

## CHIRP Lab - Religion and Power - Video Transcript

Hi there, I'm Megan Breen, a history student at the University of Portland. I'm a part of the collaborative humanities investigating religion in power or the CHIRP lab which is an interdisciplinary working group. This video is a part of a series addressing key concepts that play an important role in our ongoing research. In this video I'm going to be discussing particularly religion and power. In our previous video on religion we established a broad definition of religion as a symbolic tradition that mediates the experience of the transcendent and cultivates a sense of identity. In this video I'm going to identify some of these different power dynamics through both conventional institutional religious practice and broader lived religions.

So in our video 'what is power?' We discussed in a deeper context power as a phenomenon best described by its impact. But let's review some brief definitions of the various signatures of power offered by Mitchell Dean. We'll discuss these in terms of A and B. A and B could be a dynamic between groups, individuals, governments etc. So power-over, in power-over A has power over B to the extent that they can get B to do something B would not otherwise do. In this situation A holds all the power and B does not hold any. Power-with A has some power over B, B has some power over A. In this both groups hold some of that power and it's more of a consensual shared relationship. And on the right, power-to, this can be a little bit difficult to tease out from power-with but in power-to we're focused on the outcome. So A is able to affect B to get a desired outcome A may originally hold more power but they're elevating the voices of B and giving power-to them.

Let's start with examples of power-over. So the examples I'm going to offer here are clericalism and parenting. Both of these get at the idea of a caste system that places one group of people over another in a hierarchical fashion but we're also going to show that it can be oppressive or a good thing. So on the left hand side we have a picture of the pope. In this picture he's literally being carried over a group of people. He's the one with the power in this situation. He's the holy figure and the masses are not the ones with power, instead they're supposed to listen to the ideas of the pope. And in parenting, some parents can exercise power-over their kids however this is in a way that can be beneficial for the child's development. The power dynamics of our household help cultivate a communal identity which is key when we're defining lived religion.

All right, next we're going to talk about power-with. So, the two examples we're going to go over are translation of religion across cultures and artistry of performance art. So when a religion is open to the influence of other cultures and they're integrating symbols of the other culture into their own, they're sharing that power. They're not erasing the culture that they're coming into, instead they're uniting the community through these shared practices and rituals. Another one that may not seem as obvious, is artistry or performance art. Whether that's the dynamics between two collaborative artists, a band or a cast in a theatrical performance or the dynamics between the audience and the performers. In this the ritual is marked by a deep sense of listening so the audience is deeply listening to what the performers are offering them and

empowering them with and the audience is coming away with a message that the performers have delivered.

Lastly, let's talk about power-to. So, a great example of this is when a religion supports the liberation and inherent rights of an oppressed group. Particularly in this example, I'm going to use a pro-union catholic stance. So, historically the Catholic Church has supported and elevated the voices of workers unions. The particular example we have here on the left is a group of graduate workers at Boston College arguing that the University is betraying its Jesuit values and refusing to recognize their union. So in this example, the Catholic Church is actually not granting power-to the union workers, however the students are arguing against this and saying that historically this is not congruent with the beliefs the Catholic Church has practiced. In my last example for power-to liberal arts education. So liberal arts education is intended to be a series of practices that provide students with skills and abilities to determine the past of their lives in their future. So that means that giving someone more options for their future is inherently a form of giving power-to that individual you're empowering them to have the choice with where they're going in life. And through the courses and studies that liberal arts education offers, they're granting this to their students from the institution.

So in conclusion, religion, whether institutional or lived practices, is always exercising some form of power; power-over, power-with, or power-to. Whether that be for empowering purposes or oppressive depends on a certain example and situation. The CHRIP lab is interested in both of these concepts. We don't want to look at just the oppressive, we also want to recognize the benefits that this can offer.

Thank you so much for listening, if you're interested more in the definitions that we offer in our lab for power and religion please check out our videos: what is power? and what is religion? They take a deeper dive into it and also give some great examples and people to look into further for more information. Thank you so much!