

‘Uprooted’ religion in a cosmopolitan world: a “second round” for religion in Second Modernity?

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore how the social role of religion is re-defined in Second Modernity. More specifically, it analyzes the way the religious systems function and ‘glocally’ interact with other social institutions in risk societies (Beck) of a runaway world (Giddens) in times of ambiguity (Bauman). Based on the theoretical approach of reflexive modernization, the analysis focuses on the conditions under which the religious discourse could be incorporated into a “cosmopolitan form of statehood”. In this regard, the analysis brings into the fore the question whether religions could contribute to the cosmopolitan vision of peace promoting the universal respect of human dignity, or they carry a collusive burden that leads irreversibly mankind to controversy.

Keywords: Social theory, Religion, Second Modernity, World Risk Society, Cosmopolitanism, Beck, International Relations, Refugees

Part A. Uprooted people, uprooted religions

The role of religion in Second Modernity is under re-examination as vividly described by Ulrich Beck. There are multiple religious systems worldwide within each of whom different micro-groups of ideas, faith communities and streams coexist or collide (Beck 2010). The religious field consists a *dynamic* social field that is in a continuous and two-way dialogue with the surrounding reality, as it intersects with the political,

social, ideological features of its epoch. In Beckford's words, "religion is 'real' in the sense that it affects the lives of people and societies" (Beckford 2008, 24). Religion -beyond its theological meaning bestowal- is a multifunctional social institution and at the same time a power structure, an exchange network, a framework for interpreting the world, a symbolic system that gives meaning, hope, values and identity.

The 20th century was a century of religious turmoil. People were forced to move, carrying the altars to their luggage. Religion was globalized and the development of communication media created the conditions for the instantaneous transmission of religious messages (Barnavi 2007, 14). In a globally interconnected world, where people come in contact with any differentiated reference, both the concepts of familiar and strange are transformed once again and bring into fore new dilemmas: what will be the role of local perspective within the international context of modern reality? How the respect for the collective identity together with the respect for the choice of individuals to shape their own identities are to be ensured? "How does one deal with the otherness of the other" (Beck et al. 2014, 210) when this is not a far-away reality but an actual condition within the local reality? Greece, Italy and Spain were called to face several of these questions as a result of the recent large-scale refugee and migrant movement on their borders, mainly after the outbreak of war in Syria. The new reality proved to be dense and multifactorial. As the socio-economic framework is dramatically changing, the traditional social networks of the southern-European "welfare-net" seem to reach their limits (Tsironis & Almpani 2018). These countries with a long Orthodox and Roman Catholic tradition host the highest rate of refugees and immigrants since the Second World War. In most cases the cultural and religious references of the "newcomers" differ from what one might call the 'traditional' horizon of meaning in these countries. Therefore, not only the cultural and ethnotic, but also the religious identities of refugee and asylum seekers challenged the way(s) we were thinking about political stability in Second Modernity.

The European societies have been awakened as from lethargy to realize that human suffering and displacement neither belong to the past nor they are extracted from documentaries referring to distant societies (Tsironis 2016). According to the UNHCR (2019), we are now witnessing the greatest level of displacement on record. At the end of 2018, an

unprecedented 70.8 million around the world have been forced to flee. Among them are nearly 25.9 million refugees, about half of whom are under the age of 18. Children, men and women escaping violence and persecution and searching for safety. These are not just numbers, but lives. The lives of people who pay the price of a world in conflict. More than 2,000 (2,275) people perished in the Mediterranean in 2018. For many people though, the sea crossing is just the final step of a journey that has involved travel through conflict zones and deserts, the dangers of kidnapping and torture, and the threat from traffickers in human beings.

In the 21st century, therefore, after two World Wars and the Cold War, the terms of the political and social status quo seem to be re-defined. While the worldwide situation at international relations level has so far been regulated by international political agreements, the wars and the major refugee waves of recent decades have illuminated “micropolitics”, focusing on ethnicity and religion as the main factors. The groupings of ‘us’ and ‘others’, of ‘familiar’ and ‘strange’ are liquidized within the multivariate fermentations of global geopolitics. As Zygmunt Bauman claims, the dispersion of the modern world unintendingly results in the transformation of the distant stranger into “neighbor of the next door”, leading to a moral panic that has been shaking intensely Europe since 2015 (see Bauman, 2016). With his own words, “the underclass and others like them – homeless refugees, the *uprooted*, the ‘not belonging’, the asylum-seekers-but-not-finders, the sans papiers – tend to attract our resentment and aversion. All those people seem to have been made to the measure of our fears. They are walking illustrations to which our nightmares wrote the captions” (Bauman 2011, 158-59).

Part B. The “re-emergence” of religion in a world risk society

Back in the 70’s Roland Robertson noted that although the research on religion had always been in the core of sociological analysis, the end of the Second World War marked a paradigm shift, as religion got away from the foreground and turned into a research field of particular interest (Robertson 1971, 112). The analyses focused on the so called “end of religion” or the “disenchantment” (Weber 1919; Gerth & Wright Mills 1948; Gauchet 1997) of the world did not indicate that there will no longer be people in Europe believing in God. They rather interlined the

trends and possibilities (more in Europe than elsewhere) that God in today’s world is no longer conceived as the unique source of meaning, religion does not define alone the societal values, and it does not give the only context to the hopes and fears of people. The reasoning behind the prophecies about the ominous fate of religion was based on the conviction that phenomena inherent in modernity would inevitably lead to the decline of social and political dynamics of religion (Wilson 2000; Bruce 2002). However, as Jonathan Fox notes (2006), instead of collapsing under the weight of the modernization and secularization processes, the presence of religious factor did not weaken as expected. Religions evolved to survive and thrive in the cultural context of modern societies.

A characteristic example of this development is the example of the TIME Magazine (Tsironis 2018: 100, 115). In April 1966, the magazine published an unprecedented for the American society front cover which raised the question whether God was dead (“Is God Dead?”). For the first time, the front cover was actually published without a photo. It was so influential that was considered emblematic, while the issue of ‘falling religion’ as a social variable continued for decades to concern the mass media in the United States. Within less than four years, at Christmas of 1969, the magazine with a new cover story raised the question whether God was coming back to life. Since 2000, the questions have focused on issues such as the intersection of religion and politics (“Faith, God & the Oval Office”, 2004) or the conflict between religion and science (“God vs. Science”, 2006). It becomes clear that the interest was no longer focused on whether religion would continue to be present in the public sphere, but how and to what extent it affects the social reality.

Over the last twenty years, a series of dramatic events have led to the “re-emergence” of religion in the public discourse. The concept of religion has once again been included in the political analysis, in geo-strategic policy-making, in the defense of fundamental human rights, in mass media titles, while religious communities themselves are interfering in a more prominent way in the public debate. This interest seems to be so intense that it brings into focus a discourse on the reawakening analysis of political science and international relations towards this field (Fox 2001; Philpott 2002; 2009; Petito & Hatzopoulos 2003; Thomas 2005; Wald & Wilcox 2006; Haynes 2007; Bellin 2008; Snyder 2011; Toft, Philpott & Shah 2011; Shah, Stepan & Toft 2012; Fox & Sandal 2016;

Fahy & Haynes 2018). Tsironis (2018) underlined that although the term ‘*return*’ is not the most appropriate term to describe the theoretical attempts in the field of sociological analysis, religion is undoubtedly a field full of challenging questions for social theory and social sciences (see also Beckford 2010).

Ulrich Beck chose the conceptual framework of ‘Second Modernity’ to describe the contemporary social and cultural paradigm (Sørensen & Christiansen 2013). Beck emphasized the need of a paradigm shift in social sciences so that the analysis would take into account the interaction of global and local perspective (or the “glocal” interactions¹) in an interconnected, multimodal world (Beck 2009; Beck & Grande 2010). From 1998 onwards, he writes with progressive intensity about the *cosmopolitan vision* and the *cosmopolitan condition* with a special reference to the European context (Beck 1998; 2000; 2003; 2004a; 2006; 2007a; 2007b; 2008; 2012; Beck & Grande 2007a; 2007b). The cosmopolitan perspective of his social theory is intertwined with his core position about the perspective of *synergy* among people in a world that is rapidly transformed into a global neighborhood. The consolidation of globalization has reached such an extent that “the experience of a shared present and a universal proximity” (Beck 2010, 41), which characterizes the modern world, underlines the global dimensions of any cultural experience. Beck uses the term ‘*cosmopolitanization*’ (Beck & Sznaider 2010, 387; Beck 2011a) in correspondence with the term ‘globalization’ to depict the dynamic nature of an underway process, that is an *unintended* and *lived* cosmopolitanism. In his own words:

“*Cosmopolitanization*’ [...] means latent cosmopolitanism, unconscious cosmopolitanism, passive cosmopolitanism which shapes reality as side effects of global trade or global threats such as climate change, terrorism or financial crises. My life, my body, my ‘individual existence’ become part of another world, of foreign cultures, religions, histories and global interdependencies, without my realizing or expressly wishing it” (Beck 2006, 19).

The paradox of our times is that even if the world seems more unified than ever, it concurrently seems to be in pieces. In the contemporary cultural paradigm, individuals are now expected to seek biographical

1 For the conceptual approach of ‘glocalization’ see Robertson 1995; Bauman 1998; Roudometof 2016.

solutions to systemic contradictions (Beck 1992a, 137). Today, more than ever, they are aware of the changes and the developments that occur in a stormy pace around them. As Giddens (2017) characteristically notes “there is a sense in which *we are all migrants now*, whether or not we move physically from one part of the world to another. Via digital technology, most of us are in touch on an everyday basis with a diversity of cultures and opinions”. Bauman adds accordingly: “This is, arguably, where the moral problem of our globalizing world is rooted – in that abysmal gap between the suffering we see and our ability to help the sufferers” (Bauman 2001, 52).

The so-called ‘refugee crisis’ bears all the typical dilemmas of Second Modernity. It is a “liquid” reality with international extensions that countries are called to manage at national level, it is a collective issue with which refugees will try to cope individually and finally, it is a trans-local challenge that local communities will be called upon to face in their own frame (Tsironis 2013). As panic and terror against the possible consequences that the mass influx of desperate, uprooted people may have, paralyze the EU’s political and social function, it is not uncommon for the European citizens to display reflective defences by supporting solutions that merely shift the problem beyond national borders - to their neighbors, instead of reflecting on the structural causes of this situation and asking the political authorities to be held accountable for their international practice. However, as Beck points out, in a world where the social experience is inextricably linked to the concepts of *risk* and *ontological insecurity* (see Beck 1987; 1992b; 1996a; 1999; 2009; 2014; Possamai-Inesedy 2002), the awareness of the global risk cultivates to some extent the realization that all people commonly share the worldwide risks and opportunities, without time-bound constraints. This fact, combined with the universal interdependence, is related to the development of ‘cosmopolitan imagined communities’ (Beck, 2011b).

Part C. Towards a ‘cosmopolitan form of statehood’: what’s the role of religion?

The continuous planet-wide interconnection, one of the dominant features of Second Modernity, leads to the ‘de-territorialization’ of religions, like any other traditional cultural system. Beck argues that the interpretative approach to the social role of religious reference in the modern

world through the lens of global perspective leads to the conclusion that it is not about the disappearance of religion but the weakening of Christianity in the historical centers of its political and symbolic power in Europe (Beck 2010, 23). The “de-Europeanization” of religion signifies the fact that while European churches are emptying, Christianity as a world religion is experiencing a remarkable spread. He also notes that the renewed interest in religion over the last years in modern European democracies does not indicate the ‘revival’ of traditional religions, but rather suggests the reconsideration of the religious factor dynamics within the European political context (Beck 2010, 33).

In an attempt to sociologically approach the experience of faith in a world risk society, Beck focuses on yet another changing condition: he claims that religion has lost the justification to fully manage all life perspectives (Beck 2014, 83). He coined the term “Risk Society” arguing that the risk is inherent in the current phase of modernity (Beck 1992a). Surely, the insecurity of the unknown future and the risks it may bear did not appear for the first time in modernity. What differentiates the social reality in post-traditional societies is that there are no longer any given normative responses to address the *anxiety*² that the unknown is causing (Tsironis 2018, 174). He emphasizes the different understanding of threat in Second Modernity, considering that in an ever-growing interconnected world, the very concept of global risk could bring mankind closer (see anthropological shock), but it could also break it down on the basis of individual interests. In other words, there is a noticeable difference in the way that the common good and the social cohesion are interpreted in ‘our’ society and that of ‘the others’.

The association of religion with terrorism, the increasing violence in the name of faith at international level and the instrumentalization of religious factor in the political arena bring at the centre of Beck’s analysis the question whether religions could contribute to the cosmopolitan vision of peace promoting the universal respect of human dignity. In his book “A God of One’s Own: Religion’s Capacity for Peace and Potential for Violence”, he makes a significant effort to illuminate the conditions

2 Regarding the concept of ‘anxiety’ from the individual to the IR level, see also: Rumelili, B. (2015): *Peace Anxieties: A Framework for Conflict Resolution*. In Rumelili, B. (eds.): *Ontological Security and Conflict Resolution: Peace Anxieties*, pp. 10-29. Routledge (PRIO New Security Studies Series).

under which the conflicting tendencies could be neutralized. He focuses on the dynamics of religions to mobilize their adherents or to diminish the violent imposition of exclusivity. Beck believes that religious universalism could on the one hand liberate humanity from various social segregations, while it might on the other hand separate people on the basis of faith. Although acknowledging that the historical circumstances where religious identity was "one of the essential components of cement in the symbolic walls among different cultures" (Tsironis 2018, 280) were not negligible, his analytical proposal recognizes that the universal reference of religions to social threats and their advocacy for a more just, peaceful and socio-ecological responsible world order could create a *de facto* field of dialogue within the cosmopolitan perspective. He argues that in cosmopolitan terms, the presence of different religious narratives should not be conceived as a threat to the religious monopoly of truth, but as enrichment. The core of this cosmopolitan approach is nothing but the recognition of religious diversity as a key element of thought, action and societal self-determination (Beck 2010, 70-72).

Beck's theory suggests that religions could positively contribute to the harmonious co-development of modern democracies, and in particular to the "cosmopolitan constellation", by giving priority to the request of their peaceful reciprocal recognition over the exclusivity of truth and by recognizing the members of other religious communities as 'others' *per se* and not as defenders in the struggle of another truth (ibid 182, 190). One should keep in mind, though, that while Beck's vision reflects his optimistic cosmopolitan aspiration, "religions (at least the great monotheistic religions) do not represent social movements aimed at moderate compromises with a view to serve a collective social vision, but rather a faith proposal that demands exclusive reference to the truth. (...) It is not evident that a suggestion towards religions that presupposes an essence-based change of their self-perception could work in the real world. However, a suggestion towards them to work on distinguishing what is fundamentally identical from the culturally determined would have its own potential" (Tsironis 2018, 295-296).

Robert Fine (2007, 134) writes that cosmopolitanism can be conceived as a way of contemplating and understanding the world, a sociological approach that favors dialogue and openness in meeting with the unfamiliar or strange. Similarly, Hannerz (1990, 239) has emphasized

that "... the strict sense of the term cosmopolitanism involves an attitude towards diversity itself, towards the coexistence of cultures in the individual experience. A more genuine cosmopolitanism is first and foremost an orientation, a willingness to meet the other". In this conceptual framework, Beck's analysis adds that religions are called to *deal with the otherness of the other* as they realize that pluralism no longer appears solely as a situation among different religions, but also in the form of differentiated members' choices within the same faith community. He therefore focuses on the ambiguous power of religion to motivate faithful members of religious communities towards conflict or reconciliation (Beck 2004b).

Concluding Remarks

The individualization in modern risk societies takes place concurrently with the social change on a global scale. Ulrich Beck names this change as the *metamorphosis of the world*: "Metamorphosis implies a much more radical transformation in which the old certainties of modern society are falling away and something quite new is emerging" (Beck 2016, 3). In this frame of reference, our connection with the grand collective narratives of the past is weakening, while the exposition of local and individual reality to global developments makes life in Second Modernity even more vulnerable to the unpredictable and the uncontrollable. In this context of interaction and interchange between the individual and the global perspective, people are called upon to manage on their own the ambivalences and risks of a world that becomes dense and extremely complex. All human institutions (religions included) are in the midst of a great social transformation that causes epochal change of worldviews and refiguration (ibid, 5). Personal and collective identities are now perceived as "negotiating identities".

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1992, 9) described hell as the situation where someone is in the middle of the ocean and although surrounded by water he has not a single drop to drink ("*water, water, everywhere, Nor every drop to drink*"). The century in which we were born was the century of Human Rights and World Wars, the century of human dignity and – not to forget – the century of the concentration camps. Nowadays, the reminiscence of the beginning of the new century has been stigmatized by the endless waves of uprooted people trying to

enter Europe, the bodies of toddlers and children washing up dead in the seashores, the faces of despair at the train stations and the border crossings. Nowadays, humanity faces a puzzling and challenging so far, so close situation: we have never before used political arguments related to humanitarian aid and human dignity to such an extent, we have never had so many technological tools to confront human suffering and yet, it has never been so crucial to define the concepts of human dignity and brotherhood as a direct reality in the life of our urban prosperity and not in the heterotopia of somewhere else, somewhere far away (Tsironis 2016).

Diversity forms a twofold challenge to liberal democracies: The first one refers to the question of how the meeting with the ‘others’ could be framed. The second level of this challenge is that the encounter with the *unfamiliar* or *strange* no longer takes place in an external, international context, but at the micro-level of the community or even into the more intimate, personal sphere of everyday life. The encounter with otherness is currently taking place both between and within communities. How’s religion associated with the new turn of events? Although up to 2000 the religious factor was out of the scope of the international affairs, it currently becomes (again) one of the significant variables. Moreover, the religious element not only affects the international but also the internal political situation causing phenomena of racism, xenophobia, political populism and extremism. Therefore, while the refugee issue consists a matter of international cooperation, its effects are being tackled by communities at a local level. In this context, any realistic effort to face the new political reality worldwide needs also to include religion in the relevant discourse.

Beck attempted to identify the social role of religious reference in the era of ‘reflexive modernization’ (Beck 1994, 14; 1996b; Beck, Bonss & Lau, 2003), at a time when people no longer passively receive images, norms, and stimuli, but they process, evaluate and integrate them into their personal frame of reference and in their selectively shaped biography (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002, 22-23; Dawson 2012). As Giddens notes (2017), “in a world of almost infinite sources of possible information the self becomes a reflexive project. All of us have to develop a narrative of self – a story line that holds our lives together, against the backdrop of a world in flux”. Through this reflexive approach, the

human gaze not only determines the personal route, but also creates interpretative frameworks of the world. Beck's analysis also highlighted that in our world, before the 'cosmopolitan condition' becomes a choice, it often emerges as a reality and a challenge. Referring to this remark, Bauman (2017, 148) wrote: "as the uniquely perspicacious German sociologist Ulrich Beck suggested, at the bottom of our present confusion lies the discrepancy between finding ourselves already cast in a 'cosmopolitan situation' (being doomed to cohabit permanently with different cultures, ways of life, faiths) and the lagging far behind in the urgent task of the development and appropriation of *'cosmopolitan awareness'*".

Beck's social theory re-centered the research interest in the religious field, not only in the context of personal identity but also in that of international developments. The ever-growing interconnection and interaction of every social actor on a planetary level brought religion to the fore as an image, a proposed way of life, a field of spirituality, a cause of terror, a fiction, etc. There is no doubt that, over the last 20 years, the voice of religions in international relations is not only heard in the sphere of noble partnerships. Some of the examples that indicate the ambiguous participation of religions on global politics could be: the instrumentalization of religious identity in various political or ethnic conflicts around the world (the case of Northern Ireland, the civil wars in the Balkans, in the former colonies of Africa, etc.), the role of Orthodoxy in Russia's new geopolitical strategy, Islam in the Syrian War and other conflicts in the Middle East, the traditional concept of 'symbolic power' that the nationalist movements try to derive from religious reference, etc. Regarding religion as an agent of power in world politics, Beck ends up: "... the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 teach us that power does not translate into security. In this one radically divided world, it is likely that security will only be achieved once people's willingness and ability to see the world of unrestrained modernity through the eyes of the other, through the lens of difference, have been awakened at a cultural level and have become a part of our everyday existence" (Beck 2005, xii).

Although the "death of religion" was an analytical trend up until the 70's-80's, new analytical approaches emerged at the beginning of the millennium. It now seems that religion is not vanishing, it is rather changing. As noted above, the refugee crisis is an indicative example

that religion has come to the fore in the field of political and social sciences, international relations, but mostly through its association with violence, terrorism, religious wars, extremist movements. Beck's cosmopolitan analysis focuses not only on the negative but also on the positive potential of religions. Recognizing their ambiguous dynamics, he tries to identify what are the conditions under which religion could be incorporated into a 'cosmopolitan form of statehood'. Within this perspective, the work of Hans Küng who argues that there is "no peace among the nations without peace among the religions" and that no dialogue between religions could be accomplished without investigation of the foundations of religions, comes to the fore (Küng 2007, xxiii). It remains to the Social Theory to deeper analyze the extent to which the world transformations coincide with particular characteristics of the religious life in the current phase of modernity. Religious institutions are themselves in the process of change. This article proposes a re-examination of the interaction between religious and socio-political developments in the context of the planetary interconnected societies of Second Modernity.

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