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Neopaganism**

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A Mixed Blessing: Market-mediated Religious Authority in Neopaganism

Introduction

One of late modernity's missions has been to question and challenge all forms of institutional control, and especially religion: "The authority of the past, the authority of a clerical elite, the authority of established religious institutions and practices, and even the authority of a transcendent deity all come into question" write Partridge, Woodhead and Kawanami (2002, p. 10). As a consequence, religions increasingly rely on marketing techniques to maintain influence on their congregations and to exert their authority, using branding, segmentation, targeting and positioning, advertising, PR and social media (Einstein 2008; Percy 2000) in order to attract new faithful or simply to retain existing ones. Thus what had previously been "authoritatively imposed, now has to be marketed ... religious institutions become market agencies and the religious traditions become consumer commodities" (Berger, in Percy 2000, p. 105).

Initially recognized as a relevant factor in macromarketing scholarship (Monieson 1981), religion has only recently begun to develop in JMK (Drenten and McManus 2015). Most studies have focused on how religion exerts authority on the market, and they have only devoted limited attention to the fact that the marketplace impacts religion, too (Drenten and McManus 2015; Kale 2004; Mittlestaedt 2002). Perhaps unsurprisingly, some studies observe that the use of marketing techniques that originated in the mundane world of commerce might actually harm religious authority (see, among others, Attaway, Boles, and Singley 1997; Kenneson and Street 1997; McDaniel 1986; McGraw, Schwartz and Tetlock 2012), as it seems to bring the merchants into the temple, so to speak. Others, on the contrary, have noted the interweaving of religion and

commercialism in traditional religions (e.g., Drane 2000; Moore 1995; O’Guinn and Belk 1989). Our study takes as a point of departure the fact that the adoption of commercial promotional techniques in the marketing of religion is theoretically unclear and therefore deserves more inquiry.

In their review, Drenten and McManus (2015) show that the majority of religion-related research in JMK is centered on monotheistic, mainstream religions and call for an increased representation of religious groups in the literature. This article thus extends macromarketing research, as it examines the interplay of market-mediated and religious authority in the little studied context of new religious movements (NRM). Unlike their more established counterparts, these movements find their origin in capitalistic societies, and can rely to a much lower degree on traditional sources of religious authority. Resistance to authority in NRM exists at many levels, not least in terms of terminology. At the emic level, this is hinted at by the often used expression “spiritual but not religious”, which captures the lived experiences of those who reject traditional organized religions as the main means to achieve spiritual growth (see Fuller 2001)¹. In NRM, limited reliance on traditional sources of authority might result in a greater role ascribed to the marketplace success of religious leaders; on the contrary, as in the case of established religions, the use of profane marketing techniques might be seen as a sign of institutionalization, and actively resisted by spiritual consumers.

Our study explores the little understood role played by marketplace dynamics in the establishment of religious authority in the context of one family of NRMs, Neopaganism, and specifically Wicca, one of the most diffused Neopagan traditions. Neopaganism draws on ancient value systems imbued with “the ecstatic and mystery traditions of pre-Christian religions” and that “align religion to nature and the Divine Force” (Guiley 1989, p. 241). Within Wicca, many

initiates or clergy work on a voluntary basis, yet just as many traditional religions have turned to the marketplace and its practices in order to increase their flocks, so too have Wiccan leaders and their practices. We will explore the ambivalent relationship followers of Wicca, and specifically religious leaders within Wicca, have with the marketplace. Our main argument, based on Weber's (1964, 1968) ideal types of authority, is that in this context marketplace success can be a source of religious legitimacy and validation, and is instrumental in building a strong community of followers. At the same time, however, excessive engagement with the market can act as a powerful delegitimizing mechanism, leading religious leaders to continually monitor their practices so that they remain in a safe zone of critique-free market practice. Market success is thus a mixed blessing that can increase religious authority and influence, but is just as likely to decrease authority and credibility. Taking this as a point of departure, we situate the phenomenologically perceived tensions between commerce and religion experienced by our informants within the broader context of macro-level trends affecting religion and consumption in contemporary Western societies. We focus on the boundary work carried out by religious leaders in order to avoid culturally constituted delegitimizing critiques, and to represent themselves as being situated on the safe side of engagement with the marketplace. Our study thus contributes to the limited macromarketing research that analyzes the complex interdependencies and interactions between markets, marketing, and religion, and responds to the recent call for more macromarketing research on “how marketing erodes, advances, or sustains religious structures and consumers’ religious practices” (Drenten and McManus 2015: p. 8).

The paper is structured as follows. First, we introduce the main concept of this paper – religious authority – and we examine how modernity has eroded it, leaving room for the emergence of marketplace success as a source of legitimacy. We also highlight the limited work

in macromarketing that has examined religious authority or other topics germane to our discussion. Next, we give an overview of the emergence of Neopagan religions which, thanks to their typical disdain for hierarchies and celebration of direct relationships between the self and the variously conceived Divine, constitute a sort of extreme case where traditional forms of authority are arguably less relevant in respect to those enabled by the marketplace.

We focus on Wicca, where market-based and more traditional forms of religious authority co-exist. After a methodological note, detailing our ethnographic study, we present an emergent conceptual framework to discuss our research findings. Overall, this brings macro influences and micro practices together, showing how the market legitimizes and at the same time delegitimizes Wiccan religious practices, by exploring the boundary work carried out by religious marketers and consumers in order to establish themselves in a “safety area” where engagement with the market brings its positive effects without causing a loss of credibility. We conclude by highlighting the limitations of our work and our contribution to macromarketing theory.

Religious Authority

Religious organizations, according to Max Weber ([1968] 1978), enforce their order “through psychic coercion by distributing or denying religious benefits” (p. 54). As clarified by Chaves (1994), the benefits which religious elites might control access to will be different from one religion to another: nirvana, eternal life, health, wealth, deliverance from sin, etc. Also the sources of authority vary according to religion (see Partridge, Woodhead and Kawanami 2002 for an examination of authority in different contemporary religions). In monotheistic, Abrahamic religions, such as Christianity, Judaism and Islam, authority is conceived to emanate directly

from God, through the intermediation of divinely inspired scriptures and individuals whom God has revealed himself to. Religious hierarchies derive their legitimacy from tradition, scripture, and a link to the founder of that religion or his disciples. For example, in Roman Catholicism and some other Christian Churches the authority of the Church resides in the so-called apostolic succession, or the idea that bishops are successors of the apostles, and that each of today's bishops was consecrated by a similarly consecrated bishop, in an unbroken chain that can be traced directly back to the apostles (International Theological Commission 1973). Similarly, in Roman Catholic theology, the primacy of the Pope is justified by the fact that St. Peter, who was the first bishop of Rome, is believed to have been appointed by Jesus as leader of the apostles; accordingly, his successors inherited his role as leaders of the Church (Schatz 1996).

Religious authority can also be made sense of by means of Weber's (1964, 1968) ideal types of authority: charismatic authority, or the authority based on an extraordinary and personal gift of grace, is usually attributed to a religion's founders or other special people considered to be touched by the Divine (e.g., prophets, saints, and mystics); traditional authority, coming from the past, is available to the clergy of established religions based on social customs; finally, legal-rational authority is enforced by the State, for example by the provision that certain religious acts (e.g., a religious marriage) might have legal effects.

As noted by Mittelstaedt (2002), religious authority does not only focus on religious matters but also extends to the marketplace. Study of the intersection of religion and markets can be traced back to the work of Weber himself who theorized how Protestantism gave rise to Capitalism, and how countries where the Reformation had diffused (e.g. Northern Europe) were more likely to be economically successful. He traced how particular Protestant sects such as Calvinists endowed hard work and entrepreneurial activities with moral and religious

significance. From this perspective, worldly success could be interpreted as a symbol of one's salvation, a view which persists, perhaps, with latter day evangelical movements in the US where financial rewards accrue to those who walk in the paths of righteousness.

Work in the macromarketing field has developed Weber's initial thesis to considerably deepen our understandings of the intersection of markets and religion [\(see Drenten and McManus 2015 for a review\)](#). Dixon's (2001) historical analysis of Samuel Pepys's diary shows that despite the inherent contradictions between the Protestant work ethic identified by Weber, and Veblen's conspicuous consumption, the two concepts can be reconciled. And aside from Protestantism, Friedman (2001) explores the impact of Jewish values on marketing practice, while Klein (1987), as well as Klein and Laczniaik (2009), consider how the social teachings of the Roman Catholic Church provide a set of principles that can help offer guidance in relation to ethical dilemmas in contemporary marketing.

Mittelstaedt (2002) has undertaken the most extensive macromarketing analysis of how religion can affect trading. For example, many religions persuade, dissuade or even ban the trading of certain products (e.g., selling of Islamic insurance or Jewish prohibition on the eating of pork). Religion can also influence how trade is conducted and the rules of contract (e.g. Islamic jurisprudence or the Jewish legal code, the Mishnah). Where and when trade occurs can also be religiously determined. In certain Christian countries or regions it is still common to find shops closed on a Sunday, a holy day, whereas for Jewish neighborhoods the equivalent closing day is Saturday. For Mittelstaedt (2002) there are four key ways that religions can exert authority over markets, namely politically, institutionally, socially and competitively. He further highlights that markets may also affect religion with market offerings sometimes causing conflict over what is right or wrong, in the religious sense, for a believer, and even causing a re-evaluation of that

believer's faith. This topic is the subject of Eckhardt and Mahi's (2012) paper on the consumer tensions caused by an increasingly globalized marketplace in India. They found that Hindu religious ideals helped some consumers manage – or even resist altogether – the desires created by consumer culture. In his examination of the interplay between religion, spirituality and globalization, Kale (2004) discusses religion and spirituality together, and instead of giving religion negative connotations as others have done (see Zinnbauer and Pargament 2005), he suggests that religion can be seen as a “specific spiritual tradition usually emanating from some foundational experience of divine or cosmic revelation . . . that has given rise to a characteristic way of understanding and living in the presence of the numinous” (Schneiders 2000, p. 7)”. He further identifies four trends in contemporary religion/spirituality that are significant for this present study: 1) the integration of spirituality into all aspects of life; 2) the increasing individualization of spirituality; 3) the role of the Internet in spirituality; and 4) the syncretization of spirituality with a mixing of elements from different belief systems.

These trends beg the questions that underpin our study, namely, how is religious authority achieved when that authority is increasingly seen as residing with the individual who personalizes his or her spirituality across a range of belief systems; and what is the market's role in these processes? These questions are consistent with Lesser (2000) who writes that twenty-first century spirituality marks a shift from external authority to the autonomy, empowerment and authority of individuals or “spiritual seekers”, whose spirituality is located from within.

In the section that follows, we introduce our empirical context. Wicca represents an interesting context to study religious authority, and the way it intersects with the marketplace, for at least two reasons. First, it is a new religion that has existed since its origins in a market economy, a religion that addresses the spiritual needs of late modern/postmodern consumers,

who are more likely to find authority inside themselves, rather than in an external source, and more prone to mix and match spiritual resources originating in different religious traditions. Accordingly, the case of Wicca exemplifies the lived experiences of the members of other similarly new religious movements, beyond those who have so far been the focus of extant macromarketing research ([Drenten and McManus 2015](#)). Second, globalization dynamics play an important role in the development of Wicca, which was born in the United Kingdom, from where it diffused to North America, the rest of Europe, and elsewhere (Heselton 2000; Hutton 1999). By examining the globalization of Wicca and how it relates to religious authority, our study advances key debates in macromarketing theory around the intersection of religion and markets.

Neopaganism and Wicca: An Overview

Neopaganism – also known as “Contemporary Paganism” or “Revival Paganism” – is an umbrella term that refers to “a collection of modern religious, spiritual, and magical traditions that are self-consciously inspired by the pre-Judaic, pre-Christian, and pre-Islamic belief systems of Europe, North Africa, and the near East” (Doyle White 2016, p. 6). In other words, Neopaganism is not a single, unified, structured or highly organized movement, but rather an eclectic, heterogeneous one that accommodates individual pathways and networks (Guiley 1989; Saunders 2013).

While it is difficult to generalize across traditions, at the general level there are a few doctrinal differences that set Neopaganism in sharp contrast with traditional Abrahamic faiths. First, Neopagans conceive Divinity as immanent in nature, in contrast with the idea of a transcendent creator separated from creation (York 2001). This means that the divine is manifested through the individual self and the material world. Neopagans thus have a reverence

for nature, which is considered inherently sacred, and share positive attitudes towards the body, which is not considered sinful or a distraction to spiritual achievements.

Second, most Neopagans perceive the Divine, however defined, as both masculine and feminine. Particularly in North America, Neopaganism has become linked to the women's spirituality movement as feminist exponents (e.g., Adler 1979; Budapest 1976; Starhawk 1982) popularized the emancipating idea of the Goddess as an empowering figure for women in their fight against oppressive patriarchal forces limiting their potential. In other words, the Goddesses of pre-monotheistic pantheons are seen as images of female power and sensuality that can provide a source of inspiration for feminist spiritualities. Notably, in many Neopagan traditions women have access to priesthood. Seen as incarnations of the Goddess, priestesses have higher status than their male counterparts. Despite its emphasis on the Divine feminine, Neopagans believe that their religion has also much to offer to men, as the various Gods of pre-Christian pantheons offer pathways to multiple masculinities and the possibility of crafting more egalitarian relationships with women, unencumbered by the patriarchal values still prevalent in many societies (for insider perspectives, see Drew 1998; Penczak 2005). More generally, many Neopagan communities have moved away from the religion's initial gender essentialism, where qualities considered feminine, while highly valued, were seen as intrinsically different from similarly rigid male qualities, and are becoming more accepting of non-mainstream expressions of gender and sexuality (Kraemer 2012; Oboler 2010; see also Aburrow 2014).

Third, central to the religious practice of many Neopagans is ritual, which is re-enacted from ancient or traditional sources, or eclectically created from a variety of inspirations. Neopagan rituals often celebrate the so-called "wheel of the year" (i.e., key moments in the solar cycle, such as equinoxes and solstices), the lunar phases (in particular, the full moon) and various

rites of passage (Magliocco 2004). Neopagans often find that, compared to other religions, their rituals require more active participation; in other words, there cannot be passive observers. During rituals, Neopagans often engage in various forms of awareness-altering practices, including meditation, visualization, chant, dance, and spell casting. Some, but not all, Neopagans practice a form of magical religion (see Lewis 1996) that takes inspiration from folk or ceremonial magical practice. Often shunned by other religions, for many (but not all) Neopagans, magic is considered an awareness-altering set of techniques that empowers practitioners in ways similar to prayer in other religions.

Finally, in terms of religious organization, Neopaganism is often described as eschewing hierarchical authority, organization and structure, and resisting institutionalization. Indeed, most traditions invite practitioners to communicate directly with the Divine. Yet, in some traditions (including some aspects of Wicca, as discussed below), religious hierarchies exist, consisting of clergy or other intermediaries who facilitate communion with the Divine (Saunders 2013; see below).

Within Neopaganism, Wicca is perhaps one of the oldest and most influential traditions. The term “wicca” was employed by Anglo-Saxons in the Early Mediaeval period to refer to practitioners of sorcery. The term is now employed in a strict sense to refer to members of British Traditional Wicca (particularly, Gardnerian and Alexandrian traditions, see below), and in a more inclusive manner to identify many, if not all, forms of Neopagan witchcraft religion, particularly if they share beliefs and ritual practices similar to those of British Traditional Wicca (see Doyle White 2010 for an analysis of the evolution of the term and its uses). The “father of Wicca” is Gerald Gardner who, in the 1950s, claimed to have been initiated in 1939 into a nature-based witchcraft religion that had secretly survived Christian prosecutions (Gardner 1954,

1959; see also Heselton 2000; Hutton 1999). Gardner's Wicca, also known as the Gardnerian tradition, was diffused by Gardner and his followers (e.g., Doreen Valiente, Patricia Crowther, Eleanor Bone) in other parts of the British Isles, in North America, and elsewhere (Clifton 2006; Heselton 2000; Hutton 1999; Magliocco 2004; Pearson 2007). In the 1960s, other exponents of the movement (notably, Alex Sanders) popularized their versions of Wicca, which later diffused to North America and elsewhere.

Many Wiccan traditions, including Gardnerian, Alexandrian and other forms of British Traditional Wicca, are organized into autonomous covens of initiated priests and priestesses, usually guided by a High Priestess and Priest working together to symbolize that the male (sun) and female (moon) principles co-exist in harmony and are of equal value. Typically there are three degrees of initiation (i.e., High Priests/Priestesses are usually third-degree initiates), which mark the initiate's spiritual progress and access to spiritual knowledge and ritual practice (Bogdan 2007; for an insider perspective, see Crowley 1989). In a way similar to the apostolic succession of the Roman Catholic Church, some initiated Wiccans can trace their lineage back to the founder of their tradition. Initiated Wiccans, however, today constitute a minority of practicing Wiccans. With the publication of oath-bound ritual material, many uninitiated covens exist, together with solitary practitioners who do not practice in covens and who may also self-initiate into the religion thanks to the rituals widely available in published books or on the Internet. In a typically postmodern manner, many eclectic Wiccans organize their practice by "mixing and matching" from a variety of spiritual resources, both within and outside of Wicca (Waldron 2005).

In the 1990s and 2000s, Wicca enjoyed greater visibility, thanks to the popularity of witchcraft in popular entertainment products (e.g., the movies *The Craft*, *Practical Magic* and

The Witches of Eastwick, and television series such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*, and *Charmed*), and the availability of books written by practitioners for a wider public (Berger and Ezzy 2009; Ezzy 2001; Foltz 2005). Greater recognition and interest has generated a larger market for Wiccan products, services, and experiences. Wiccans, like other Neopagans, are avid consumers of books, music, ritual clothing and jewelry, and a variety of religious objects such as wands, incense burners, candles, ceremonial daggers, chalices and sacred statues, many drawing on pre-Christian pantheons. These items are often used for ritual and other spiritual practices that enable communion with the Divine. A wide range of seminars and other training opportunities exist for the acquisition of ritual skills and consumption objects (e.g., tarot reading, making incense, constructing ritual tools, etc.).

Some Wiccan leaders and practitioners are religious entrepreneurs and marketers who, by writing books, holding festivals, offering training classes, and divination sessions have contributed to the diffusion of Wicca. This diffusion has also been facilitated by the availability of a wide range of magical products. The advent of the Internet and, more recently, social media, has brought further visibility to Wicca's many traditions (Berger and Ezzy 2009), which are now present in countless web sites, blogs, Facebook groups, and Youtube channels. Today, Wicca is a global religious community with a few epicenters (mostly in the British Isles and USA, where Wicca is older and more developed) and many peripheries, where the religion has arrived more recently. Religious leaders from established traditions situated in religious epicenters often travel abroad to teach subcultural skills to local practitioners; conversely, practitioners from peripheral areas often travel to central places where Wiccan traditions and institutions have their "headquarters", to seek training and formal initiation or, more simply, to shop for consumption objects they have difficulty in obtaining at home.

These marketplace dynamics, which link together globalization and the so-called “commodification of Wicca” (Ezzy 2001; Foltz 2005; Waldron 2005) have their critics (see Aburrow 2015, and Wildermuth 2015, for an ongoing insider debate shedding light on Neopaganism’s conflicted attitude towards money). Ezzy (2006) observed that a watered-down, consumerism-oriented version of Wicca now exists. This emphasizes the more marketable aspects of the religion, such as individual pleasure and instrumental self-gratification, while ignoring the more serious side that philosophizes around loss, death, the cycle of nature, and the co-existence of light and dark in existence. According to Ezzy (2006), these consumer-oriented versions have facilitated the diffusion of Wicca, but at the same time have transformed it to make it more compatible with consumer capitalism, sacrificing in the process communitarian, equalitarian and ecological values. Similar criticisms have also been leveled at other religions such as protestant evangelical movements in the US, which incorporate various forms of entertainment for their flocks (see, for example, O’Guinn and Belk 1989). Concomitantly, Coco and Woodward (2007) examined ambivalence and tensions in Neopagans’ representations of and engagement with commercialized versions of their religion that they perceived to be inauthentic. Their informants’ concerns were exacerbated by superficial media representations, some Neopagans’ excessive use of advertising and other promotional techniques, and by the commercial availability of products (for example, spell kits or fairy wands), which were perceived to promote a consumer-oriented version of the religion. Coco and Woodward (2007) also explored, from a consumer perspective, the distancing from commercialized and consumerist behaviors, which are reified in the “fluffy bunny” sanction – a derogatory term attributed to those viewed as superficially following New Age fads.

We conclude our overview with some considerations on religious authority in Wicca and its relationships with marketplace dynamics, building on the work of Weber (1964, 1968) and others that has examined authority in Neopaganism and other alternative spiritual practices (Hanegraaff 1999; Laubach 2007; Truzzi 1971). At first glance, because Wicca is a new religion (even if its principles pre-date Abrahamic religions), its religious leaders can hardly base their authority on tradition as it is commonly understood (Laubach 2007). Still, “traditional” British Wicca and some American traditions are older than others; additionally, some covens, groups and associations are more proximate, in term of lineage, to the founders of their traditions. These elements form the basis for greater authority and legitimacy for those who seek initiation into those traditions. In legal terms, like many other minority and/or new religions, Wicca is typically not recognized by the State as a religion, and its members are often stigmatized in a variety of manners, including verbal ridicule and workplace discrimination (Tejeda 2015). In some countries, however, Wiccan and other Neopagan groups have obtained some form of legal protection or recognition (see Stewart 2011 for a legal analysis of the US situation), or are mobilizing towards that end. For example, the US-based Department of Veteran Affairs agreed to accept the Wiccan pentacle as an approved religious symbol on veterans’ headstones (Banerjee 2007), and Wiccan weddings have been legal in Scotland since 2005.

More specifically, in terms of Weber’s legal-rational authority, Laubach (2007) observes that Neopagan organizations show little signs of institutionalization and centralization: “[w]hile there are larger organizations . . . most recognize they have limited authority even over their own members” (p. 54). At the very least, however, tradition and coven leaders have a gatekeeping role with respect to admission and internal advancements, particularly in relation to British traditions. Finally, in terms of charismatic authority, Laubach (2007) suggests that with its

emphasis on direct access to the Divine, “Neopagan democratization of revelation takes a large step away from Weber’s concept of charisma because any member of the collective has the potential to make an authoritative claim” (p. 53). Yet, more experienced Wiccan leaders can facilitate Wiccan participants’ own connection to the Divine by teaching ritual skills and other awareness-altering techniques.

We take as a theoretical point of departure for our empirical analysis that in contexts like Wicca, Neopaganism and other emerging religious movements, where traditional, legal and charismatic sources of legitimacy play a more limited role than in established religions, the market might act as an important source of religious authority. By marketing their books, courses, and other services, religious leaders may become “human brands” (Thomson 2006), and promote their traditions towards spiritual seekers, the general population, and the State. Excessive promotion and commercialization of Wicca might however result in negative sanctions, reducing religious leaders’ authority among core Wiccan practitioners. We acknowledge that a similar critique may also be raised towards clergy in Abrahamic religions. Emerging religious movements, however, lack State support and tithing systems, forcing leaders and organizations to adopt market-based exchange systems that make them more susceptible to accusations of commercialism.

Methodology

This present study is part of a larger project employing an ethnographic multi-method and multi-sited approach, undertaking fieldwork within Neopagan communities at sites in Italy, England, Ireland and elsewhere. The authors of this research are an ethnographic team (Sherry 2006) including a practicing Wiccan. Insider or “native” ethnographers are common in the study of

religions (McCutcheon 1999), as their insider knowledge and access to their religious communities can provide more sensitive and culturally informed accounts of the religion's belief system and practices. This is particularly important in the context of Neopaganism, which is a vulnerable community whose members are often stigmatized by both followers of traditional religions, for whom polytheism and witchcraft often evoke negative images, and atheists, for whom Neopagan beliefs might be perceived as utterly superstitious. The insider author engaged in extended reflexivity in order to better understand his uneasy subject position as a social scientist, with a keen understanding of marketing and consumer research scholarship, and as a full practitioner of the Wiccan religion. This author's field notes contain countless introspective pages, where awareness-changing experiences were scrutinized, based on both Wiccan sense-making strategies and scholarly understanding of religion and magic. In doing so, he was helped by the work of various other scholars who have similarly faced the challenges coming from the scholarly investigations of emerging religions and alternative spiritualities, which can hardly be studied by scholars who remain at the margin of core awareness-inducing experiences (e.g., Blain, Ezzy and Harvey 2004; Magliocco 2004; Pearson 2001; Salomonsen 2002; see also Goulet and Young 1994). Notably, in her study of the feminist Reclaiming witches of San Francisco, Salomonsen (2002) championed a mixed insider/outsider approach which she termed "a method of compassion", which "does not refer to a wholesale positive embracement, nor to passionate criticisms and arguing, but to something in between" (p. 4), enabling full participation in ritual activities. Magliocco (2004) further argues that the "ethnographic perspective is *not* about being an objective observer of a culture, but rather about containing within one body multiple, simultaneous frames of reference with which to interpret experience, and being able to shift easily from one to the other" (p. 15).

Unlike these scholars, who were studying core religious elements of Neopagan religions, this paper is focused on market-related issues for which the adoption of multiple frames of references was less of a struggle and of a similar level of difficulty to that faced by other marketing or consumer researchers who studied specific subcultures and had to move from the emic to the etic level of analysis. The interpretive work of the other two authors, who are external to the community, also contributed to the sometimes difficult task for insider ethnographers to “make the familiar strange, and the strange familiar” (Giroux and Simon 1988, p. 13).

Data collection for this project involved participant observation of Neopagan gatherings, festivals, rituals, social events, workshops, online forums and blogs. We conducted formal and informal interviews with participants that included religious leaders, service providers (i.e. specialist retailers, astrologers, therapists, etc.) and their customers, as well as other members of the Neopagan community. Our overall dataset consists of transcripts from long and short interviews, field notes from participant observation, netnographic data captured from Neopagan discussion forums, and photographic records of events, landscapes and material objects.

For this current paper we focus on our data on Wicca, and specifically on those practitioners who act as religious entrepreneurs and community builders. Informants for this study all come from Italy, and were selected in order to provide a representation of different Wiccan traditions and parts of the country. Italy was chosen as the site for our study for a number of reasons. Firstly, while Italy is predominantly a Catholic country, it is also a land of classical Paganism, with archaeological remains of ancient Greek, Roman, Celtic and other worship sites spread across the country. Neopaganism started diffusing in Italy during the 1990s, as books in English were translated into Italian, and a growing number of Italians had access to

the Internet, which facilitated access to foreign online material and provided a platform for interactions among interested spiritual seekers. This led to the development of the first groups and associations (Cronos 2007; Howell 2008) and the establishment of an Italian branch of the Pagan Federation International (PFI). According to Howell, a landmark event was the publication of the Italian translation of Phyllis Curott's (1999) bestselling *Book of Shadows*, which triggered a wider interest in Wicca and Neopaganism among an adult audience. Curott herself, the founder of the Wiccan organization Temple of Ara, was the first of a series of foreign religious leaders to come to Italy to offer workshops and, eventually, to initiate petitioners into their traditions.

Other well-known religious leaders, who came to Italy in the following years to offer seminars, themselves authors of international bestselling books, include Starhawk, Kathy Jones, Vivianne and Chris Crowley, Morgana Sythove, Janet Farrar and Gavin Bone. They represented a variety of traditions from the US, the UK, and Ireland. Today, Italian Neopagans continue to interact online thanks to Facebook groups and other social media, and offline through workshops, conferences, and informal pub gatherings. Various covens, study groups, and associations now exist, and in 2014 a new association, federating a diversity of Italian Neopagan organizations, was formed, with the goal of obtaining legal recognition (Greene 2014).

Participants of the present study, while previously known by the first author, were invited to focused one-to-one interviews (lasting between two and three hours) pertaining to the relationship between market and religion in the context of Wicca. The first author is publicly known within the Italian Wiccan community as a marketing scholar and, on a few occasions, was invited to talk at Neopagan events and conferences about the influence of the market on religion, and asked for advice on the marketing of religious services and products. Therefore, no

informant was surprised about the request to be involved in the study. The fact that interviewer and interviewees had known each other for many years yielded a number of consequences: on the negative side, relevant past experiences were often hinted at instead of being fully explained, since the informant knew that the author was informed of the fact; common acquaintances were also often mentioned, without explaining who these people were, their relationship to the informant, and their role in the Wiccan community. On the positive side, however, the same circumstances enabled a more effective elicitation of relevant facts and the meanings associated with them, which might not have been the case, had the interviewer not been aware of the facts.

The informants whose stories were included in the research findings section (see below) were shown their accounts and offered the option of revising them if necessary. A first draft of the paper was also shown to nine knowledgeable individuals who are academics in the field of Pagan Studies, Neopagans, or both, who offered advice on Wiccan doctrine, history, the resonance of the main points raised by the study, and the way the Wiccan community was represented in the paper. The latter is an important point, since the work of some scholars of Neopaganism has caused considerable controversies in the community for their insensitive accounts of the lived experiences of informants (most notably, Luhrmann 1989; see Pearson 2007 for an account of the reception of Luhrmann's work in the community she studied)².

Consistent with an ethnographic approach, we used an extended case study method which is a particularly good way to “extract the general from the unique” (Burawoy 1998, p. 5; [see also Kates 2006](#)), by building on both preexisting theory and emergent themes from our data. The extended case study method involves undertaking a detailed study of specific empirical instances (or cases) of a phenomenon and deriving more general, abstract principles from the case. Typically researchers use participant observation to study a variety of events, interactions and

interrelationships in the field, and then select particular informants that exemplify the emerging theoretical positions. It is an approach that has been used to good effect in consumer research to elaborate more macro level theories from micro level interactions (e.g. Higgins and Hamilton 2014; Hollenbeck, Peters and Zinkhan 2008; Holt 2002). In keeping with this method, we took a hermeneutic approach (Thompson 1997) to data analysis that used two levels of analysis. The first level is intratextual, examining how individual informants negotiate their beliefs and practices in relation to the marketplace, and how they gain and retain credibility with the Wiccan community. The second level is inter-textual, comparing and contrasting findings across transcripts and other data sources, as well as with extant theories. In this way we followed an iterative process, moving between the two levels and working with both emergent themes and a priori codes.

Findings

As previously discussed, in revealed religions, the representatives of God (or other deities) on Earth are seen as the ultimate authority on what faithful should believe and how they should behave. In Wicca, in a way that is similar to other traditions within Neopaganism, the divine resides within the individual. Thus, being a religious leader in the Wiccan community is about facilitating others to connect with the divine and assisting them to find their own paths. Therefore, in order to better understand the intersection of the market and religious authority in the Wiccan context, we looked at the legitimizing practices our key informants undertook to establish credibility in the eyes of other community members, and the delegitimizing forces they faced. We acknowledge that, by focusing on religious leaders, we offer a view of Italian Wicca community that reflects the life experiences of informants with higher levels of seniority, status, interaction with foreign groups and institutions, subcultural skills and, more importantly for the

goals of this study, market experience. Had we focused on Wiccan practitioners who did not rise to position of leadership, our account would certainly be different. Despite this, Wiccan practitioners' anticipated or actual reactions to leaders' engagements with the market are a key motif in our informants' life histories and feature prominently in our research findings. Additionally, thanks to our ethnographic observations, our studies integrate to some extent the perspectives of non-leaders. As a result, our interpretations offer a more nuanced account of market-related dynamics in this field rather than one based solely on interviews with religious leaders.

A common theme recurring across our informants' observations is the importance of what we, at the etic level, describe as “engaging with the market”. While each informant’s story is unique, the consumption of books and the participation in workshops led by foreign religious leaders are, for all informants, important turning points in the construction of their religious identity and, eventually, the decision to petition for initiation into one of the US, England or Ireland-based Wiccan traditions currently present in Italy. Some were initiated into Wicca abroad, and others in Italy. Long before being initiated, most of our informants have also been very active in the foundation and management of Neopagan associations in Italy, and have organized or contributed to seminars, study groups, conferences, and other activities. Some of our informants sell services in the areas of divination or alternative medicine, thanks to skills that they have developed as a consequence of their spiritual path. Nobody, however, completely sustains himself or herself economically because of his or her Wiccan-related activities. This is not a bias in our sample, as today, in Italy, to the best of our knowledge, nobody does³.

Significantly, despite all their experiences as religious entrepreneurs and marketers, terms like “the market” or, even worse, “marketing” rarely appear in our interview transcripts and field

notes. When they do appear, they typically are negatively laden, as an embarrassing necessity or, worse, as excessive, stigmatized commercial behaviors that ultimately may lead to a weakening of perceived credibility. Our informants preferred to employ a variety of more positively connoted terms, such as “building community”, “getting ourselves known”, “dispel stereotypes”, and focused on dispelling negative views about Wicca, providing “correct information” about the religion, “educating” others about Wiccan practices, and so forth. Truly, for our informants, marketing is to be better understood as ‘societing’ (Cova 1997). Religious community building, while often mediated by market exchanges, is also characterized by frequent attempts at “escaping the market” (Kozinets 2002) via the gift economy and various forms of voluntary work.

Next, we tell the stories of three of our informants, chosen to be representative of themes that recur in our datasets. Such a strategy to represent research findings enables us to provide access to the lived experiences of our informants, which we interpret in the light of macro-level trends shaping religious authority in Neopaganism as it interacts with marketplace dynamics and globalization. The accounts we provide are focused on this aspect, and we do not report here other life themes and narratives emerging from interview data and other ethnographic observations.

Avoiding the market: Helios’ story

Helios, 39 years old, lives in a large Italian city, where he works as an employee for a large service provider. Interested in Neopaganism since he was a teenager, during the 1990s he was able to find fellow spiritual seekers thanks to the Internet and, later, to the first Neopagan events taking place in Italy. After many experiences of solitary and eclectic spiritual practice in groups,

he became a member of a Wiccan group consisting of uninitiated members, and a founder of one of the first Italian Wiccan organizations. During the 2000s, he was initiated first into a US-based tradition, which he later abandoned, and later into a British Traditional Wiccan lineage. He is now a third degree high priest, running a coven, and in the process of creating a new Wiccan association.

Helios recognizes that deciding whether and to what extent to engage with the market is a “dilemma that touches everybody” in the community. Unlike the Italian Catholic clergy, which is State-supported, “it is clear that nobody can be a professional [Neopagan] priest” in Italy. Building a Wiccan community is expensive, and “there is a thin line between losing money and making money”, particularly when the activities are not carried out informally, at the individual level, but in organized forms (e.g., a legally constituted association). Still, when considering the ‘famous priestesses’ from abroad, he makes a distinction between “those who live off Wicca”, by writing books, holding seminars, and providing other paid services (e.g., divination sessions), and those who “have regular jobs” that often finance the expenses incurred for personal practice and community activities. Helios firmly identifies himself as belonging to the latter category: “I earn nothing [from Wicca]!”, he says laughing. He explains that he “keeps himself distant as much as he can” from commercial exchanges related to spirituality.

I know how spirituality, or rather what appears to be spirituality, can be employed to make a lot of money . . . I’ve seen people losing a fortune . . . So it may happen, it may happen, it would be easy to turn a study group or a seminar into a source of revenue. . . Each of us has dreamed, or imagined rising, somehow, to the office of somebody’s personal savior or high priest. . . I personally prefer to keep myself distant from these situations . . . I really try hard not to find myself in these situations.

Clearly for Helios, the market is a potential source of contamination, and a major risk to his credibility, both in terms of how he is perceived by others and also his own integrity. Note that in the quote above, he is drawing attention not just to the temptations of money, but also to the lure of charismatic authority, as “somebody’s personal savior”, a type of authority associated with traditional religion. Helios thus avoids the market as much as he can, and throughout the interview he makes several references to activities that, though conceivable in terms of market exchanges, are symbolically situated by him in a private domain dominated by non-marketable community values. He explains that basic social activities such as going out, having dinner together, trips, and vacations all come with costs that he would also sustain outside of a religious context. The effort linked to his sacerdotal duties is currently very manageable because he takes care of only a few initiates, relatively speaking, and “external court” members (i.e., people who are training in the tradition and will possibly seek initiation in the future). Relationships with these people are personal, friendship-based, and spending money together is “part of normal human relationships”. However, he speculates that beyond certain limits this would be unsustainable:

Should I have thirty initiates, it would be more problematic. . . Therefore, either I find a way to strip down these unavoidable costs - and this can happen if we are also in a friendship context where I get lodged. I can also sleep in a garage, where we can be flexible... Or, if things go beyond the friendship dimension, also because of the sheer number of people involved, it turns difficult not to need a way for not losing, or rather for not losing too much, because an investment, at all levels, from time to money to energy to freedom, is implicit in what we do. According to me, the question is how much this investment is distant from my normal activities. So, a simple way not to find oneself in

these kinds of perplexities is to have relationships that I conceive of as a spiritual family, a spiritual brotherhood.

With market success, then, come two types of negative consequences. First, and despite all possible good intentions, it would not be possible to maintain personal relationships with all initiates and external court members, let alone mere seminar participants. Second, and particularly in the case of ‘professional’ priests/priestesses, because of the need to cover travel, lodging, and venue renting expenses, one cannot be too selective and could end up engaging with people he/she would not normally like to have relationships with. Both these outcomes would damage his idea of a spiritual family and, in turn, his own sense of integrity and overall credibility as a Wiccan priest. More generally, it becomes “difficult to distinguish between what is ethically correct and what is not when what you do makes you earn your daily bread”. Helios’s words remind us of Weber’s (1968/1978) dichotomy according to which social ties can be categorized as belonging to personal social interactions (*Gemeinschaft*, or community) or to indirect relationships based on impersonal roles (*Gesellschaft*, or society). Many spiritual seekers also want a personal relationship with their high priests/priestess, and particularly so in the case of celebrity priestesses coming from abroad. The personal unavailability of some of them, “despite all good intentions”, has resulted in frustration among practitioners who do not accept a *Gesellschaft* type of religious organization.

Helios’s determination to avoid the market was challenged when he moved to his new place and decided to renovate its basement to turn it into a permanent, private Wiccan temple: “I did it to have a worship place for our coven... Then, initially, I was hoping, too, that it would eventually pay for itself... I never fully believed it would have been possible, and I didn’t really pursue it, but yes, it was a hope”. Despite the fact that over the years he has had some requests to

rent the space, so far he has not encouraged or followed up with them, as “turning a passion into business sometimes kills the passion”. He adopts a similar approach for pagan moots (i.e., pub gatherings), which he organized in his town for many years:

more than attracting new people, which has never been my main goal, it's keeping on attracting the same people... There are many people who are less lucky than me or others as they don't have an outside world aligned to their inner spirituality . . . I've always seen the [pagan moots] as a great solution for this, not from a purely promotional standpoint, it's an actual construction of community... Going out for drinks is not something exceptional here, it's something that everybody does... It's a way to build a network of relationships that can become stronger on the human side, but that can also build a [Neopagan] identity . . . And it's free, in the sense that the price of drinks go to the pub owner, not to the moot organizers.

Being gossiped about: Luna's story

Luna, 37 years old, is from and lives in a large Italian city. Mother of one child, she is a self-employed professional service provider. Raised in an atheist and “rather anticlerical” family, she nevertheless found herself drawn to a nature-based spirituality. A feminist from an early age thanks to her mother's influence, she found Neopagan religions' emphasis on the Divine Feminine especially appealing. At the end of the 1990s, facilitated by the Internet, she interacted online with other people interested in Neopaganism, and eventually started practicing with a small group of female friends. At the time, the Neopagan scene in her town was very underdeveloped, and during the 2000s she often travelled to other parts of the country to attend

events, conferences, and seminars. Thanks to her language skills, she was soon asked to serve as an interpreter during seminars led by religious leaders from the US and Ireland, and in that capacity she got to know some of them “at a more intimate level in respect to what can happen to the average seminar participant”. Eventually, she started organizing seminars in her town and to animate a Neopagan “circle” (that is, an open group of spiritual practice). In 2008, she was a founding member of a Neopagan women’s organization. Initiated in a US-based Wiccan tradition in the same year, she is currently her tradition’s only ordained clergy in Italy.

Luna found herself in the role of religious entrepreneur, organizing workshops in her town out of a desire to give her friends, who did not have the time and/or financial means to travel across Italy, access to the spiritual experiences facilitated by the workshops she was attending. Here is her recollection of how it all started:

And then I, brazen-faced [laugh], went to Diana [the High Priestess who was giving the workshop, pseudonym] and told her: why don’t you come to [my town] to give this seminar? There are a lot of friends of mine who would be interested... We have read your books together, we read and then practice together based on your books... Why don’t you come? And she said: I’d be very happy to come if somebody organized it ... And I said: ok, I can try [laugh].

The workshop in Luna’s town, which was well attended, was instrumental in building a group who would meet regularly to continue with the spiritual practice and celebrate the eight festivities in the Wiccan religious calendar. This transformed the nature of Luna’s group, from a *Gemeinschaft*-type small community of friends to a larger group, a “circle”, increasingly in the

public sphere and open to all. The group, which recently celebrated its tenth anniversary, was given a formal name, which to protect anonymity in this paper we call the Silver Thread:

[Before] it was not a public group, it was just us. . . we would gather together at somebody's house, it was very informal. . . It was really a group of friends. After Diana's [pseudonym] workshop, which was in 2006. . . she exhorted us to keep on meeting to celebrate, to create something, and this is how the Silver Thread [pseudonym] was born"

Interviewer: "What was the Silver Thread, technically? Was it a circle, an association...?"

Well, technically the Silver Thread is an open circle - that is what in a more traditional Wiccan language would be termed an outer court. It was born with the people who had taken part in that workshop... At the time, Diana used to create e-mailing lists for those who participated in a seminar, to give them a means to interact, and this is how it all was born. My friends and I started to meet with some people who had attended this workshop and then, bit by bit, the thing grew and the group became open, in the sense that it was a little more public . . .

Luna is proud of the Silver Thread's continuity – which is not to be taken for granted in an emerging religious movement that some have described as characterized by anarchism and active resistance towards organization and institutionalization. To her, keeping a continuity means providing "a temple, even though there was no temple, in the sense of a physical space, but . . . a community, a center where people could always come back . . . and be welcome". The circle, with its open boundaries, is a service offered to the community, without any need for engagement: "if somebody wanted to celebrate, if they were looking for something, they would come, perhaps they would only come once, they didn't need to come every single time".

Relationships with people irregularly attending open circle rituals and activities would necessarily be more superficial and based on common religious affinity rather than a deeper personal relationship. Still, some of these “outer court” practitioners, to the extent that they show commitment and develop stronger bonds with core members, may be invited to join the “inner court”, which is “like a covenant” in the sense that “if you are in, you are in: you make an engagement, you come, you take part in it, so it’s different [from the outer circle]”.

What Luna describes is a process that starts with a private spiritual group that turns into a public religious *Gesellschaft*, which is more accessible, as it is promoted through the Internet and social media. Eventually, however, this group and other equally accessible initiatives provide the means, at least for those who are willing to make an engagement, to get socialized into a closer-knit religious *Gemeinschaft*, beyond Luna’s original group of friends. Luna’s social role as a “public figure brought with it a sense of isolation, however, furthered by the fact that for personal reasons, some of her friends had left town:

I found myself alone to manage this community that in the meanwhile had grown, and when people arrived who had never done anything and saw you who were conducting the ritual. . . It was obvious that, despite the fact that I always try to act as a funny character, to avoid being put on a pedestal, people see you as an expert, as a more experienced person to ask questions to, to rely on... So there was no longer that peer-to-peer relationship, not at the beginning at least... Then, obviously, when you become friends with these people, the relationship changes...

Like Helios, Luna resists the lure of charismatic authority that market expansion facilitates. As Luna’s public activities expanded, the need to fund them increased. Like Helios,

Luna firmly removes some initiatives, conceived as “community service”, from the market domain. Many (e.g., seasonal celebrations, rites of passage) are free of charge, whereas others involve reimbursement of small expenses (e.g., rental of space and materials in the case of small workshops). Also, when asked to serve as interpreter in the context of Wiccan workshops, she often does not claim compensation (only refund of travel expenses) or, when she does, her fare is “well below the market prices” she applies in professional contexts. In several instances, Luna makes it clear that many activities do not break even and she often has to “put money in, out of [her] own pocket” to make some event possible; additionally, the small advances sometimes generated are often employed to subsidize future initiatives. A different logic, both in her case and that of religious leaders coming from abroad, is, however, invoked with respect to teaching - ritual skills and related knowledge:

A distinction to be made, also in a spiritual domain, is between earnings which are lucre [monetary gain], which go beyond what is legitimate, and earnings which are legitimate, earnings that are a right exchange, a right compensation of the time, of the energy that a person pours into transmitting specific techniques.

By drawing a distinction between religious activities in a strict sense, which have the goal of offering a service to the Wiccan community, and teaching activities, which should be compensated in a fair (but not excessive) manner, Luna engages in boundary work which is sometimes contested. Often, this occurs in the form of gossip, based on the accusation of “enriching [herself] with Wicca”, which increased with Luna’s growing role as a public figure in the community: “in the end, you’re exposed, aren’t you? That is, you’re exposed to gossip, to scandalmongers; you become a mirror where people project their shadow”. In one memorable

episode, an acquaintance confronted Luna directly about the “excessive” price of a workshop she was conducting:

Well, Luna [pseudonym], you get paid 80-100 Euros for this workshop, and at the end there are 10 people, that’s 1,000 Euros in total, but how much would you spend for the meeting hall? And then you’re organizing it here [in her home city], it’s not that you have travel expenses... At the end, it’s a nice profit.

The confrontation ended when Luna showed her acquaintance an envelope containing the money from the seminar, which had been saved for “an initiation fund” to pay the travel expenses of US-based priestesses. Still, religious entrepreneurs like Luna have to face the fact that members of their communities will question their motives and the financial incentives and rewards of such religious practices. Since nothing profanes the sacred more than money (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989), accusations of commercialism and profit making goals act as powerful delegitimizing forces for spiritual leaders who, in a context like Wicca, cannot avoid engaging with the market in order to build a community.

Engaging ethically with the market: Redbird’s story

Redbird, 40 years old, lives near a large Italian city and has been involved in the emerging Italian Neopagan scene since the early 2000s, when she explored various women’s and Earth-based spiritualities. At the time, thanks to her job, she had a “great salary” which granted her the financial means to travel across Italy and attend various events and workshops. Eventually, she assumed an organizational role for some initiatives and, in 2008, she contributed to found a national-level women’s spirituality association. Initiated into a progressive tradition stemming from British traditional Wicca, she is now a third-degree initiate and coven leader. In 2011,

following a bereavement in the family, she reconsidered various aspects of her life and eventually left her job. She is now a professional organizer of events and educational retreats in the field of spirituality and holistic practice, and a holistic service provider herself, offering evolutionary tarot readings and healing sessions.

In Redbird's story, the need for an ethical engagement with the market recurs frequently, starting with her decision to leave the financial security provided by her job, which she describes as a "shark's environment" demanding frequent ethical compromises, to look for a profession more in touch with her spiritual life. She developed some of the capabilities at the base of her holistic practice thanks to her spiritual path (for example, tarot readings), whereas in other cases she underwent specific trainings in Italy and abroad (for example, reiki and a women's energy healing technique). Following a question on whether it would be possible for her "to live off Wicca", she clarifies that "it's not correct to mix together the two things" and that she maintains a strict "boundary line" between her Wiccan practice and her work.

What I do is divide the two things: my work as a holistic practitioner and event organizer, and my personal path within Wicca. I don't make money on my personal path within Wicca; I give my time for free. As a holistic practitioner, it is fair that I make money, because I, too, have a mortgage, bills to pay, etc. But this keeps me more in line with my spirituality.

Yes, it is important to keep this [boundary] line. It happens that some people in my study group - most are women - ask me for a treatment, but there's such a strong personal involvement because we know each other, we see each other, we keep in touch, etc., and there's an inter-exchange, so at the end it's still a payment... It's like saying, I will treat

you and you will support me in something else... It's an unspoken thing, an unwritten thing, but it's something that happens every day. It normally works like this with friends. I have big difficulties working professionally with friends and have them as clients... Big, big, I've always had big difficulties in this sense (laugh). I'd rather do a favor, work for free, than ...be paid by friends, ehm, I think that on the one hand it's not wrong, I agree with those who think it's not wrong, but on the other hand it creates in me so many personal qualms that I'm better off this way.

To ameliorate the potential conflict between her work and her Wiccan personal path, Redbird adopts a gift-giving logic when dealing with the occasional request for treatment she receives from fellow Wiccans. The Italian Wiccan community is very small and inter-connected, and given Redbird's role in the community, many people know her. Therefore, the market for her holistic services lies outside her Wiccan *Gemeinschaft*, within the broader domain of women's and Earth-based spiritualities. Deciding whether to apply a gift giving or a market logic is particularly difficult when acquaintances who are not close friends (in other words: members of the Wiccan *Gesellschaft*) ask for her services. Redbird deals with these harder to categorize situations by "letting things go": if payment is offered, she looks at her inner reaction and sometimes forfeits it; if not, she accepts the situation without unnecessary cognitive rumination and emotional turmoil: "you need to accept what happens, you don't have to get angry, you don't have to get offended. If you decide to let it go, you have to accept what happens".

Redbird believes that her spiritual path gives her an added value when working as a holistic practitioner, linked to her greater awareness of subtle energies, and a caring and more reflexive attitude that is hard to find in traditional medicine. Still, while her studio's logo features Goddess-related imagery, she refrains from disclosing her rank as Wiccan high priestess in her

promotional material (a choice shared by her studio associates), as she believes “it wouldn’t be appropriate to say”. Also her choice to create a professional holistic practice was motivated by a desire to “keep separate” the promotion of spirituality in a strict sense, which is better carried out “in the context of a cultural promotion association like ours”, where she works as a volunteer, from paid, professional work: “it is not right to mix the two things”. Still, her choice of working as a holistic practitioner caused some negative reaction and gossip in the broader Wiccan community, based on the similarities of some Wiccan spiritual practices with holistic treatments:

It’s difficult to understand, particularly for the others, in the sense that for the others it’s all a large cauldron. But not for me, in the sense that, as a holistic practitioner, I offer treatment, energetic treatment. . . So I ask you to pay for my time. . . In Wicca, I work with energy, but it’s not the same thing, it’s sharing.

There are people who believe that if you have an association, or study groups, it means making a lot of money. And if the people who have this association also have a holistic practice, then yes, then the thing becomes: it’s your job then, because there’s a tendency to mix the two things together, there’s a tendency to be suspicious, to have to be suspicious of others.

By invoking a commercial therapeutic logic, Redbird appropriates and reifies a legitimizing discourse developed in the context of alternative medicine, which underlines her professional training: “it’s a training for holistic practitioners, so it’s not a spiritual workshop, but a practical workshop, where she [the trainer] also gives you the professional ethics, she gives you the fares; it’s very oriented to the ‘do this as a job’”. Still, such logic does not go unchallenged within the Wiccan community: despite Redbird’s best efforts to “keep separate”

spirituality from holistic therapy, some in the community “mix the two things together”. The attribution of commercial motivations is employed to delegitimize both Redbird and her association, despite the fact that its volunteers often ended up losing their own money.

At the beginning, we very often organized completely free activities, and I have to say that during the first years we [board members] poured into it [the association] a lot of money, but really a lot, a lot, a lot, a lot, a lot, a lot, a lot, a lot, we poured into it a lot of money. So at a certain point we said: let’s stop for a moment, ok, it’s voluntary work, ok, it’s the association etc., but at least the association has to maintain itself on its own. . . . You know, the first years I had fewer problems [than other board members] as I had a great salary, so it wasn’t a burden putting some money into it. To me it was an investment in spirituality. But at a certain point we realized that this was not right. . . . At the energetic level, this thing was not right, it caused stress.

Over the years, Redbird and her fellow board members improved on their accounting practices and learned to better estimate the full costs of each initiative – for example, out of pocket expenses, which were initially individually subsidized (“I never took them back. If I drove our guests to Rome or Tuscany, I would spend 200 Euros in gas, and I would pay for that”). This in turn led to better pricing methods. As a result, the association, whose policy of keeping prices as low as possible now makes concession to the need to break even, no longer offers completely free initiatives. Less expensive happenings were initially provided based on a free offer, but since “people are not equally correct”, a modest price (usually in the 5-10 Euros range) is now preferred. More expensive workshops involving foreign teachers have higher prices to cover significantly higher expenses, but nobody is turned away for lack of funds, as each event foresees some partial or total fee waivers for recipients who help with the

organization. The association has a policy to offer fair compensation to workshop leaders as “it is correct to compensate for their time” – still, it is not uncommon that such compensation is refused or offered to local charities.

Discussion and conclusion

In this section, we move from the emic to the etic level, and propose a theoretical framework that depicts the links between our informants’ situated experiences and the macro-level factors affecting religious authority as it interacts with global market-mediated dynamics (see Figure 1 below). This framework was generated by comparing and contrasting research findings from the extended cases of Helios, Luna and Redbird, and other ethnographic data, as well as relevant theoretical work in macromarketing and beyond. At the macro-level, various factors serve to situate the phenomenologically felt experiences of our informants, their various attempts to escape the market and the boundary work they engage in to legitimize their activity, and protect themselves from the typically unfair accusations of commercial motivations.

[Insert Figure 1 around here]

As we anticipated in our literature review, postmodernity accentuated the late modern disdain for authority in many domains, including religion, and has paved the way for new religions and spiritual practices outside of organized religions. The secularization of society, which can be understood as a decline in religious authority (Chaves 1994), made it necessary for religious institutions – particularly in plural and multicultural societies – to market themselves, using techniques from the world of business, but this is often criticized for bringing the taint of commerce to that which is sacred. New religions and spiritualities exist in a consumer culture, where spiritual seekers increasingly find teachings and practices that are to some extent

incompatible with traditional religions' doctrines. For example, the Roman Catholic Church advises against mixing Christian meditation with Eastern techniques, and highlights that the New Age movement is incompatible with core Christian beliefs (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 1989; Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue 2003). Such condemnation has not, however, prevented some Catholics from engaging in Zen, Taoist, Buddhist and other forms of non-Christian meditation, as well as various New Age practices. The mix and match attitude of postmodern consumers is amplified by globalization, and the diffusion of the Internet and social media, which provide exposure to niche religions and spiritualities in an unprecedented manner (Kale 2004). Seduced by these offerings, consumers' search for meaning – so often found also in the consumption of mundane goods and brands (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989; Schachar et al. 2011) – leads to an increased demand for spiritual goods and services, in ways that are sometimes accused of entailing forms of spiritual materialism (Gould 2006).

In the specific context of Wicca and Neopaganism, community and market coexist, with the latter de facto providing entry points to close-knit religious *Gemeinschaft* groups. Neopaganism emerged in Italy during the 1990s, thanks to local religious entrepreneurs who, building on social interactions mostly carried out over the Internet, organized gatherings, workshops and other events that contributed to the development of a shared identity and shared consciousness among Neopagan-inclined seekers. By inviting foreign teachers – often authors of bestselling books, religious leaders and celebrities within the community – these associations had a pivotal role in linking the peripheral Italian community to global Wiccan epicenters in the British Isles and the USA. The price of these initiatives, which were relatively expensive because of the need to offer a fair compensation to workshop leaders and to cover their travel expenses, exposed these associations to the accusation of exploiting spirituality for commercial gain.

This is a culturally relevant accusation to organized religion, which finds antecedents in the biblical story of Jesus driving away the merchants from the Temple, and Martin Luther's condemnation of the Church's sale of indulgences that gave origin to the Reformation. Unlike their more established counterparts, however, emerging religious movements cannot rely on accumulated wealth, State support, formal tithing from members or other non market-mediated fundraising mechanisms. As a result, their need to rely on the market and the risk of delegitimization such reliance entails, are exacerbated. Additionally, as a whole, Neopaganism has not developed a theology of material salvation that legitimizes giving to the Church, as in other religions (see for example Bonsu and Belk 2010 and McAlexander et al. 2014 for a discussion related to, respectively, [African Pentecostalism and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the United States](#)). Within this broader context, Neopagan/Wiccan religious entrepreneurs find themselves entrapped within a web of meanings, defined at the cultural and societal level, that both enable and constrain their religious promotion and community-building activities.

Our interpretive model (see again Figure 1) makes sense of the imagined boundaries that structure these agents' engagement with the market, by simultaneously providing incentives for doing so, and constraints that have to be negotiated with varying degree of success. Some, like Helios, decide to limit engagements with the market and keep their spiritual practices in a private space, characterized by strong interpersonal ties, in the logic of *Gemeinschaft*, but, in doing so, they remain invisible and hard to find for spiritual seekers. We situate these groups in a space of limited engagement with the market that engenders missed community-building opportunities. In avoiding any potentially delegitimizing practices, Helios ensures his authority as a Wiccan priest remains intact, albeit restricted in scope.

Other religious entrepreneurs engage with the market by entering the public sphere and promoting their initiatives, thus becoming easy to find by interested spiritual seekers. To legally carry out such initiatives, these agents need an organized form, which generates fixed costs. Associations like Luna's and Redbird's adopted various strategies to avoid the 'commercialization of spirituality' critique, including the legal form of a not-for-profit association; the provision of unpaid, voluntary work; frequent financial subsidies to the association's activities; low prices for spiritual initiatives, often barely sufficient to break even; and the waiving of fees for those in need. Such strategies situate these religious entrepreneurs' activities in a safe area of legitimate and seldom contested practices that attract a larger *Gesellschaft* of loosely connected spiritual seekers interested in Wicca/Neopaganism, who can be socialized in the community and eventually use these initiatives as entry points into *Gemeinschaft* groups. Within these associations' portfolio of activities, a particular relevance is assumed in workshops led by foreign religious leaders. Because of their status, acquired in more central places in their global Neopagan communities, these 'celebrities' often attract large audiences who are willing to pay to interact with them. At the same time, the higher prices of these initiatives expose these leaders, and the associations bringing them into peripheral areas such as Italy, to accusations of commercialism.

At the individual level, spiritual entrepreneurs like Luna and Redbird can also be personally accused of "enriching themselves with Wicca". Both engage with boundary work to situate their activities in a safe, legitimate space. Luna distinguishes between excessive lucre and fair compensation for the time and energy the teacher pours into transmitting specific techniques. By doing so, she invokes the logic of education – if people pay to improve their education in mundane domains, why shouldn't they do the same for spiritual knowledge and skills? Similarly,

Redbird distinguishes between spiritual activities that are informed by a gift giving or sharing logic, and her holistic professional practices, which are based on a therapeutic logic and therefore should be fairly compensated. If people pay to improve their health through traditional medicine, why should they not do the same with holistic medicine? By drawing on logics from adjacent fields, these informants try to shield themselves from delegitimizing critiques of using spirituality for personal gain. Their boundary work is, however, more often contested, leading to gossip and sometimes open confrontations that put these practices in a space of risky engagement with the market.

Overall, our study makes several theoretical contributions. First, our work extends Weber's (1964, 1968) theory on the sources of religious authority by identifying market success as a source of religious authority, one which is particularly relevant in the context of new religious movements (NRM) such as Neopaganism, where, unlike Abrahamic religions, traditional forms of religious authority might be less established. We also contribute to the literature that has examined religious authority in postmodern religions and spiritualities, where charismatic authority is democratized and every member can make authoritative claims (Laubach 2007; Truzzi 1971). Also in these contexts, where the individual is the primary source of authority on spiritual matters, market success can increase the credibility of religious leaders, and establish their credentials as facilitators of followers' capability to connect inside and listen to their "true self".

Our study also contributes to the emerging macromarketing literature that investigates religion. First, our study contributes to a better understanding of the reciprocal interaction between marketing and religion in the context of emerging religious movements. In their review, Drenten and McManus (2015) suggest that despite Mittelstaedt's (2002) work on how marketing

influences religion as a key area of interest for religion and marketing research, scholarship in this field is very limited. They also suggest that more research is needed to examine the reciprocal interaction between marketing and religion, and specifically “how marketing erodes, advances, or sustains religious structures and consumers’ religious practices” (p. 9). In this respect, our main contribution is the idea that there are limits to the authority the market lends to religious leaders: excessive (however defined) market success can indeed be a two-edged sword that delegitimizes instead of legitimizing those who are blessed by it. Specifically, we show that in the context of Wicca, the market facilitates the coalescence of *Gesellschaft*-type groups of spiritual seekers who, by interacting among themselves, can give rise to *Gemeinschaft*-type religious communities, where market exchange plays a negligible role. Additionally, our study illustrates that the marketplace/religion interface is a continuous process of negotiation and co-creation – sometimes peaceful, sometimes contested - that takes place between religious leaders and consumers. By illustrating the nuanced positions of Wiccan leaders in negotiating what is socially acceptable *vis à vis* their religious and market practices, our findings and subsequent framework highlight the importance of the socio-cultural context in determining which market practices are seen as appropriate and thus pursued. Wiccan leaders must engage in much boundary work with other practitioners if they wish to nurture a community of followers. As we show, some practices are deemed legitimate by most, and attract little critique. Others are more prone to scrutiny and can entail forms of delegitimization for those who adopt them. Boundary work is fraught with difficulties, and this makes some leaders avoid marketization altogether, but they then remain limited in scope and influence. In a neoliberal marketplace where the “democratization of religion” (Gauthier, Martikainen and Woodhead 2011, p. 264) is arguably increasing its social influence, we can clearly see the influence of consumer culture and the rise

of prosumers, who both consume and produce their own individualized belief systems and practices. Just as religion uses social authority to influence cultural beliefs and the expectations of those engaged in marketplace activities, so too does marketplace culture bring its own set of expectations to bear on religious practice (e.g. free choice), exerting its own form of social authority.

Our study also hints at the interplay between religion, spirituality and globalization in the context of Neopaganism (see Kale 2004). Empirical studies in macromarketing have often investigated how the globalization of markets, brands and products affect local consumers and their religious beliefs (Drenten and McManus 2015; see among others Eckardt and Mahi 2012). Our study focuses instead on the little understood market-mediated globalization of religious movements. From its origin in the British Isles, Wicca has spread to Europe, North America, and elsewhere. Our study has highlighted the link between these macro-level processes and the activities of spiritual seekers in Italy who became religious entrepreneurs by inviting foreign religious leaders and, as a result, building their own religious authority. Globalization brings with it a “new spiritual ecology” (Kale 2004, p. 102), and we believe our framework elaborates on and sheds light on these processes in relation to the Wiccan “spiritscape” (Kale 2004, p. 102). By focusing on the Wiccan religion, this study has responded to the recent call for more diversity in macromarketing research on religion beyond monotheistic, mainstream religions (Drenten and McManus 2015) and has sought depth rather than breadth, in order to convey the lived experiences of practicing Wiccans in a particular socio-cultural context. Much work remains for macromarketers to explore the analytic generalizability of this framework, and how it may vary across other market and religion intersections and cultural contexts.

Endnotes (Manual)

1. At the theoretical level, religion (religiosity) and spirituality were used interchangeably in the past; starting from the 1980s, however, a number of contributions across the social sciences have attempted to distinguish the two constructs, often characterizing the former in negative terms (Zinnbauer and Pargament 2005; see also Kale 2004; and Rinallo, Scott and Maclaran 2013, for a review of marketing and consumer research on the topic). As noted by Zinnbauer and Pargament (2005), “[t]he most egregious examples [of excessively rigid characterizations] are those that place a substantive, static, institutional, objective, belief-based, ‘bad’ religiousness in opposition to a functional, dynamic, personal, subjective, experience-based, ‘good’ spirituality” (p. 24). Others, while highlighting differences between religion and spirituality, propose that the former can be a pathway to the latter, as religion can “be viewed as a road map for spirituality, a road map that contains in its beliefs and symbols the accumulated wisdom of those who have made the journey before us. Spirituality, in and of itself, does not have to be predicated by any particular religion” (Kale 2004, p. 95). In this paper, our use of the two terms is consistent with Kale (2004).

2. The authors are not based in institutions that have an Ethical Review Board to which approval for this study could be asked for. Given the sensitive nature of the study and the stigma often faced by Wiccan practitioners, extra care was taken to ensure that the study was conducted in an ethical and respectful manner. The three authors extensively discussed among themselves relevant procedures, which included – as specified above – the gathering of additional data in the form of long interviews from informants expressly recruited for this study; the circulation of early drafts of this paper to the informants whose life stories are included in this paper, and a panel of nine experts in Pagan Studies. Overall, those contacted encouraged us and found that the manuscript is culturally sensitive and resonant. One raised a concern that in countries with smaller Neopagan communities such as Italy, informants to academic studies can be more easily identified. We revised the research findings accordingly by providing as little identifying information as possible to increase informant anonymity.

3. Some of our informants obtain part of their revenues from activities that are to some extent linked to their role as religious leaders. For example, Luna receives compensation for teaching ritual skills and Redbird for the organization of events and spiritual healing services (see the Research Findings section). As our findings show, these activities are symbolically distanced from the spiritual core of Neopaganism through boundary work based on,

respectively, an educational or therapeutic logic. The general point remains, however, that in the context we studied nobody fully sustains him/herself thanks to Wicca – even taking these ancillary activities into consideration.

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