarchy (or the encompassment of others) are general conditions of humans in language" (2011a: 13)—though not necessarily enacted in practice. His observations suggest a hypothesis worthy of further exploration: that the *conjunction* of divine and human kinship may be a particularly effective way of producing accretions of charisma. As he puts it, "because of his privileged connection to ancestral being, the Maori chief has more fellowship, more *mana*, and more occasions for the 'kinship I' than others. Power is, in this regard, a certain unbalance of mutual being, which is also to say, of genealogical priority" (Sahlins 2011b: 229).

In a recent essay, Viveiros de Castro (2009: 237) observes that in a modern Euro-American understanding, "kinship is the primal arena for the confrontation of biological nature and cultural nurture, animal instincts and human institutions, bodily substances and spiritual relations, real facts and legal fictions." This "dualistic predicament" is often seen as definitive of the human condition, yet in Amazonian kinship there is no biological theory of relationality—and no resulting predicament. To overcome the nature/culture dualism at the heart of these debates, Viveiros de Castro proposes a return to three founding problematics of classic anthropology, kinship, gift, and magic, in order to "put back together what has been pulled apart early in the history of anthropology and rarely re-assembled since" (2009: 246). He suggests that

[perhaps] gift exchange, kinship and animism are merely different names for the same personification process—the economic, political and religious forces of a single generalised symbolic economy—just as the commodity production, the state and the scientific revolution form the pillars of our own modernist symbolic economy. (2009: 246)

Our analytical tool of divine kinship similarly stresses the unity of physical and metaphysical kinship and highlights the resulting possibilities in terms of leadership and mobilization. Viveiros de Castro (2009) argues that in premodern societies things and people assume the social forms of persons, whereas in modern ones they assume the forms of commodities; but as Hann and Hart (2011) point out, in modern societies the impulse toward commodification is not necessarily as successful as has been assumed. Depersonalization and repersonalization, we would suggest, are two constantly present avenues of action in all social settings, and divine kinship offers a framework within which they can be viewed as twin and fundamentally related processes. The following section explores what the ethnographic case studies reveal regarding the relationship between religion, kinship, and mass politics.

Divine genealogies and politics in action: A comparative perspective

A man is trying to persuade Krishna to contest the elections by telling him that he is the best person to do so: "After all, you are a Yadav." Krishna answered: "I am a god and do not belong to any particular *jati*." The man replied: "Sir, even god would not be able to succeed in the present political arena. At least try to hold on to your caste!" (Joke circulating during the 1999 parliamentary elections in Mathura, North India)

The joke above illustrates how ingrained the relation is between caste and voting in contemporary India and how ideas of representation have

been translated into vernacular idioms. The Yadavs, traditionally a low- to middle-ranking cluster of pastoral-peasant castes, have become one of the most assertive and politically powerful caste formations in contemporary India. Michelutti (2008) shows how at the core of this community lies a specific folk theory of divine kinship according to which all Indian pastoral castes trace their descent to the Yadu dynasty to which the god Krishna (a cow herder, prince, and warrior) belonged. The unifying myth of Krishna not only relates the origins of the entire Yadav community, but also nullifies hierarchy and cultural differences within the community, legitimating the equality of all members, expressed through the language of divine kinship.

Yadav political rhetoric depicts Krishna as a democratic-socialist politician and as "the first" fighter for social justice, and his divine genealogy legitimates the "political qualities" and success of Yadav politicians and their supporters. Ordinary Yadavs are said to inherit "political knowledge" and be "natural politicians". Folk theories of knowledge linked to indigenous conceptions of the relations between human beings (ancestors) and gods thus facilitate the process of legitimation of democracy and of political leaders, helping Yadavs construct their own unique folk understanding of democracy.

The relationship between men and gods is a recurrent theme in the anthropological analysis of India (Babb 1975; Dumont [1966] 1980; Fuller 1979, 1988; Bouglé 1992; Gellner 1992). In South Asian societies more generally, relations between gods and goddesses shape ideas and practices of kingship and authority (Dumont [1966] 1980; Dirks 1987; Price 1989). Popular Hinduism makes no absolute distinction between divine and human beings (Fuller 2004: 3): in this world, gods are ancestors and ancestors can become gods (Michelutti 2008; see also Michelutti and Simpson 2009). The divinization of men relies on a rich repertoire of stories linking deified heroes to the lineages of local or regional leaders, princes, or kings, who play a significant role in the caste system (Raheja 1988; Quigley 1993), and thus inflects the composition and political imagination of In-

dian society. In recent times, popular Hinduism has become even more closely intertwined with politics. In the 1990s, with the rise of Hindu nationalism, there occurred a mass politicization of popular religion and nationalization of substantialized deities (and "ideal" kings), particularly the figures of Ram and Krishna, further entwining the worlds of these gods with those of relational or village deities, who symbolize the hierarchical relations within the caste system (Fuller 1988: 19). Michelutti shows that in order to understand the making of the "new" *homo mythologicus* (who replaces *homo hierarchicus*), attention must be paid to religious descent and kinship and the ways in which the traditional religious ideology of hierarchy (Dumont [1966] 1980) has been usurped by an "egalitarian" *religious* ideology of descent. Hence, if on the one hand ritual hierarchy has been undermined as a principle of social stratification (replaced with substantialized, quasiethnic castes), on the other, "ritual descent" has dynamically facilitated adaptation to the modern political world.

Letizia (this issue) discusses another form of divine genealogy and "living god" belonging to Newar Hindu-Buddhist culture, and still operating in the contemporary Nepalese secular state. The Kathmandu Kumari goddess, a child sequestered into a ritual life until puberty, traditionally blessed the king, legitimating his rule. Although Nepal became secular in 2007 after the king's overthrow, the goddess still sits on her throne and now blesses the president instead. Hindu festivals still permeate the calendar of the state and the new president of the republic has in many instances replaced the former Hindu king in officiating at public religious functions. The Kumari and the head of the state, whoever that may be, are intimately connected. At first glance the Kumari's role appears to have remained largely unquestioned, but the human rights challenge at the center of the article discloses the workings of vernacularization. Analyzing a court case that argues that the institution of the national goddess should be seen as a form of child labor, Letizia charts the encounter and clash of universalizing, equalizing

human rights discourses with the local order of recently beheaded kingship, in the context of wider debates on the meaning of secularism and religious freedom.

So far we have explored a continuum between gods and human beings in Hindu and Buddhist traditions, but how is divine kinship conceptualized in Venezuelan Catholicism and Russian and Serbian/Montenegrin Orthodox Christianity, and how does it inflect vernacular democracy?

Joel Robbins argued that Christianity is set apart from all other religions by a tendency to bring about "personal and collective projects of discontinuity" (Robbins 2003: 230) and because it keeps the discontinuity that marked its birth always in the foreground (2007: 11). Christianity also tends to be seen as a religion of transcendence, where

disdain for the flesh and for the material world fosters in various ways a dualistic vision in which the material … is radically opposed to the spiritual and to a heaven in which physical pains and pleasures will cease to matter and another order of experience altogether will replace the present one. (Cannell 2005: 338)

However, as Cannell points out, different Christianities frame breaks and continuities differently. Not all Christians experience "problems of presence" (Engelke 2006) to the same extent, and the line between the transcendent and the here and now can become remarkably blurred.

Michelutti shows how popular Christianity and Afro-Indio cults infuse the everyday sociality of rural Venezuelans. The sacred histories of Chuao's people are linked to heroes like the liberator Simon Bolivar and revolutionary slaves through spirit possession cults, ghosts, and spirits. The spiritual genealogies of the people of Chuao and their "Christianity" offer one ethnographic example that moves beyond the body/spirit dualism. In short, in Chuao there are no "problems of presence" (Engelke 2006). Chávez's revolutionary history is hence lived and practiced in a world where present and past are continuously collapsed into one another by divine

kinship. Past forms of subjugation, slavery, and the kingship idioms of colonial Venezuela and others are still *lived* realities in the village. The forest and the *hacienda* are the places where Chuao's sacred history is re-enacted every day.

A belief in divine immanence is also central to the lives of Orthodox monastics, who are linked into pan-Orthodox structures of divine kinship by the cult of saints and a form of charismatic authority embodied in the figure of the *duhovnik* (spiritual father/confessor), a potential future saint (see Forbess 2005, 2010). The most famous *duhovnici* tend to be senior monastics whose popular legitimacy often leads to political embroilments. These forays into politics are underpinned by the Orthodox dogma of symphony, according to which the church, conceived as a national community of faith, is more fundamentally responsible for the spirit of a nation than the state, and should try to encompass the latter. In both Serbian/Montenegrin and Russian Orthodoxy, sanctifications of autochthonous figures are a key arena of political/religious intervention, ideal for forging divine kinship ties between the church, community, political party, nation, and state. Long series of canonizations stretching back to the Middle Ages have given these nations' heroes a synchronous heavenly existence (saints are seen as alive and active in the historical present). Heroic ancestor-saints are thus captured by the church but, crucially, they also capture the church in return.

Forbess (this issue) describes vicious battles over divine kinship and the control of the relics, tombs, and monastic foundations of Montenegro's saintly heroic ancestors. Almost evenly matched pro-Serbian and pro-Montenegrin segments of the population rally around rival churches (and political parties) in a contestation that is as much about access to charisma embodied in "the relics of history" (Feely Harnik 1978: 414) as about politics and economics. Both sides think these are and should be linked. Each side also claims to be championing democratic rights and freedoms; each has a case, and each uses divine kinship to drive home its point.

Köllner (this issue) also shows how divine genealogies have the capacity to fuse or rupture communities. In Russia, a spate of nation building following Ukraine's Orange Revolution included high-profile sanctifications that restated the connections between the national soul, the Orthodox Church, Putin's government, and the birth localities of the new saints (and historical heroes). To dismiss such "Orthodoxification" of public ceremonies as a politically directed top-down instrumentalization of religion would ignore the diverse forces and actors at work, the tentative and contested character of their divine kinship claims, and the genuine affective investment of the actors, both elite and ordinary people, in the vernacular political-religious idioms their projects help create.

Both Köllner and Forbess highlight the prominence of institutional factors in Orthodox affairs, illustrating how the peculiar intermingling of charismatic and bureaucratic forms of authority within church institutions shape interactions with political elites. Indeed, the two cases share a common ground. It is valid to speak of "Orthodoxy" (singular) in an institutional and theological sense, because these national churches form a federation ruled by a common council (synod) that safeguards a common doctrinal ground. "Sister" churches are in communion with one another and have symmetrical institutions. There is significant theological and structural consistency across national churches, underpinned by vibrant pan-Orthodox cosmopolitanism among both monastic elites and ordinary laypeople. Unlike the more pluralistic Catholic Church (see, e.g., Bax 1995), each Orthodox church has a single monastic order that is integrated with the territorial branch, and from whose ranks all higher clergy are drawn. Priests are married and confined to a lower hierarchy. Popular religiosity tends to be less influential in driving religious innovation than in Catholic contexts: for instance, candidates to sainthood tend to be selected and contested by elite factions within the church, and grassroots cults drive only a small minority of sanctifications. When states break apart, national Orthodox churches tend to fol-

low suit. As Forbess's article illustrates, such fractures can stimulate innovation by drawing attention to alternative spiritual/political ancestors and the divine genealogies of rival church/state projects. Institutional factors and theological tradition mean that close political-religious linkages are viewed by these churches and their faithful (many of them part of the political elites) not as an anomaly, but as natural, an established feature of these churches' (and states') divine kinship genealogies.

Charisma, political hope, and the language of gods

As in the myth of Hercules' slaying of the Lernaean Hydra, when democratizing forces cut off the head of kingly hierarchies, several new heads spring up in its place. These are charismatic leaders using heroic or lordly idioms of divine kinship ties to build grassroots constituencies brought together by an eclectic range of enticements and motivations. Kinship and religion are widely available key imaginative tropes for organizing human/divine hierarchies and ideas of legitimacy and leadership, and they tend to take center stage in such mobilizations, fostering a perceived enhanced intimacy between leaders and followers. Hence, charismatic leaders tend to be central figures in divine kinship mobilization scenarios.

In comparative politics, charismatic leaders are often viewed as products of economic and institutional structures, and the more enchanted dimensions of their power are left unexplored. The ethnographies presented in this theme section show, however, how sociocultural repertoires of symbols and rhetorics often challenge the rationality and instrumentality of clientelist networks. Looking at popular sovereignty through the lens of divine kinship helps to understand the symbolic benefits (rather than material benefits) to be gained through patronage and ethnopopulism (Michelutti and Heath 2013). Political competition in patronage democracies often unleashes fears, dreams, and conspiracy theories that become an integral part of electoral bargaining at the state/national level. These are often left unexplored by more instrumentalist analyses of political mobilization and voting behavior. Yet if we look at political leadership through divine kinship and at "kinship as magic" (Viveiros de Castro 2009), divine kinship also becomes a powerful tool for exploring fears, hopes, and aspirations produced by political dreams.

Kinship and religion facilitate daring conversions in terms of scale (Strathern 2004), either expanding the frame of reference from individual to group to nation and beyond to ancestors and gods, or contracting it to render the connection intimate and immediate. Indeed, the scale of the person itself can be amplified to a vast hybrid assemblage of networks and possibilities (Latour 1993; Strathern 1996). At one end of the spectrum, divine kinship can create charismatic bodies; at the other, it creates fearsome powerful entities like "the people".

Weber ([1947] 1964) famously argued that "pure" charisma resists capture or domestication, and Hansen and Verkaaik (2009) also point to its tentative, *emergent* character as a defining characteristic. Seen in relation to divine kinship networks, charisma is always in movement—emerging from sacred sources: gods, rituals, places, and objects (cf. Hansen and Verkaaik 2009)—or (à la Weber) from the forceful personalities of leaders, and being captured (through kinship) by actors who convey it across spaces. Embodied in people or things, charisma circulates along networks of divine kinship from gods and ancestors to democratically appointed leaders and their ordinary followers—and also in reverse, from the people to their elected representatives.

These ethnographies reveal a continuum between divine and human beings, differentiated in terms of concentrations of charisma expressed as luck, fertility, or special and secret knowledge or office. Importantly, each case shows how divine kinship establishes intimacy with power and those who have or channel it (according to Shalins 2011a, 2011b). This makes it a powerful tool for mobilization, its influence rooted in the fact that it dynamically

creates links of substance between the leader and the people. Although the idea of charisma is used in various ways by the different authors, it ubiquitously points to a divine kinship that injects the political with energy, and repersonalizes, revitalizes, and reorients it.

Ritual spaces are central sites for the production and reproduction of charismatic kinship. In the case of Venezuela, popular religious cults and figures who were folklorized by nationalist ideologies (which transformed myths into histories of the nation) are now reinjected with religious energy. Similarly, Köllner (this issue) describes the centrality of performance and rituals that celebrate divine rather than earthly kinship. Political vernacular rituals such as the spectacle of court orders (see Letizia, this issue) are seen as battlegrounds and stages as different actors perform and try to maintain, revive, and capture charisma as it emerges and to shape hopes and aspirations.

Like charisma, hope operates simultaneously on different scales, both temporal and spatial—from the domestic economy to political action, from the local to state to global level, across different forms of civil society, and so on. This makes it a valuable political resource, tapped by ambitious emergent leaders. If divine kinship collapses past and present, hope provides an orientation to the future, or rather to a variety of imagined futures considered desirable by various groups and actors who are trying to act politically within democratic contexts. Hope is central to human life because it helps build a vision of the future and of its relations to the past, and envision the transformative action to actualize it. It thus elicits an investment into a particular vision. Like the Yadav in the joke who advised adherence to caste, those with little access to economic resources invest in and through the networks of kin, religion—and divine kinship.

Tropes such as charisma and hope fulfill similar roles in two bodies of literature that have rarely intersected—the thoroughly enchanted one of religion and the thoroughly disenchanted one of development, democratization, and modern politics. Appadurai argues

that "[democracy] rests on a vision. And all visions require hope," but also observes that

it is not clear whether there is any deep or inherent affinity between the politics of democracy and the politics of hope. This is puzzling since in today's world, the hope of becoming democratic is offered to many societies, even if this requires them to be invaded and remade at high cost to human life. Yet the relationship of hope, as an ethical and political principle, to the primary values of democracy is unclear. (2007: 29)

So, how does thinking through and with "divine kinship" offer a vantage point to explore how processes of vernacularization affect, enhance, or obstruct hopes and aspirations and democratic revolutions across the world? The ethnographies presented in this theme issue show how the idea of democracy is indeed transformative, opening up a field where people can act to change their lives, redefine themselves, and shape their aspirations (economic, religious, ethnic) in their own terms. In her monograph on elections in Bosnia, Coles quotes an informant's observation that "democratisation is a new form of missionary work—elections simply replace the Bible" (2007: 16). But, she asks, what messages are embedded in the sermon? Are elections a form of salvation?

In the twentieth century, the politics of hope is said to be becoming "gradually distinguished from utopian, messianic, and millenarian movements for change (which form the prehistory of hope as a democratic sentiment) on the one hand, and the politics of prudence, pragmatism, and policy on the other" (Appadurai 2007: 31). Instead, mass politics and antipoverty development agendas have connected the language of democracy with the rhetorics of "hope", "aspirations", and "possibilities", framing participation as "the path to capacity rather than the reverse" (Appadurai 2007: 31). As the "politics of hope" attempts to bridge the gap between the poor and the rich, participation, empowerment, and capacity building have become popular catch concepts deployed not only by governments

and international institutions, but also by local charismatic leaders who represent themselves as embodying the will of poor people.

The ethnographies of divine kinship presented here show how "democratic hope" (e.g., Appadurai 2007) is in some contexts distinguished from utopian, messianic, and religious practices, but less so in others (there are, of course, also significant intracultural variations to consider in terms of such distinctions). For example, in North India, Michelutti describes how the concept of "the people" has become narrower and narrower as a result of the parochialization of Indian politics linked to caste-based regional parties, patronage, nepotism, and the criminalization of politics, all of which is also legitimized by "divine genealogies" and folk understandings of democracy linked to caste *dharma*s and their gods (Michelutti and Heath 2013). So, while Yadavs strengthened their positions, weaker and less populous castes are subjected to new forms of caste dominance. Contrastingly, over the past five years in the Venezuelan village of Chuao, Michelutti observed the making of a community that perceives itself as a brotherhood of equals bound by values and mobilized by a shared collective mission of redemption and salvation. Like an illusionist, President Hugo Chávez transformed desperation into hope. Here, the politics of hope is linked to development and utopian and messianic dreams: a very powerful combination. Messianic hope has hence not been substituted by "democratic hope", but the vernacularization of democracy in kinship/religious domains has produced new powerful forms of "democratic millennialism" and charismatic kinship.

What are the meanings of democracy in Montenegro, and how do they inflect propensities to hope and seek betterment by democratic means? The word *teško* is especially apt for summing up a Montenegrin attitude toward the world, often used in this context by and about Montenegrins. It means tough, and denotes an often deliberately obstructive attitude meant to demonstrate one's pride and independence. This hardheadedness is credited, in local

mythology, for the Montenegrins' success in retaining independence against huge odds. Underlying this image presented to the world is an ingrained emphasis on the prestige structures of honor in a highly egalitarian society where highland clans and male brotherhoods were traditionally the main unit of mobilization. A very strong emphasis on historical feats of courage, still celebrated by a living heroic ballad (*gusle*) tradition, underwrites the understanding of sovereignty as independence—and the new nationhood has been seen in this light. Compared with the obsessive preoccupation with *freedom* as *independence,* democracy, seen as a foreign import, has in some ways proven less compelling. Uncomfortably juxtaposed to the ideal of the free self-sufficient warrior is the reality of poverty, violence, and endemic difficulties in mobilizing a collection of *teško* individuals. The politics of hope readily invokes the politics of hopelessness and distrust in the democratic promise.

There exists, however, a long tradition of church mobilization through charismatic *duhovnici,* monastic "big men" with a talent for performing their connectedness to national hero saints and the presence of these ancestors within them. Their economic and political backers and supporters are connected to these genealogies through ties of baptism. Such confessors are brokers of power who can harness considerable economic and political resources, and deliver mobilization. Religious feasts such as the patron saint celebrations of particularly powerful confessors conjure up terrific assemblies of the great and good: political party leaders, military men, media personalities, ambassadors of friendly nations, and financial backers, entrenching networks between them.

Both parochializing and universalizing impulses shape such mobilization. These should be read in context with religiously defined cosmopolitanisms (such as the pan-Orthodox or pan-Catholic) and the ghosts of earlier state projects (cosmopolitan Yugoslavia and communist aspirations to equality and popular justice). The Serbian Orthodox monks start from the idea that religion should shape politics (rather

than the other way around), but their own actions are shaped by the ideas of rights, freedoms, and democratic fairness, in the name of which they challenge the legitimacy of an entrenched governing elite led, since the 1990s, by another charismatic "big man", ex-president Dukanovic.

Building on the insights provided by the case studies in this theme section, we can start to "map the field" and prepare the ground for further cross-cultural ethnographic work on popular politics. While the analyses of economists, political scientists, and international relations scholars have largely treated the state and democratic institutions as distinct from society, ethnographic accounts reveal little organizational boundary (see, e.g., Fuller and Harriss 2001). However, capturing and making sense of this "blurriness" has often proved a difficult task both methodologically and theoretically. It is in this context that we have probed the analytical concept of "divine kinship" as a means of gaining insight into the cultural implications of democracy. This concept leads to questions rather than answers—its usefulness as a tool lies in the fact that it makes it possible to imagine new ways of looking at democracy, kinship, and religion and to formulate a range of fresh questions, to be answered through further ethnographic work. These questions include: How is "the politics of hope" and of aspirations caught in the language of religion by politicians in different sociocultural contexts and transnationally? To what extent do new forms of governance and ongoing transformations of existing institutions privilege particular political theologies and religious rhetorics? How does "divine kinship" collapse past and present (and simultaneous processes of historicization and mythicization)? Importantly, a comparative ethnography of "divine kinship" shows that processes of vernacularization result in transformations that cannot be controlled or directed from above, and potentially can produce the terrain for novel political experimentations and alternative projects. A central question still to be explored is how do different/parallel processes of vernacularization become connected and what kind of mass politics, dreams, and revolutions can they potentially produce or fail to produce?

Acknowledgments

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