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‘Multiple Secularities: Religion and Modernity in the Global Age’ – Introduction

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Many of the key features of the contemporary era of global modernity bear powerful connections to religion and secularity. Worldwide migration brings with it the movement of religious identities and practices. Emergent forms of religious diversity challenge societies, especially those who have been marked by close connections between state, national identity and organized religion. More than before, migratory movements and questions regarding the rights of ‘newcomers’ are today at the centre of struggles over citizenship and maintain intimate links to struggles over the expansion of native residents’ citizenship rights as in the case of gay and lesbian mobilizations. In this context, the question of whether the religious tradition migrants belong to, and which presumably shapes migrants’ ethics, conforms to the values of host societies has drawn great attention in public debate. The demands of religious minorities to freely and equitably practice their religion and the practices of states to accommodate them are assessed in light of the values of democracy and human rights, and states, religious communities as well as ‘secular’ movements usually claim these values for themselves when justifying their lines of action in front of increasingly globalized audiences. Likewise, terrorism just as the so-called ‘war on terror’ responding to it and the forms of religious profiling of victims and potential suspects they engender, are fuelling contestations over religion and secularity. This suggests that secularity is often implied in social conflicts or processes of change that have other issues as their primary object. At the same time, however, the way secularity figures within configurations of modernity is fundamentally shaped by the *long durée* of civilizational history, by the way religion affects local cosmologies and

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spiritual ontologies (see Swidler, this issue) and is related to authority and forms of organization (see Nelson and Gorski in *International Sociology* vol 29 no 1, January 2014).

Migration and mobility, human rights and democracy, citizenship struggles, or counter-terrorism: the way in which societies respond to the religious dimensions of these issues is, more often than not, borne from *particular* understandings of the secular. These understandings, in turn, can reflect the historical trajectory of religious traditions leaving deep imprints on political cultures. But as we witness today, not least during the uprisings in the Middle East known as the 'Arab Spring' they can also be 'up for debate' and become strongly, sometimes violently, contested. We suggest the notion of 'Multiple Secularities' to capture some widely shared sociological sensibilities about the fact that the ways secularity is construed and operates must be divorced from monolithic concepts of modernity.

It is true that for more than two decades theorists of modernity have already grappled with the new visibility of religion and made efforts to accommodate religious resurgences, new forms of public religion and new religious movements within conceptualizations of modernity to move beyond linear and deterministic narratives of modernization. In response to the same observations, theories of secularization have become subjects of intense criticism and given way to notions of 'de-secularization' (Berger, 1999). Very recently, a further set of studies began to interrogate and question monolithic understandings of secularism, broadly construed in terms of the institutional arrangements specifying the relationships between, and often the separation of, religion and the state (Cady and Hurd, 2010; Kuru, 2009). However, while in such contexts religion is often readily construed as a marker of cultural difference and identity (of countries, regions, social groups), the secular is still peculiarly seen as homogenizing, as something outside culture. Contrary to that, we contend that drawing on Eisenstadt's notion of 'Multiple Modernities' (Eisenstadt, 2000) leads us to think about the secular in terms of its cultural diversity and the way it is shaped by both civilizational histories and global interconnectedness.

With this special issue we propose to move beyond conceptualizations of secularity as homogenizing and explore how social constructions of the religious-secular divide, including their institutionalized practices, acquire specific cultural meanings in different parts of the world. With a strong conceptual focus on comparative research we examine how shared but also contested forms and practices of distinguishing religious and secular spheres of society shape and define the meaning of religious identities, membership, practices and modes of incorporation.

The idea of 'Multiple Secularities' as a paradigm links up with sociological concerns over public religion (Casanova, 2007), 'conditions of belief' (Taylor, 2007) and the variegated genealogies of the secular (Asad, 2003) and thus speaks to widely shared observations. However, we have also elaborated this notion in terms of a theoretical concept that can serve to guide comparative research and the development of new research questions (Schuh, Burchardt and Wohlrab-Sahr, 2012; Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt, 2012). We suggest that secularity should be understood as the sometimes latent, sometimes explicit forms of distinction between religious and non-religious spheres and practices in society and that secularities should be analysed not so much in quantitative terms ('more'

or 'less' of it) but in terms of its cultural underpinnings. The cultural sociology of secular modernities we propose is chiefly interested in the shifting symbolic meanings that the secular acquires within historically specific relations of political power and epistemic authority and the ways in which religious-secular dynamics are interpreted in the light that culturally resonant visions of modernity throw on it. It seems to us that in order to interrogate the analytical potential of this, as well as other, theorizations of secularity it is both necessary and productive to broaden our view beyond the "usual suspects" of secularism research (France, Turkey etc.) and to question the registering of data of all sorts in terms of stylized national models. In other words, by recognizing the manifold moments of global interconnectedness and, as Beyer emphasizes in his article (this issue), the 'globalization of observation', research on multiple secularities becomes a key component of a truly international sociology.

The articles in this special issue interrogate the forms and meanings of secularity in the global age in the light of three thematic concerns:

- 1) Meanings and Pathways: The cultural meanings of religious/secular distinctions differ. But how are these differences linked to specific histories of religious and ethnic diversity, of processes of state-formation and nation-building? How do they document the social conflicts that occurred in these processes? In countries such as India secularity is straightforwardly addressed as 'secularism'. In the US the dominant notions are 'non-establishment' and 'free exercise' of religion. What are the cultural and conceptual proxies through which secularity is addressed in different societies and what are the sacralized values attached to it?
- 2) Global Interconnectedness: While different notions and institutionalizations of secularity emerge from different histories, it is clear that they are also critically shaped through civilizational encounters and globalization. Historically, this has happened through military and colonial conquest and missionary movements. Currently, the entanglements of different secularities are often associated with transnational migration, new regimes of religious pluralism, emerging patterns of postnational citizenship and the changing place of religion in international politics. At the same time, the definition of secular spheres is associated with international human rights regimes and the expansion of a world polity made up of NGOs and other transnational organizations. Under which conditions and with which consequences do such mutual entanglements between different territorially grounded notions of secularity or between local cultures and transnational secular arenas unfold? Why do some societies or groups develop indigenized notions of secularity while others reject it as alien? In response to which influences are understandings of secularity reinterpreted?
- 3) Institutionalizations: The forms and prominence of secularity invariably depends on the practices and arrangements through which they are institutionalized. As Nelson and Gorski discuss in their contribution which will appear in *International Sociology* 29(1), in Europe the notion of the secular may mainly be associated with emancipation from religion, but the emergence of secular spaces critically hinged upon the success or failure of what they call 'the parochial package'. Lehmann, in his article, points out how the secular comes to be embodied in

hugely varying practices of the 'state management of religion'. What then are the concrete forms through which dominant ideas of secularity are institutionalized? How can secularity be positioned as an analytical term encompassing symbols of protest where such institutionalizations are absent, fragile or remiss? How do such institutionalizations shift in the face of the ongoing decoupling of territorially based state politics and deterritorialized forms of belonging? Are there alternative cohabitations of religion and modernity that forgo institutionalizations of secularity altogether?

This issue starts with an article by Marian Burchardt, Monika Wohlrab-Sahr, and Ute Wegert, in which they discuss the concept of 'Multiple Secularities' with regard to two postcolonial settings: India and South Africa. The article explores and develops the notion of 'guiding ideas' of secularity that serve to orient institutionalizations of the religious-secular divide with reference to fundamental problems, and argues for its significance for a cultural sociology of secularity.

On the background of these societies' specific histories of religious diversity and social inequality, of colonial and postcolonial entanglements and national emancipation, tolerance and non-discrimination have become key concerns in both of them and are closely related to the issue of secularity. However, in both cases the authors find that these guiding ideas are challenged by competing, holistic notions of 'Indian culture' and 'African Neo-Traditionalism'. While being contested, in India secularity has become part of historical constructions of an Indian past and thereby been indigenized. In South Africa, on the contrary, a 'secular tradition' was difficult to construct. Secularity became part of the package of liberal values of individual freedoms and human rights, which is politically powerful but remains 'thin' in terms of cultural resonance.

An interesting contrast is given by the second article in this issue, written by Gudrun Krämer, which deals with secularity in the Arab Middle East by making use of José Casanova's (1994) distinctions between three modes of secularization as functional differentiation, religious decline, and the privatization of religion. With reference to the notion of secularity as the differentiation between religious and non-religious domains, Krämer argues that such differentiation has indeed occurred in the Arab Middle East as much as in other parts of the Muslim world. The question, however, is to what extent these processes have been perceived as legitimate, useful, and desirable, and by whom. Viewed from the angle of the 'Multiple Secularities'-approach, this problem begs the question about the guiding ideas of secularity. Here, Krämer sees only limited potentials: A secular approach, she argues, continues to be widely seen as a loss of coherence and integrity rather than a means to liberate creative energies and to enhance social and national integration. Islamic law or normativity is closely linked to the notion of the *ordre public* in this region of the world.

Peter Beyer addresses the issue of secularity from the perspective of religion-state-relations and their changing relationships. Discussing prominent theorists who try to make sense of this transformation – Peter L. Berger, Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor, José Casanova, Rajeev Bhargava, and Tariq Modood – Beyer explores the shift to what he calls the 'post-Westphalian' condition. By that he means the (relative) de-linking of the structural modelling of religion and state, which weakens the close coordination of

religion and state identity and state structures that has characterized the Westphalian model. It is not only the state, but other social systems as well that religion can be related to. What religion is has become much more confused and in fact problematic. Exploring the cases of Turkey, India, and Canada, Beyer concludes that Post-Westphalianism more than anything else implies a pluralisation of options for the relation between the 'secular' and the 'religious'. If this will eventually lead to a new form of homogenization on the global level, is not yet clear.

In terms of 'Multiple Secularities', this suggests that specific guiding ideas of religious-secular distinctions have become available in different parts of the world and potentially lead to struggles over concepts that are promoted by different groups of actors below the state-level and instrumentalised for their specific interests. To what degree, however, they may find resonance on the background of specific national and regional histories, and by whom, remains an open question.

David Lehmann addresses the same question of changing religion-state-relations in his article on the shifting frontiers of secularism in Europe, the USA, and Brazil. But he addresses it from a very different angle than Peter Beyer and comes to an unorthodox and extraordinarily original reading of recent developments. While for most scholars human rights, freedom of religion and free religious markets (as outcomes of the separation of religion and the state) are the unquestioned normative bottom-line, Lehmann adopts a more sceptical perspective. Instead of focussing on what is good for individual religious groups, he suggests, we should also start asking what is beneficial for society as a whole. By contrasting 'religion as heritage' and 'religion as belief' (as represented by conversion-led movements), he argues that it is the latter that creates contemporary tensions. These tensions, Lehmann argues, arise because of 'a shift in the nature of religious claims from heritage-based to a basis in personal belief; (...) the influence of conversion-led movements and the non-availability of impersonal or impartial criteria for the recognition and adjudication of claims for religious exemption and privilege; (...) the legacy of exemptions and privileges formerly accorded to religious institutions; (...) and the political instrumentalization of religion.'

Sam Nelson and Philip Gorski (*International Sociology* 29/1) address the same development from a different perspective. In their analysis of the Euro-American divergence in the trajectories of secularization and religious change, they argue that it is the dominant parochial form of religious community in Europe – bundled 'together with local solidarity, civilizational identity, property relations, political authority, and territorial divisions' – that made the effects of 'modernization' more severe. In contrast to that, they argue, newer, de-parochialized forms of religious community (the conversion-led movements addressed by Lehmann) proved to be better compatible with the great social transformations of the 19th century. But they attribute this not alone to the 'market structure' of religion in America. Catholicism in Europe, the authors argue, was much less affected by these transformations, because in Catholic countries old forms of extra-parochial forms of religious organization survived and often grew. Of special importance for such forms of organization and for religious revivalism were imperial environments of religious change and foreign missions, which are regularly overlooked in supply-side theories.

Ann Swidler's article, finally, explores the meanings and carriers of secularity in Africa in the context of modernity and discusses how secularity is configured within

three distinct domains of authority, community and the sacred. She construes these domains as three 'religious traditions': Axial religions, chieftaincy systems and globalized modernity, represented above all by international NGOs and the framework of human rights. She finds that NGOs, while offering the insignia of modernity and secularity, are rarely successful in providing the terms on which people may really become modern, autonomous individuals. Here, Swidler takes up a Weberian notion of modernity as lines of action rationalized along the means-ends axis. Religion, especially Pentecostal Christianity, is not only deeply committed to but also a real and effective carrier of modernity in that it allows people to become autonomous individuals while at the same time creating new kinds of collective capacities.

Importantly, in most parts of Africa contestations, let alone judicial conflicts, about the place of religion in state institutions or the public domain in terms by which Europeans, Americans or Asians understand them, are quite rare. The view from Africa, instead, reminds us of the continued significance of Weberian concerns with the power of religion to shape aspirations to modernity, modern personhood and the forms of authority and community in which it may flourish. It is the notion of spiritual protection that allows Pentecostals to develop life strategies outside the domains of inherited loyalty that leads to rationalization and that may perhaps provide the ground for new modes of secularity similar to those introduced by the Calvinists Weber describes in the 'Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism'.

Taken together, religious-secular dynamics are addressed in these five articles from different perspectives: (1) from the perspective of cultural formations and the meanings that are associated with them – in negative or positive terms (Burchardt, Wohlrab-Sahr and Wegert; Krämer); (2) from the perspective of state-religion-relationships and their transformation in response to globalization and the rise of conversion-led movements (Beyer and Lehmann); and (3) from the perspective of conducts of life and their de-traditionalization (Swidler). All of these perspectives take into account the multiplicity of cultural and structural patterns and their mutual influences and entanglements, and discuss their consequences in different parts of the world. Whether in the field of politics, law, mass media, of life styles and life conduct, the relationships between the religious and the non-religious are far from being homogenized, but the distinction between religion and secularity, its interpretations and contestations have lost nothing of their significance.

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