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## **EDITORIAL**

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### **PATHS OF RESEARCH IN RELIGION AND POLITICS**

#### ***An introduction***

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Religion plays an important role in contemporary politics, both as a public and political actor, and as set of values. As a public actor, religion – embodied in organizations, institutions, groups, and associations (Haynes 1997) – widely participates in the political spheres of European countries. Religious authorities express their opinion on political matters, religious groups organize in the civil society, religious entrepreneurs try to mobilize people and start political campaigns. Among the most recent examples, we find the participation of religious groups to the protests against the legalization of same-sex marriage in France, the commitment of religious associations towards the increasing poverty in the aftermaths of the economic crisis in various countries, or the strong relationships and tensions between religion and politics in Russia, as shown by the “Pussy Riot” case, for which the Patriarch Kirill I asked an “exemplar punishment”, and the persecution against homosexuals. At the same time, both European and non-European societies are experiencing a profound reshaping of their political landscapes. In these contexts, it has become clear that new modes of governance redraw the boundaries between institutional actors and citizens, and create space for horizontal and/or transnational networks.

Today, the separation between religion and politics is being questioned more or less radically, and the meaning and the substance of democracy likewise. In a (partial) map of the themes at stake, we find many different perspectives. One concern is related to the role of religion in national or international identities. Examples are the controversies around the religious roots of Europe, the debate over national identity launched in 2009 in France by the then President Sarkozy, and, more broadly, the discussions around multiculturalism, integration of immigrants, and the meanings and boundaries of “culture” as a concept (see, for instance, Bhargava 1999; Capelle-Pagacean, Michel and Pace 2008; Habermas and Taylor 2002; Phillips 2007). These debates also concern the individual citizen’s identity, thus questioning the role of religion in education. Defining a cultural identity, indeed, also implies the definition of the educational process through which children become citizens: therefore it also leads to question whether religion (and, which religion) should be part of the construction of a national identity. Other issues regard the role of religion as a public or private matter and the (changing) boundaries between private and public spheres (see for instance Augé 1992; Beck 1997; Giddens 1991; Willaime 2006). Examples are the debates over the display of religious symbols in public spaces, dress codes, and regulation of reproductive policies. These issues are closely related to the issues between gender, religion and secularism. For instance, this is the case for the controversies around the regulation of reproductive rights. Furthermore, many feminist analyses focus on Islam and women, as well as on westernized readings of otherness (Okin 1998 and 1999; Ponzanesi 2007; Talpade Mohanty 1984; Yegenoglu 1998). Several debates revolve around the role of religions in the strictly political sphere, focusing on religious actors playing a political role, on the role of religious values in political decisions and party/social movements politics, and on the relationships between religion and public policies. More broadly, these themes are related to the main topic of the shape and boundaries of contemporary democracies (see, for instance, the wide debate around Habermas’ and Rawls’ theorizations). In this perspective, the main questions revolve around the tensions between identity and diversity, or pluralism and cohesion, and lead to question, for example, the features of the secular State, the models of migrants’ inclusion, the relationships between specific religious traditions and democracy, the role of religious values in political decisions, and the forms of the democratic decision-making.

The number of scholars and the range of disciplines dealing with religion in society have been growing in the last decades. As Beckford underlined, “Scholars who have rarely commented on religion in the past, now seem to find it [religion, NdA] indispensable to their accounts of current change, especially the kaleidoscopic multiplicity of competing religious worldviews. [...] The fact that commentary on religion is increasingly creeping into social scientific theorizing about social and cultural change suggests that the study of religion is no longer as isolated from the rest of the social sciences as it used to be. But this is not an unalloyed benefit.” (Beckford 2000, pp. 487-488). In other words, since religion plays an important role in contemporary societies’ politics and public spheres, there is a need of empirical and in depth studies, as well as of a constant dialogue between different disciplines, such as sociology, political science, anthropology, and law.

## 1. Where we are

Drawing on Ferrara (2009) and Dobbelaere (1987), we can summarize the streams of literature around the relationships between religion and society in three main areas: the debate around political secularism (religion and politics); the debate about the secularization of societies (religious values in society); the phenomenological transformation of the experience of believing (spiritualism, individualization of religion).

According to some scholars, the public presence of religions increased in the last decades (Casanova 1994). In fact, many placed the “public resurgence of religion” in the seventies (especially in US) and find trace of a “revival of religion” (see Hadden 1987). These assessments revived the wide debate over the meanings and the dimensions of the analytical categories of “secularism”, “secularization”, “political secularism” (see Chaves 1994; Christiano and Swatos 1999; Shiose and Zylberberg 2000; Tschannen 1991). At the same time, new analytical categories for the analysis of the role of religion in societies have been discussed, such as “post-secularism”, “de-secularization”, “re-enchantment” (see Beckford 2000 for a discussion). Other scholars prefer to underline that the individual and collective experiences of religion have been changing, focusing on religiosity as a personal choice (see Berger 2001 and 1969), and they introduced various analytical concepts, such as “religion à la carte”, “patchwork religion”, “invisible religion”, “diffused religion”, “believing without belonging” (Davie 1994; Hervieu-Léger 1999; Luckmann 1967; Roof 1993; Schlegel 1995; Wuthnow 1998 and 1992). As a consequence, also the public and political roles of religions have been changing, and have to be analytically reframed. At the same time, societies have been transforming, and social and religious values likewise. Multiculturalism, migration and bioethical debates, among others, put religion in the spotlight, thereby calling for a redefinition of classical theorizations about the role of religion in society.

According to Dobbelaere, until the 80s the academic interest followed a geographical pattern: “different cultural backgrounds suggest particular situations and specific fields of research” (1987, p. 107). However, in the last decades, due to both the growing academic internalization and scientific exchanges, and the globalization process, the topics of interest are increasingly converging (see Social Compass editorial 2013).

In Italy, the studies of religion and society have a long tradition, starting from Acquaviva (1961) – for a specific bibliography on sociology of religion in Italy see Buralassi (1974) and Cipriani (2009). A partial list of topics and works include: religion and social classes, mainly analysed by sociologists of religion in the 70s<sup>1</sup>; Catholic Church structure, catholic organizations and religious movements, with both single case-studies and comparative analyses<sup>2</sup>; religious plural-

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<sup>1</sup> Examples are: Cipriani 1976; Guizzardi et al. 1981; Nesti 1975; Prandi 1977.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance: Abbruzzese 1991; Ceccarini 2008; Colozzi and Martelli 1988; Faggioli 2008; Garelli 2007 and 2003; Giorgi and Polizzi 2013; Guizzardi 1977; Magister 2001; Marchisio 2012 and 2002; Marzano 2013, 2009 and 1997.

ism, including studies on both Islam, minority religions and various forms of spirituality<sup>3</sup>; culture, values, society secularization, and individual values and religiosity – these studies include contributions by political sociologists on the role of religious values in individual behaviours<sup>4</sup>; contentious religious issues, including bioethics, debates over the role of religion in education, or religious symbols in the public sphere<sup>5</sup>; religious identity and electoral/political behaviour<sup>6</sup>; religion and political parties<sup>7</sup>; political secularism<sup>8</sup>. This list does not mean to be complete, nor comprehensive: it aims to offer an overview of the variety of topics and disciplines involved in the analysis of religion in Italy.

## 2. Contextualizing this issue

The aim of this issue is not to answer to the questions of a specific research program. Such a particular goal would be better addressed in a journal with a more narrow scope. Our objective is to enrich the debate that *Partecipazione e Conflitto* has been developing in the last few years about the broader dynamics of participation and conflict by providing remarkable examples of how religious organizations are influencing the social and political scene, both in Western and in non-Western contexts. This is the reason why the articles of this special issue address different problems, different political and cultural contexts and different theoretical approaches about religion and politics. Even their authors come from different academic disciplines. This heterogeneity allows the readers to have an overview on some of the most important religious actors (movements, associations, groups and parties in contemporary democracies, such as Christian traditional parties in Europe and the US, Islamist groups in Turkey and in Pakistan. At the same time, this collection of article shows different approaches through which is possible to analyse these movements, such as cross-country comparative approaches, comparison between different cases of religious groups' collective action within the same national contexts or in the same urban area, or in-depth case studies of the specific role of religious groups in a broader national

<sup>3</sup> Among the many studies, see: Allievi 2010 and 2009; Introvigne and Stark 2005; Nasi e Salvarano 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Again, the bibliography is huge – among the others, see: Cartocci 2011; Cesearo et al. 1995; Cipriani, 1984 and 2003; Diotallevi 2002 and 1999; Garelli 2011 and 1986; Garelli, Guizzardi and Pace 2003; Nesti 2006; Martelli 1990; Marchisio 2005; Pisati 2000.

<sup>5</sup> These topics have been analysed by both sociology of religion, political sociology, political philosophy. See for instance Cambi 2007; Diotallevi 2007; Le Caldano 2005; Lucà Trombetta 2005; Mancini 2008; Giorgi and Ozzano 2013; Ricolfi 2001; Rusconi 2000; Scalon 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Ballarino et al. 2010; Carbonaro, Ferrarotti and Pace 1976; Cappello and Diamanti 1995; Ceccarini and Diamanti 2007; Segatti 2006; Segatti and Vezzoni 2008; Pace, 1978 and 1995; Saraceno and Rusconi 1970; Segatti 1999; Tosi and Vitale 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Bertezolo 2011; Damilano 2006; Galli 1978; Guolo 2011; Maciotti 1976; Scoppola 2005 and 1967.

<sup>8</sup> Boniolo 2006; Ferrari 2007; Margiotta Broglio 2007; Pin 2006.

mobilization. The common element of these different contributions is the objective of looking at the complex relationships between religious organizations (both movements and parties) and political mobilizations, and analysing the religious factor neither as a mere effect of conflicts driven by non-religious factors, such as economic or utilitarian motives, nor as essentialist phenomena driven by non-rational logics of action.

A first point of view to study this issue is the national level comparative approach used by Luca Ozzano and Joerg Baudner.

Ozzano's article stems from the wide tradition of political science research on fundamentalism (see, for instance, the *Fundamentalism Project*, referred to in the paper), and it addresses the complex relationships between women and religions (which is the topic of specific streams of analysis, see for instance *Religion and Gender* journal). Ozzano analyses the phenomenon of women's presence in fundamentalist movements, by looking at three cases, taken from different political and cultural contexts: USA, India and Turkey. The author addresses the apparently paradoxical role of women in movements that, on the one side, predicate their mainly private role, and, on the other side, appoint them as movements' representatives. Even if there are differences in the three contexts analyzed, the article shows that women's empowerment within fundamentalist movements looks like an unintentional effect of strategic moves made by the male leadership of the movements to attract more consensus and militants. Working as activists in the movements is often the only way women of traditionalist milieu have to become more involved in public life, without being stigmatized by their families and communities.

Baudner's article takes an importance stance in the wide debate over the compatibility between religions and democracy. In the XIX and early XX centuries the scientific concerns typically questioned the relationships between Christian parties and western democracies, while nowadays the same concerns arise towards the "democratic values" of Islamic parties. In his comparative analysis of the political stances of religiously-inspired parties, the author focuses on their similarities. Baudner looks at the common paths of the development of religious parties in very different contexts, such as in Western Europe (Germany and Italy) with Catholic parties and in Turkey with Islamist parties. The case studies are the development of the German CDU (Christlich Demokratische Union – Christian Democratic Union), the Italian Democrazia Cristiana (Christian Democracy) and the Turkish AKP (Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi - Justice and Development Party). The author explains that the transformation of political Islam into Muslim democracy has important elements in common with the transformation of political Catholicism into Christian democracy. This approach in the study of religious parties challenges the essentialist approaches (according to which Muslims and Christians traditions have incommensurable differences), by using the classic party theory (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Kirchheimer 1965) and by analyzing the development of political parties in the context of nation-state building, democratization and industrialization. The article argues that, despite their differences, Christian democrats in Italy and Germany and Muslim democrats in Turkey have similar approaches in reconciling capitalism and democracy, by reacting to both socialism and liberalism and proposing a "third way thinking". Their parties have had a similar form of mass integration parties (Kirchheimer 1965), which encompasses a specific cross-class alliance and an emphasis on traditional

family politics. Moreover, they have been transformed into catch-all parties with a pronounced neo-liberal economic agenda, but keeping on pursuing cross-class policies, through specific social policies and a promoting intermediary organizations.

A comparative approach is used also by Olga Michel. In her article, Michel explores how strongly-religious corporative actors with different modes of world-rejecting involve themselves in different forms of activism. She analyzes the organizational discourses of religious groups with different modes of world-rejecting (i.e., world-conquering, world-transforming, world-creating and world-renouncing): a small Catholic political party with explicit right-wing orientation and calling for a theocracy (i.e., world-conquering); a local community of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Germany (i.e., world-transforming); two local community of ethnic German Mennonites from the former Soviet Union: one which cooperates with domestic evangelical groups in terms of civic engagement (i.e., world-creating); another one which avoids any contact with “the world” outside their community (i.e., world-renouncing). Through a process of data collection and data analysis inspired by the guidelines of Grounded Theory, Michel shows that, deliberately or not, every fundamentalist corporative actor develops specific strategies for combating “the sinful” and imposing “the holy” inside and / or outside its organizational boundaries, even if it does not involves itself explicitly in political activism. Their strategies produce hierarchical status relationships and different patterns of hierarchical conflicts with the particular organizational environment. When these groups focus predominantly on the inner-worldly spheres they develop a pattern of missionary activism in their environment. When they focus more on the other-worldly spheres, their pattern of activism is oriented toward congregational and church-related activism. Michel’s article stems from sociology of religion and it focuses on the patterns of social and political participation in “strong-religious” groups, by specifically considering how religious identity may affect political participation.

From a different perspective, Emanuele Fantini’s article focuses on the interactions between different political cultures in the making of a collective movement. Through a case study analysis, Fantini describes the ideological and organizational features of the public water movement in Italy, which promoted two national referenda in 2011. The article takes into consideration the specific role of Catholic groups during the related campaign and tries to understand their contribution to the making of the movement, in terms of defining contents, identity and practices. Fantini’s research shows the deep connection between the movement’s framing of water as “human right and commons” and the Catholic Social Doctrine’s message on the promotion of the common good. On the one hand, he demonstrates how this link helped a large engagement of grassroots supporters in the referenda campaign. On the other hand, he points out the low influence of Catholic groups on the whole movement’s identity and repertoires of action and how the water mobilization fell short in reorienting their way to conceive civic and political commitment. The case study approach is also used by Marie Bassi’s article. She focuses on immigration in Sicily and religious groups’ collective action in this regard. In particular, she analyses different cases of religious organizations working for migrants in Palermo, through an in-depth field research within the Catholic milieu. Bassi shows how religious organizations managed to gain an important role in the Italian public arena, despite the decline of the Christian

Democratic party in '93, by providing some welfare services for migrants that public institutions are not able to ensure. This mobilization allows them to shape the public debate and take part in the policy-making process, while maintaining a high degree of pluralism (both among and within the organizations), in terms of mission and attitude toward public institutions. Moreover, Bassi focuses on the potential for organizational and ideological adaptation of these organizations and on their process of professionalization and secularization, despite the religious roots. Indeed, most of the activists are lay and give more importance to ethical issues and solidarity than to strictly religious concerns. Bassi's article intervenes in the wide debate around migration issues and the role of religion in national patterns of inclusion/exclusions, by specifically focusing on the role of Catholic organizations and showing how they acquired the ability to exert social control on the territory thanks to their indispensable role in this field.

Sergio Castaño presents another case study-based research, focusing on political Islam in Belgium. In his article, Castaño deals with the complex relationship between Muslim communities' social presence and the organization of their political representation in Belgium from the '60s on. The question faced by the author is the low relevance of Political Islam in the country, despite the growing relevance of Muslims communities in the last thirty years. The article describes two main stages: first, the '60s and '70s, when the political voice of Islam was organized and represented mainly by the Saudi Embassy, without strong connections with the real Muslim communities in the country. Secondly, the '80s, when the growing size of Muslim communities in Belgium and the mobilization of some Muslim groups in public protests convinced the Belgian authorities to shift their focus and acknowledge the real dimension of the Islamic presence in the country. Many Muslim political groups have tried to acquire political leadership and representation among Belgian Muslims, but the difficulties encountered to act together have relegated them to a marginal role in the institutionalization process of Islam, while the majority of Muslims preferred to vote for conventional Belgium parties. Nonetheless, the social presence of Muslims has strongly prompted the emergence of right wing xenophobic groups, with large political consensus and a high capacity to influence the public perception of Islam as a threat to the Belgian social system. Like Baudner's, Castaño's article intervenes in the scientific and public debates over the relationships between religion and democracy, although from a different perspective: the author specifically focuses on the public role of religiously-inspired political actors that mainly stem from migration.

In the last article, Alix Philippon presents the case of the Barelwi movement in Pakistan, a Sufism oriented religious movement rooted in the 19th century, which has gradually politicized through Pakistani history. Today there are about forty Barelwi organizations in the country, differently characterized on a scale of politicization, protest and radicalization. Their organizational form is a blend between a Sufi order, an activist association and, for some, a political party. Philippon shows the various and often invisible interactions of this movement with Islamism, even though the latter has long been considered as antinomic to Sufism. Through a deep account of the Barelwi groups, the article sharpens our understanding of these complex interactions. In the framework of the "War against terror", the different Barelwi groups have tried to denounce the "talibanization" of Pakistan, by organizing conferences and demonstrations, and to promote a

political Islam based on the Sufi values of “peace, love and tolerance”. At the same time, this movement has also undertaken a process of radicalization, thus blurring the lines between peaceful activism and violent direct action. Philippon’s article stems from a political science perspective and addresses the important issue of pluralism within a religious tradition.

This special issue aims to offer a wide range of examples of studies focusing on the interactions between religion and politics from different disciplinary perspectives and scientific traditions. Ranging from single case study to transnational comparative analysis, from sociology of religion to political science, and from the analysis of specific religious traditions to comparative studies, they offer a useful insight of topics and debates.

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