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Religion and Political Sociology

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Public conversations on religion-related subjects are taking place everywhere and mostly in a sensational register, feeding a global political anxiety. Religion has also made a comeback in social sciences as an incontrovertible part of social life. This chapter provides the coordinates for a better mapping of religion, alongside the classical tradition in political sociology, considered as a legitimate and unavoidable object of study for the discipline. These coordinates must include social forms and experiences, issues of power and control within and over religious organizations, the link between religion and politics and the development of individual religious behaviours in social contexts, and it should also favour a comparative perspective. This chapter explores first the issue of the definition of religion as an epistemological challenge for political sociology before moving on to review and contrast North American and European scholarship on religious developments in modern societies.

I've spent a lot of time over the past months thinking about what happened to McCann and me last winter in Sophis: asking myself what it was the Truth Seekers did to us there, and how. Could any group of rural religious cranks really have driven a well-known sociologist out of his mind, and his assistant almost out of the profession?

(Alison Lurie, *Imaginary Friends* (1967: 3))

Liberation theology, headscarf, burqas, Danish cartoons, the war on terror... and 9/11, but also the Moonies, the Iranian Revolution, and a variety of issues from comic strip controversies to family law questions ('sharia courts'), blasphemy, the Rushdie affair, polygamy, new religious movements, sectarian mortifère movements, public discussions on abortion, euthanasia or cloning, the role of religious groups and

churches in the Eastern and Central European democratization process; worldwide, religion has become contentious in relation to the expression of specific forms of religiosity. The hypothesis of an irremediable decline of religion in secular public spaces has in particular been counterbalanced during the 1980s, against the expectations driven by the secularization thesis. Since the early 1990s, European secular public spaces have for instance taken a radical turn in dealing with the growing visibility of Muslims, and have become intolerant towards Muslim forms of religiosity, increasingly regarding them as cultural, social and political pathologies (Amiraux 2011).

The position religion occupies in the analytical vocabulary of political sociology is a complicated one, to say the least. Sociology initially emerged as a science of modernity pointing throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to a 'crisis scenario' (Pollack 2008) predicated on the decrease of religion's social significance. It looked at the birth of rationality in the modern secular state and tried to understand the nature of the social bond in these emerging modern societies (urbanized, industrialized, rational and plural). But religion still animates many contemporary societies and political scenes. Since the works of the founding fathers – Weber, Comte, Durkheim, Marx in particular but not only – relations between religion and social togetherness have been a continuous subject for analysis. However, social anxieties relating to this terrain have multiplied, and the attendant political concerns renewed themselves and intensified. Religion's significance, role and value for the social sciences remain therefore a core object for interrogation, ontological, epistemological and methodological: Which definition should prevail? How can political sociology do justice to the intricate and multiple dimensions of religion? What should social scientists look at when seeking an overview of religion in today's world? This series of questions is rendered more difficult to answer within a political sociology perspective by the sheer publicity and politicization that has elevated them, over the past three decades, to the epicentre of public life, front stage on the social scene. Indeed, public conversations on religion-related subjects are taking place everywhere and mostly in a sensational register. It has become part of common knowledge: everyone has something to share on the subject of religion, his/her own and the other's. In the meantime, the interest in religion in the social sciences 'has now returned to a position close to the center of intellectual curiosity about the forces shaping socio-cultural life in the early twenty-first century' (Beckford and Demerath (eds) 2007: 3).

This chapter does not set out to answer these questions, nor to exhaustively survey the extremely rich and varied web of references that crisscross the field of study of religion in political sociology. Our aim is rather to provide the coordinates for a better mapping of religion, alongside the classical tradition that is tackled earlier in this volume, considered as a legitimate and unavoidable object of study for political sociology. These coordinates must include social forms and experiences, issues of power and control within and over religious organizations, the link between religion and politics, the development of individual religious behaviours in social contexts, and the connection between individual identity and one's life course as scrutinized in multiple specific case studies (Beckford and Demerath 2007). This chapter begins by exploring the issue of the definition of religion, before moving on in its second part to review North American and European scholarship on religious developments.

Questions of Definition, Problems of Perspective

When approaching the teaching of religion, it is essential to vary one's material and illustrative examples in order to open up the student's imagination to what constitutes 'the religious'. Every scholar has his/her own trick. Beaman (2008), for instance, usually works with a fictive religious group, the 'Church of the Holy Shoelace' (nothing wrong with an approach that induces immediate sympathy from students), to beckon her students. She then invites them to wonder: Should we stick to what we see? Do religious rites and practices suffice in analysing religion's role either in society or in individual lives? What makes a religion true for its believers? What difference does it make when believers do not practise? How do the devout become members of a community? What meaning does this have for them, and/or the rest of society? Where does religion fit in? Are religious people sincere in believing what they advocate? How does religious practice impact on other social behaviours? The awkward issue of definition may seem too basic, even altogether redundant. But the question does not confine itself to the classroom context, and has posed a challenge to all the disciplines of the social sciences. This epistemological challenge has also become part of the daily routine of judges, lawyers, public officials, doctors and social workers confronted with having to decide whether or not people may have the right to wear a headscarf, file a complaint for religious instead of ethnic discrimination, be granted refugee status, close their shops on certain days, obtain their divorce, etc. Defining religion is no longer exclusively a scholarly duty and a pedagogical exercise, but has become an everyday requirement for many social agents, in particular in the courtroom.

Part of the difficulty of definition relates to religion's diverse modes of expression. Indeed, one of the major shifts between the sociology of the founding fathers and today's discipline is the demise of insular religious dogma. This has come about through an intense religious vitality which has given rise to numerous new movements and forms of spirituality, expressed either individually or collectively and in some cases outside the traditional forms of religious organization (churches, sects). Gone are the days when an entrenched religion could claim an ultimate truth in a politically bound and territorially limited society. Instead we see the emergence of what has been described as a religious market further elaborated upon in terms of globalization (Beyer 2001; Lehmann 2002). Religion has thereby become 'an infinitely varied subject that interacts in a myriad different ways with the cultural, ideological, political and economic systems that surround it' (Davie 2007: 209).

Religion is also about belief and faith, practices and rituals that create a link with the sacred. It is primarily the field of experiencing the sacred but, as Talal Asad puts it, there cannot be a universal definition (2003). Religious manifestations are rich, diversified and multiple. Should one approach them in the first instance as exclusively linked to traditional established places of worship or include the constellation of passions and beliefs that have sprung up everywhere, including a spectrum of beliefs expressed independently from any relation to a deity? This is about individuals as well as communities. Religions are not simply constituted by ideas and opinions, but manifest themselves as a way of life, through the performances required of believers by their convictions. Though invisible for the most part, or to be more precise, having no empirical existence, these beliefs are not fictions. The sacred reality of the believer's praxis can still be described, even when religious motivations, religious experiences

and emotions include miracles and apparitions. Last but not least, religion refers to divergent ideas about the right way in which to live (Berger talks about 'structures of plausibility'). However, the terminology deployed (denomination, faith, religious community/society, worship, sect) and the consequent categorization of ways of talking publicly about religion remains stubbornly nationally defined and distinctive to specific nation-states and cultural universes (Robbers 2005).

A final problem in defining religion is establishing its very nature. Can its essence be captured in its external characteristics and manifestations? This definitional problem is complicated by the flourishing multiplicity of ways to live and practise, which is a major outcome of globalization in the field of religious pluralism. The concrete experience of pluralism and diversity forces us to contend with the content of competing messages, but also teaches us how to cope *in concreto* with differences of practice inside one's own preferred rituals. If we cannot sum up the constellation of definitions that as a result flood the domain of the study of religion in the social sciences, we can extract some of the main elements that make it possible to work on it from a political sociology perspective. It is for example useful to distinguish between the practice of religion, that is, the 'religious vitality' that embraces religious observance but also spirituality (belief and practices), and the social significance of the influence that a religion exerts on the other parts of society (Herbert 2003: 5–6).

Two main types of definition have so far been deployed, a functional one and a more substantive one (Droogers 2009: 269). The former has given birth to a literature that largely reduces religion to its institutional definition (a believer is a practitioner), religion being referred to as productive of a social order. In the latter, ethnographic perspectives on lived religion have been more frequently used to make sense of the various ways of carrying out the practice of one's beliefs in one's daily activities (Bender 2003). Another variation on this functional versus substantive definition of religion highlights the tension between belonging (involving a reading of the relationship of an individual member to his or her religious institution: How do religious institutions work? How do they keep their members?) and believing (emphasizing the more internal or intimate part of one's belief). European Values Surveys have for instance helped to document a decline of Christianity in the European Union (EU) since the 1950s that has been labelled as the 'unchurching of Europe' (Ashford and Timms 1992). The decline in Christian membership has tended to confirm the description of Europeans' attitude towards religion as driven by a 'belonging without believing' dynamic (Davie 1994). Here the notion of belonging brings together many important aspects, including the transmission of religious culture to one's children through the extension of a chain of memory (Hervieu-Léger 2000). Clarke considers that this particular moment invites scholars to distance themselves from an institutional approach to religion and move towards a more 'organic concept' (2009). This means jettisoning a perspective exclusive to Christian-Western societies that insists on drawing a limited horizon around the complexity of religious phenomenon, in favour of a global framework that includes other perspectives among the epistemological premises of its analysis (Casanova 1994; Roy 2010). Such a move would also hasten the development of a more cognitive approach to religious belief.

To fully savour the significance of these comments regarding the burden of Christianity as a dominant framework for dealing with religion at large and religious

otherness in particular, we turn to Benhabib's useful distinction between *observers* as authors of the narratives and the *social agents*, participants in the culture, who experience traditions, stories, rituals, symbols, tools, etc. not in terms of a narrative account as a compacted whole, but rather as the horizons of life. She elaborates for instance on the Hindu practice of *sati* according to which a widowed wife immolates herself by ascending the burning funeral pyre of her husband. This rather marginal practice to many Hindus came to be regarded as a central Indian tradition when its meaning and status entered into negotiations between British colonials and local Indian elites. Benhabib explains how the colonial administrators were driven by their own moral and civilizational revulsion when confronted with this not religious but merely cultural practice 'considered odious or offensive to human dignity' (2002: 12). They were equally concerned that their outlawing of it could lead to political unrest. If a practice was considered central to believers, some tolerance was to be shown. They investigated the status of *sati* as 'religious practice', looking to find a justification for it in religious scripture. In this they directly followed the Christian model (by analogy between systems of faith). Unable to identify any scriptural evidence, they proceeded nevertheless to codify the practice, '(...) and, above all, discrepancies in local Hindu traditions that varied not only from region to region but between the various castes as well were homogenized' (Benhabib 2002: 5–6).

This brings us to a rather convenient definition for all manner of situations. It takes religion as 'a system of beliefs and practices oriented toward the sacred or supernatural, through which the life experience of groups of people are given meaning and direction' (Smith 1996: 5). Belief is of particular importance insofar as it encompasses a wide spectrum of differing worldviews and ways of performing them (Roy 2010). Its cognitive and pragmatic dimensions are priority targets for political sociology looking at religion today.

Scholarship and Religion

Theories, paradigms and types of analysis focusing on religion in the social sciences have never strayed far from the conceptual terrain of secularization and individualization. These two notions are also key to grasping the difference between European and North American ways of working on religion in political sociology.

Secularization: the way out?

Secularization as a European paradigm has been severely taken to task over the past two decades for failing to account for the divergent roles religions may play in societies, but also because, during the 1980s, quite unexpectedly, religion made its comeback at the forefront of various forms of political activity all over the world, either as an object of contestation or as a subject in contestation following a 'deprivatization' movement (Casanova 1994). Within the secularization paradigm, where it is taken for granted that the influence of religion over a society has become less significant, belonging to a religion is assumed to have become a mainly voluntary affair, the possibility of choice even being protected through a set of constitutional fundamental rights (freedom of conscience).

The social impact of secularization, however, is scarcely a uniform matter: think only of the hugely differentiated impact of modernization in Latin American, Japan, South Africa, Western Europe or the Middle East. Thus the critique of secularization as the sole paradigm with which to analyse religion in public life began by pointing to the centrality of its functional definition of religion (focus on dogmas, obedience of the practitioners, institutions, ritual practices) and the insufficient attention paid to the variety of roles that could be associated with religion in these various contexts. Some of the critics of the secularization paradigm denounced the wilful blindness that secularization as a paradigm had exerted over social scientists at large (Wald and Wilcox 2006); while others set about deconstructing the 'death of God' and shifting the focus from the public spaces and state regulation of religion to the conditions of belief in the Modern Age (Taylor 2007) or chose to elaborate a 'spiritual' secularism (Bhargava 2010). Eisenstadt, comparing various historical settings, proposed the notion of 'multiple modernities' to resist prevalent intellectual traditions and in particular the idea of an equivalence between 'western civilization' and modernity, as well as the hegemonizing and hegemonic assumptions of the Western programme of modernity (Eisenstadt 1973, 2000). Important voices on this include Asad and others who pointed to the dislodging of the meaning of secularization by insisting on the pluralizing formations of the secular (Asad 2003; Brown 2009), a perspective that held considerable empirical sway over non-Western fields of study (Mahmood 2005). In the early twenty-first century, this secularization perspective has been, so to speak, effectively disengaged from its exclusive focus on the role of the state (as regulator, legislator, a producer of norms and values) and redirected to a more precise investigation of the lived experience of believers and unbelievers. In fact, as critics of the secularization narrative have often argued, the declining impact of religious beliefs is found particularly in the public sphere while it is assumed to be less evident in matters relating to the private: modern citizens, in particular in Western contexts, are supposed to relate to society as autonomous, responsible, reflective entities (Halman and Pettersson 2003). Individual morality has become a personal concern, as is personal religiosity, no longer requiring regular attendance at places of worship. But again, it is not as simple as it seems. The role that believers accord their religion varies according to multiple social cleavages, from class to ethnicity and denomination.

Secularization has often gone together with the privatization of beliefs as one solution to cultural conflicts (Barry 2001). Politics, culture and social morality come to be conceived of as independent of any religious influence. Morality in this process becomes a personal as opposed to a collective concern. These secular strains in scholarship that have dominated the field until recently must be recognized for what they are, since they have imposed quite specific cognitive frames on the other religions, even when studies were carried out in non-Western contexts. Core themes recur throughout, such as the decline of the authority and power of religious institutions in public life (both in the institutional and socio-structural dimension); the effect of social differentiation (tracing the decline of the influence of religion on different sectors of social life, in particular on education); the decline of individual involvement in religious practices owing to social integration (societalization); together with a general rationalization of public life. Today, however, secularization points us to a process whereby religious thinking, practice and institutions lose their political significance but not their social relevance.

European and North American views of religion and society

As an outcome of secularization, the religiously plural social context operates as a frame in which multiple ways of being a believer and member of a faith community are made possible and can be expressed. This is consistent with the idea of the positive freedom and expression of an individual's fundamental rights through choice (to believe and not to believe). Pluralization informs the diversification of the ways in which one can express one's religious belonging, either in resisting modernity or in part embracing its discourses and even in becoming radicalized. Beliefs are diversified, faiths have split, but the need for meanings remains central to an individual's social positioning (Taylor 2007).

A spectrum of rites, practices and modes of belonging is the hallmark of twenty-first-century religions. Their higher visibility does not coincide with the idea of the intensification or the return of the religious that for a while attracted scholarship. Rather this more explicit public presence challenges the confines of the secularization narrative. Many national political spaces have their experience of pluralism, not only Western societies. In modernized European societies based on the principle of autonomous individuals associating through citizenship and individual respect for specific common rules, the idea of keeping one's distance from religious institutions goes hand in hand with an increase in do-it-yourself approaches in religious matters. The resulting increase in individualization was particularly strongly manifested in the United States, becoming one of the central theoretical paradigms organizing political sociology in its study of religion (Warner 1993). To sum up, the rational choice perspective has been the central motto for this literature in which the believer deploys strategy and otherwise mobilizes resources as a perfectly rational agent in order to maximize profit and avoid losses (Bruce 1999; Goldstein 2006). In this project, the religious satisfaction of the individual is perfectly reconcilable with the metaphor of a religious market (the supply-side model).

The difference between EU and US scholarship on religion follows from these divergent interpretations of secularism. To put it concisely, the vitality of the religious sector in the United States contrasts strongly with its lethargy in Western European societies (Hammond and Machacek 2009: 400). The role of the state has been identified as part of the explanation: highly regulating the religious field in Europe while being altogether less invasive in the North American context. The religious vitality of the US people has been particularly thoroughly investigated, more specifically the role that religious and civic commitment plays in equipping individuals with the knowledge they need to launch themselves into society at large. This constitutes a major difference in the scholarship: while, in the US-based context, part of the literature emphasizes the idea that religious-based groups of committed people may contribute strong social ties to their societies, this has been comparatively undervalued and under-researched until relatively recently in the European context, when it arose in the context of the Fall of the Wall (Müller 2008) and also through closer study of ethnic community settlements with dynamic religious vitality, whether applied to Muslims, Sikhs or African Evangelists.

In North American scholarship, the distinction between public (state) and civic (secular) can be found in two rather different discourses: on the one hand the privatization thesis mentioned earlier (Luckmann 1967; Chaves 1994) and, on the

other, study which takes as its object the way in which religious groups (private, civic) reach out into the public realm (Smith 1996; Wiktorowicz 2004). For instance, the civic interaction of religious groups is surveyed in order to assess its impact in terms of 'social capital' (as developed by Putnam) and to track the way that religion helps people to 'spiral outward' (Lichterman 2005) in their social relations. In European contexts, the religious individual is looked at through the lens of his or her personal autonomy and the limit a state might pose to this, the limit being perceived as in most cases illegitimate. States, for example, might regulate private clothing associated with religious practice as in the series of burqa rulings that are popping up all over the EU. In July 2010, the Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project released the result of a survey that illustrates this divergence in the two political cultures with respect to religion. Asked about their approval or disapproval of the French Bill that would make it illegal for Muslim women to wear full veils in public places, majorities in France (82%), Germany (71%), Britain (62%) and Spain (59%) declared that they would support such a ban in their own country; while only 28% of the US sample said that they could approve it.

Generally speaking, the US approach to religion has long drawn on political science to better understand the interaction between religion and political behaviour. Religion is regarded as the source of certain political attitudes and socially related behaviours, adding further sub-categories to the classical taxonomy (ethnic, age, gender, class, etc.) (Manza and Wright 2003). A large literature has analysed the connection between the resilient religious affiliation after the Second World War (Lipset 1996) and the historical prevalence of a strong overlap between religious and political affiliations, in order to assess the significance of splintering affiliations (based on a functional definition and relying on church attendance, doctrinal beliefs, denomination groups, contextual aspects of congregational memberships) as powerful predictors of US voting behaviour (Manza and Wright 2003). For European scholars, the dominant reading of religion in the social sciences has followed a more socio-historical trajectory. In both contexts, however, the major challenge presents itself as a disconnection between meaning and norms as experienced at an individual level. Authors have talked of a micro-secularization perspective, of a 'deregulation' of the religious market, or classically of 'individualization'. Still, the invitation to place the individual's ordinary experience of religion at the core of its episteme remains a crucial challenge to political sociology on both sides of the Atlantic. Such a development would also construct a bridge to a much-needed broader process of capillarization of religion as a social phenomenon.

Increasingly, current classical concepts seem insufficient to support a satisfying study of religion in its contemporary complexity. The sociology of religion is indeed in the middle of something of a paradigmatic crisis (Riesebrodt 2008). Discussions about religion in the modern world are very different from the ones that experts of religion have been studying ('Why this mismatch?' asks Davie 2007). It is a mismatch that somehow illustrates the intensification of the 'latent schism between religious and secular worldviews' (Mahmood 2009: 66). Alongside the call for a more organic approach to religion (in opposition to functional and substantive ones), US scholars have recently expressed the need for a 'strong program' in the sociology of religion which would recognize religion as an independent rather than a dependent variable (Smilde and May 2010).

The principal advance occurring throughout this discipline is better scrutiny at the level of individual belief, consciousness and practice at a grassroots level, but within a political sociology perspective. Works rich in ethnography have for instance been emerging in a steady stream. So following a tradition in the sociology of culture in particular inspired by Bellah, Lichterman examines the processes through which religious groups bring religion into the civic arena, while signalling to themselves and others that they are religious groups by deploying 'quiet signals of religious identity' in carrying out their civic obligations (Lichterman 2005). The notion of agentivity has also become paradigmatic in this renewal based on ethnography, as well as the theoretical framework of collective action and social movements, mostly in non-Western contexts (Wiktorowicz 2004).

Religion as a capillary social object

The idea that religion works in contemporary societies by following a 'capillarity dynamic' arises from a variety of sources. First, it follows from the suggestion that 'religion' is making its entry into disciplines where it used to be rather discrete (law, philosophy, economy). Religion and politics, still a troubling relationship viewed from the secularization perspective, is probably the most investigated topic in all the various contexts. It brings in the analysis of different actors, including states, and religion-based groups, while looking at the relationship of religious individuals to politics, mostly through the analysis of religion as an indicator of political attitudes and behaviours. It even ventures, in some contexts, into what is happening in people's private rooms and intimate practices as an example of a 'repoliticization' of the private and religious spheres (Casanova 1994). Queer studies and intersectionality have also made their entry into the field. Recent reflections on homonationalism, inspired by the seminal work of Puar (2007), examine the intersection of the broad structures of racism, neoliberalism and class exclusion that underwrite 'homonationalist config-urations' in which the rehabilitated figure of the 'queer' is transformed into a border differentiating in hierarchical terms Western liberal democracies from the rest of the world. Puar points out the racist or racial dimension of homonationalism insofar as it tends to exclude specific groups, in her eyes most notably Sikhs, Jews, Muslims (Puar 2007). 'Intimate citizenship practices' have thus been elevated into discriminating variables that measure the capacity of certain individuals to become European citizens or Europeanized. Concrete examples abound that clearly confirm the diverse ways in which homonationalism is enmeshed in securitization, counterterrorism, nationalism and citizenship (Haritaworn 2010). This complements the more classical work on religion looking at fundamentalism and radicalization as an effect of the globalization and politicization of religion.

The role played by law in framing public problems related to religion, either under the human rights rubric or in relation to culture, is also a relatively new preoccupation, given that religious freedom (as commonly defined in most secular constitutions) has not previously featured among the more controversial fundamental rights (Grimm 2009). Looking at the interaction of law and religion today means on the one hand regarding the impact religion may have on legal systems, and on the other, analysing the way certain religious groups and religious individuals rely on law to advance their claims and procure respect for their rights as believers. Questions arise around the

ability of certain groups to develop the legal competences to build up a case: 'One concerns who has standing to take legal action against minority faiths; another concerns admissibility of evidence in matters dealing with small unpopular faiths. A third important issue concerns the general approach taken toward religion and religious groups within a society' (Richardson 2009: 423). This study covers the legal reality of the existence of established hierarchies of religion, which brings us back to the earlier concern about definition. Groups claiming status as a religion (think of Alevis or Baha'is) have to fit within a hierarchical scheme that matters when it comes to fundraising, building places of worship, training religious clerks and educating children. Looking at the nexus of law and religion also prompts reflection on the admissibility of evidence in matters dealing with the smaller, less popular faiths. Liberal states condemn certain practices that enter the spotlight of public life mostly through the glare of controversy, and welcome others in the name of neutrality. What is the logic and internal coherence of liberal neutrality? Can secular legal traditions be fair to religion?

Conclusion

Religion is no longer marginal to political sociology as it is not marginal to social life. It is slowly moving from being conceived of as the cause of something else and as an intermediary object of study, to a proper object of study in its own right capillarized within multiple sectors of social and political life. The epistemological and methodological preconditions for a better knowledge of its political and social meanings still need improving, in particular a more systematic comparative perspective. On this point, the founding-father traditions may need to be revitalized. The central paradigms (secularization and privatization/individualization) have been challenged in many respects by the pluralization dynamic of new religions in the global-institutional faith landscape. The legal regulation of religious diversity, whether in national or international jurisdictions, tends to confirm the legitimacy of certain religious signs (Christian signs in Europe, for example) by qualifying them as 'cultural', while it marginalizes others by qualifying them as 'political'. Through secularism, constitutional traditions work somehow as guarantors of cultural homogeneity (Mancini 2009). So not only is religion central to the social sciences research agenda, but it has gained a politically loaded status that makes its messages hypersensitive for publics at large.

Returning to the pedagogical challenge mentioned in the introduction, we need to dig into research with the same appetite that we look for appealing material that can register the complexity of religion as social fact in all its current complexity. *Big Love*, the HBO TV polygamist melodrama featuring the family life of the Henricksons – fundamentalist Mormons in Utah, has it all. The ritual addictiveness of the series stems from its portrayal of the complicated social and family life of Bill, father and potential prophet, and his three wives and numerous children. They are unchurched Mormons living in Salt Lake City out of the compound. The tie binding them to their initial community of belonging is essential to the narrative, an active theme in the drama throughout its four seasons. We contemplate a dynamic and intense family life mixed with up with a religious commitment that is taken completely seriously. The TV drama

represents in fact a relatively exhaustive, beautifully illustrated handbook of the sociology of religion, including chapters which embrace not only such classic content as prophecy, dogmas, rituals, education, transmission, the link with tradition, un-churching, the creation of a new church, the experience of religious pluralism and competition, but also more functional and contemporary themes, such as legal constraints, politicization, public controversies around polygamy, gender relations, political participation, etc. Religion presented in *Big Love* exceeds the strict frame-work of polygamy. But the Henricksons have their say too ('Mormons don't eat salmon', says Barb, Henrickson's first historical wife), which somehow might drive political sociologists out of their minds, as Lurie justifiably imagined.

Acknowledgement

Further Reading

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