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| Postmodernism theory |
| **Key Concepts:**   * Postmodernists believe that the UK and other Western societies have experienced major economic and cultural change in the past 20 years – they claim this transformation from modern to postmodern society has implications for religious organisations * Hunt (2003) observes that postmodernism does not provide a coherent theory of society – it offers a “series of interpretations of contemporary social life” * Pomos argue that over the past 40 years the UK has experienced fundamental change – once characterised by certainty, it was a manufacturing nation and people were born into statuses and hierarchies e.g. class, patriarchy, age, ethnicity and religious affiliation – individuals had little or no control over these social processes – big ‘truths’ such as science, political ideologies and world religions were used by those in power to explain to the less powerful why the world was organised in the way it was – but pomos state that today the UK is characterised by uncertainty and fluidity e.g. the UK is no longer dependent on manufacturing, and consequently relationships and authority based on social class are allegedly no longer important. The UK today is a service economy aka it is organised around the consumption of goods and info, as well as being more media-saturated, and receptive to other cultural and economic global influences * Pomos argues that in postmodernist societies, there are no longer absolute truths – Lyotard (1984) argues that ideologies no longer exist, and that people have become disillusioned with metanarratives (no longer believing that there is one true religion or belief system). Postmodern societies accept there are many ways of looking at the social world and that there are multiple ideas and wisdoms – there is also a greater choice in postmodern societies for constructing personal identity and lifestyle: people are no longer forced down social paths. People are now more individualistic – postmodern societies are pluralist societies in which people freely choose to construct their identities from a diverse range of sources.   **Hervieu-Leger (2000)**   * argues that if religious communities want to stay healthy and vibrant, they must pass down memory, traditions, beliefs and practices to the next generation via the churches, family life, formal education and everyday routine * However, she argues that conventional mainstream religions have lost their status and authority today, because they do not suit postmodernist societies that are constantly changing * People have become less capable of handing down all these things to younger people because they have competition from other views (both religious and social) of how the world works * People are more likely to subscribe to rationalism, individualism and moral relativism. They reject belief systems that claim a monopoly over truth and instead see ‘truth’ and ‘morality’ as relative (a variety of viewpoints containing ‘grains of truths’) * There is also more of a demand for individualism and freedom of choice. Hervieu-Leger says there is now a market place of competing religious and philosophical beliefs, in which people can shop around for religious or spiritual beliefs that are tailored to them as an individual. * Societies are therefore experiencing a ‘cultural amnesia’; young people are now less likely to inherit a fixed and compulsory religious identity. They can now choose their own spiritual paths or ignore religion and spirituality altogether.   **Lyon (2000)**   * Argues that in postmodern societies traditional religions have become dis-embedded or de-institutionalised, because of the globalisation of the mass media * The global media via satellite channels and live internet streaming has lifted religious beliefs out of traditional institutions (Churches) in which they have been embedded for hundreds of years, and made them available in the privay of people’s homes * Therefore, religion is no longer characterised by a collective act of worship – it has become individualised * Globalisation has expanded religious consciousness by introducing people to a greater range of religious and spiritual ideas, especially those taken from non-Christian * So, rather than being embedded in one religion over the course of their lifetime, people are now spiritual shoppers, sampling religious and spiritual wares from a global supermarket of beliefs and practices * This ‘pick and mix’ by postmodern spiritual ‘shoppers’ helps them to express their spirituality or to find meaning in their lives   **Religion: Competing for Consumer Attention**   * Religion in postmodern society is now treated like any other commodity – they must compete for consumer attention in a globalised religious marketplace known for its greater diversity and choice * If a religion cannot keep up with the constant change found in postmodern societies, it may fail altogether or have to re-invent itself * However, Lyon (2000) argues that the new forms of global spirituality, which have become more visible and available because of globalisation, mean that postmodern society is actually characterised by religious resurgence and revival (aka the comeback) in the form of both new unconventional forms of spirituality and a rise in fundamentalist religious ideas and practices |
| Theoretical evaluation |
| * Bruce (2002) argues that just because there is a variety of religions for ‘consumers’ to choose from, it doesn’t mean it is a characteristic of postmodernism – there has *always* been a plurality of religions * Furthermore, the evidence suggests that globally the world religions Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism and Buddhism are probably more popular than ever – there is little sign that they (or science) have declined as metanarratives * Bruce also argues that many of the new religions are weak religions – he suggests they fail to exert a profund effect on people’s lives, moralities and identities. He claims that many new religions go through a phase of being fashionable but they often fade into obscurity – this compares poorly to the lifelong commitment that millions make to the world religions * Bruce is also sceptical that the spread of global media has disembedded traditional religion – he argues that those religions that use TV or the internet are mainly preacfhing to the converted – most viewers are already church attenders who supplement their weekly attendance with media extras * Bruce also rejects the postmodernist notion that group identities are no longer important – he concludes that postmodernism has greatly exaggerated the rise of individualism and the decline of traditional sources of authority such as social class |
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| Conclusion:   * Contemporary arguments only cloud understanding of religious theory of society. The rise of Fundamentalism has increased led to greater conflict in society and in places like Afghanistan led to great **social change** and upheaval thus disregarding much Functionalist thought. The rise of fundamentalism also seems to undermine the arguments of a **pick and mix culture** as the definition of fundamentalism is to reduce choice. However It has been argued by theologians that Fundamentalism is a reponse to rapid social change and therefore supports the ideas of Malinowski. Fundamentalism in The Middle East supports the ideas of the problems attached to globalisation and fundamentalism might be seen as a response to of the threats of **disemedding**. * It is also difficult to use Britain as an example of Functionalism being a correct interpretation of religion’s role in society. **Secularisation** has been continuing to reduce the power of religion over British people. If only 24% of people in the UK regularly attend religious service how can it be argued that religion has **ideological** and **social control**? |

POSTMODERNISM