

# Glocal Religions: An Introduction

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**Abstract:** This introductory article offers an overview of the volume's major problematic. It examines the literature on religion and globalization and then moves on to an overview of the literature on religion and glocalization. Throughout the discussion, the article refers explicitly to the volume's chapters and outlines how their specific themes fit within the broader problematic of glocal religions.

**Keywords:** religion; glocalization; globalization; hybridity

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## 1. Introduction

This volume originated from the 2015 panel on glocal religion, which I organized and chaired for the biannual meetings of the International Society for the Sociology of Religion. Following the panel, contributions were invited for a special issue of the journal *Religions*, and over the next two years a series of articles were published in the journal. Although several of this volume's chapters originated from the initial panel, the list of contributions was subsequently expanded. I should express my gratitude to the scholars whose work is featured in the following pages. My thanks also go to the publisher, whose support for this project has been critically important.

The goal of this volume is to bring the theme of glocal religions to the attention of a broader scholarly audience as well as to demonstrate the relevance of glocality for the cross-cultural study of religion. It is not accidental that this volume features work that covers different regions of the globe and comes from different disciplines and specializations. The theme of glocal religion is far from novel; the notion of global–local or glocal religion as a ‘genre of expression, communication and legitimation’ of collective and individual identities (Robertson 1991, p. 282; Robertson and William 1991, p. xv) has been on the agenda for more than two decades. More explicit scholarly engagement with the problematic of glocalization and religion is far more recent and remains relatively limited—especially if contrasted with the widespread popularity of the theme of globalization and religion (for an overview, see Roudometof 2016a). In this introductory chapter, I address two important issues that should be useful in offering a general means of orientation to readers with regard to the material featured in this collection. Firstly, I offer a brief account of the historical trajectory of the ideas associated with the problematic of the relationship among religion, globalization and glocalization, and secondly, I briefly discuss the ongoing and interdisciplinary scholarly production on the glocalization–religion nexus. Hopefully, this volume provides further incentive for additional work on this topic. There is plenty of room for future growth along the lines suggested by the theme of glocal religion, and numerous cases of religious expression from different corners of the globe can come under scrutiny and examination using the problematic of glocal religion.

## 2. Religion and Globalization

The intertwining of religion and globalization is quite well known, and religion is one of the primary areas demonstrating the significance of globalization in cultural and social life (for an overview, see Altglas 2010). It should be noted that key ideas about the very notion of globalization as a distinct process emerged from within the study of religion, although this is still largely unacknowledged. According to post-World War II modernization theory, modernization meant the success of universalism, secularism and at least a certain level of cross-cultural convergence (which remained a contested issue throughout the heyday of these perspectives in the 1960s and 1970s). However, since the 1970s, social scientists were confronted with a series of phenomena that offered a practical refutation of the predictions of modernization theory; on top of the list is the 1979 Iranian revolution, followed by the subsequent rise of fundamentalism and various religious revivals in Islamic countries but also in the US itself. Modernization did not translate into secularization—and the empirical refutation of this connection meant the delegitimization of post-World War II modernization and secularization theories.

The alternative perspective came with the notion of globalization, formulated in the early 1980s by Roland Robertson in a series of publications that eventually became his volume titled *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (1992). Robertson (1992, p. 8) defines globalization as ‘the compression of the world’. By ‘compression’, Robertson means the accelerated pace of contact among cultures, peoples and civilizations or the sense that the world is ‘shrinking’. Robertson does not equate globalization with universalism—but proposes the interpenetration of universalism and particularism. His approach is an alternative that highlights the significance of the ‘search for fundamentals’ as part of globalization. Fundamentalism or religious revivals are not seen as ‘anomalies’ but are accounted for as responses to globalization. The key idea is the notion of relativization—that is, the notion that, once a group encounters a new reality or condition or comes into contact with hitherto alien cultures, worldviews or ideas, it readjusts or ‘relates’ its own condition to the new realities. To avoid misunderstandings, relativization does not mean relativism. In Maffesoli’s (2016, p. 745) analysis, a similar term is proposed (‘relationniste’) to denote the idea that concepts, ideas or practices become meaningful through their being related to other concepts, ideas or practices. Meaning is a property located only within a specific cultural milieu or context and nested in webs of relationships; when such relationships are reconfigured, meaning is adjusted too.

The post-1989 fall of communism in Eastern Europe contributed to the further proliferation of scholarship. For a short list of prominent or influential publications see, among others, Berger and Huntington (2002), Stackhouse and Paris (2000), Hopkins et al. (2001), Beckford (2003), Juergensmeyer (2003), Beyer and Beaman (2007), Beyer (2006) and Levitt (2007). Different organizational schemes have been proposed by Robertson (1992), Therborn (2000) and G. Campbell (2007) to capture the historicity of globalization. Although these authors are not in agreement in terms of the temporal phases or stages of globalization, they all share a long-term perspective that extends globalization further into the past and, *de facto*, separates globalization from modernization. Within the study of religion, scholarship has taken additional steps to address the everlasting and inconclusive debate on the definition of religion through the articulation of theories and interpretations that explain not just the phenomenon labeled ‘religion’ in the West alone but, rather, the development of ‘world religions’, as such (for accounts, see Masuzawa 2005; Beyer 2006; Hedges 2012). From within these lenses, then, the emergence of world religions is intertwined with the extension of commercial linkages and networks over the Euro–Asian landmass and is related to the political–military projects of several empires (see Tehranian 2007). Of special importance for the incorporation of the problematic of globalization within the sociology of religion is the gradual extension of Appadurai’s (1990) notion of –scapes into the area of religion. Although religion is not included within his original typology of –scapes, the notion of religious landscape or religiouscape has been gradually introduced into social–scientific discourse (McAlister 2005) and used to study the differential signification and contested nature of religious sites that operate within competing religiouscapes (Hayden and Walker 2013). It has also been further applied to religious traditions

within Christianity (Roudometof 2014a) as a means of capturing the religious unity formed by such traditions.

The globalization of various religious traditions, faiths and other subgroups, or more accurately their spread across borders (Kennedy and Roudometof 2006), brings forth the problematic of global–local interaction. This problematic is of course well known to researchers. The various patterns of the global–local binary relationship are typically seen as forming either an adversarial or a nonadversarial relationship. One of the primary forms nonadversarial relationships take are the multitude of processes that are conventionally referred to as indigenization, hybridization or glocalization (Pieterse 2003; Burke 2009; Roudometof 2016b). These processes register the ability of religion to mold into the fabric of different communities in ways that connect it intimately with communal and local relations. Religion sheds its universal uniformity in favor of blending with locality. Several authors have focused more on individual cases that highlight the mutability of religion; suitable examples include Warburg’s (2006) impressive study of the Baha’i, Beyer’s (2009) discussion of the differential adaptations of customs and practices such as the Islamic hijab, and Dessì’s (2014) discussion of religious change as glocalization and analyses of Al Qaeda’s international terrorist organizational blueprint as ‘glocal’ (global–local) (Marret 2008). The broader point here is that practices depicted as ‘traditional’ (such as the Muslim veil) are frequently innovations that transform past practices into contemporary cultural forms to express a felt incongruity with what is perceived to be a threat to identities and traditions.

### 3. The Religion–Glocalization Nexus

Social scientists’ increased engagement with glocalization reflects a reality that has become gradually apparent to most people around the globe in the aftermath of the 2008 Great Recession. Globalization has entered into a more cautious and regulated phase, whereby walls have been created to obstruct the free flow of trade, money and people as governments adopt a more selective approach concerning their trade partners, the capital that is welcomed within their borders and the individuals who are viewed as legitimate candidates for inclusion in their societies. In a classical statement that helped introduce the term into the social sciences, Robertson (1995) argued that

the global is not in and of itself counterpoised to the local. Rather, what is often referred to as the local is essentially included within the global. In this respect, globalization, defined in its most general sense as the compression of the world as a whole, involves the linking of localities. But it also involves the ‘invention’ of locality, in the same general sense of the idea of the invention of tradition. (p. 35)

Accordingly, global–local or glocal religion thus emerges as a key domain of inquiry as groups and individuals use religious traditions symbolically as emblematic of membership in an ethnic or national group. Both institutional avenues and private means are employed in this symbolic appropriation, and these are usually interwoven into a web of other associations and relationships. Although communities continue to be formed around the notion of ‘locality’, this category is further divorced from its original connection with a specific geographical area and it can be transnationally and/or symbolically reconstituted (Kennedy and Roudometof 2006). These processes involve the construction of cultural hybrids that blend religious universalism with several forms of local (national or ethnic) particularisms. For example, consider the case of Santo Daime, a syncretic religion, founded in the Amazon region of Brazil, that combines elements of folk Catholicism with influences of spiritualism, African animism and indigenous South American shamanism (see Dawson 2012).

Although the study of glocalization has become an area of growth for the study of religion, interest in this topic is by no means limited to the social–scientific or sociological and anthropological study of religion. In fact, it has extended into diverse fields ranging from marketing glocal yoga (Askegaard and Eckhardt 2012) and the relationship between science and religion (Drees 2015) to the fields of theology and constitutional law (see, for example, Hirschl 2010). The significance of glocal for new conceptions of theological thought that need to confront contemporary

challenges is an important consideration in these debates. In theology, glocalization has been evoked as a conceptual vehicle for interpreting Christianity's adaptation strategies in China (Ng 2007) and has been debated as an interpretative strategy for public theology (Storror 2004; Pearson 2007). In theology, as Küster (2016) remarks, the shift from contextualization to glocalization is visible in the works of African and Asian theologians, whereby late modern blueprints of enculturation theology are superseded by contextual and intercultural theological reflection. Discussions of missionary work have further noted the significance of glocalization as a highly relevant missionary strategy for engaging with diverse cultural milieus (Atido 2017; Engelsviken et al. 2011; Fujino 2010).

The above clearly suggests that the religion–glocalization nexus is by no means restricted to fields within the social sciences. This is evident in this volume's pages, with contributions coming from seemingly surprising fields—such as archaeology. Even more, the necessity to study empirical phenomena that involve a broad range of transnational and hybrid religiosity forms a solid foundation for future engagements with the notion of glocalization. Within the social sciences, the glocalization–religion nexus involves the consideration of an entire range of responses as outcomes instead of a single master narrative of secularization and modernization (Beyer 2007) and is among the developing research frontiers (for an overview, see Roudometof 2014c). Contributions to this research area cover a wide range, from analyses of the German religious landscape (Nagel 2014) to Japanese religiosity (Fujino 2010) to Afro-folk religious practices in Puerto Rico (Romberg 2005) and analyses of Orthodox Christianity's historical record (Roudometof 2013, 2014a, 2014b). Spickard (2004) also has studied the transnational expansion of Sekai Kyusei-kyo—a new Japanese religion—by specifically examining issues of transnational religious coordination. Spickard argues that culture has shaped the religion's local reception, whereas local culture has further overturned initial organizational hierarchies and models. Of special importance is the study of social movements related to religions (Luz 2014) and minority–majority relations (Burity 2015; Topel 2017). Such research helps relate glocality to the making and remaking of identities around the globe.

Of particular significance for the empirical consideration of this problematic are the cases of Japan (Dessi 2013; Dessi 2017) and Brazil (Matsue 2014; Rocha 2016; Shoji and Usarski 2014). In *Japanese Religions and Globalization*, Dessi (2013) offers a highly instructive study of the variety of glocalized adaptations of Japanese religions that highlights both inclusive and exclusive tendencies within Japanese forms of religiosity. In his contribution to the present volume, Dessi further expands upon his long-standing research agenda concerning the use of glocalization as a heuristic means for understanding varied practices. In his article, he focuses on two case studies: the first one concerns the ongoing greening of Japanese Buddhism, whereas the second concerns the adoption of meditational techniques by priests and lay practitioners in Hawaiian Shin Buddhism. He argues that the glocalization of Japanese Buddhism is shaped by four factors: global consciousness, resonance with the local tradition, decontextualization and quest for power. Buddhism of course has been a prominent example of glocalization—not solely in Brazil or Japan but also in France (for a discussion, see Obadia 2012). Alongside varieties of Hinduism and eclectic adaptations of initially esoteric or mystical practices that originated in the Indian subcontinent, it offers classic examples that substantiate the thesis of the “Easternization of the West” (C. Campbell 2007). More than simply showing that cultural influences do not invariably run from West to East but in the opposite direction as well, this research agenda is also intimately related to the problematic of glocalization, as in most instances the versions of religious practices imported into the West are not faithful replicas of the originals but instead undergo creative adaptations to their new Western surroundings, thereby glocalizing themselves in order to endure and thrive in their newfound cultural milieus.

As the above clearly shows, research on the glocalization–religion nexus involves a large number of cases coming from a tapestry of regions around the globe: Brazil, Japan, US, Puerto Rico, Palestine, Germany and China are some prominent examples. These cross-cultural and inter- or transdisciplinary lenses of such research are also echoed in several chapters within the present volume. In her article, Tatiana Tiaynem-Qadir adopts the notion of glocalization to the transnational and anthropological exploration of liturgy within the Orthodox Church of Finland. Her research is based largely on ethnographic fieldwork with participants from Finnish, Russian and Greek cultural

and linguistic backgrounds. In their chapter about the specifics of funeral feasts in St. Lucia, Sabita Manian and Brad Bullock explore the migrant narratives and Indo–Caribbean religious practices through ethnographic research. The authors inquire into the ways diasporic identity is reconfigured in a local–global nexus as well as the degree to which this particular funeral feast has acquired glocal characteristics.

Use of the notion of glocal within the study of religion is not, of course, solely restricted to the contemporary era—for once it has been introduced into our conceptual vocabulary, glocalization can be further applied to the historical record. Focusing on the *longue durée* of the history of Eastern Christianity, Roudometof (2013, 2014a) defines four forms of glocalization: indigenization, vernacularization, nationalization and transnationalization. Vernacularization involved the rise of vernacular languages (such as Greek or Latin or Arabic in the case of Islam) endowed with the symbolic ability to offer privileged access to the sacred, whereas indigenization connected specific faiths to ethnic groups, whereby religion and culture were often fused into a single unit. Vernacularization was often promoted by empires, whereas indigenization was connected to the survival of particular ethnic groups. It is important to stress that this is *not* an exclusively contemporary phenomenon. The creation of distinct branches of Christianity—such as Orthodox and Catholic Christianity—bears the mark of this particularization of religious universalism. Nationalization connected the consolidation of specific nations with particular confessions and has been a popular strategy both in Western and Eastern Europe (Hastings 1997; Gorski 2000). Transnationalization has complemented religious nationalization by forcing groups to identify with specific religious traditions of real or imagined national homelands or to adopt a universalist vision of religion. In this volume, Marco Guglielmi’s article offers a highly nuanced assessment of this work. Addressing a very different cultural and geographical region, in her chapter Barbara Watson Andaya explores the degree to which the Christian missionary activities of the past centuries in East Asia were subject to a ‘repackaging’ or ‘glocalization’ that would render Christianity (most often Roman Catholicism) amenable to the local cultural milieu. She argues that the glocalization of Christianity set up a series of ‘power-laden tensions’ that continue to be the subject of ongoing negotiations to this day. This research might be seen in close connection with the series of arguments developed by José Casanova (2018) about the differential historical pathways to religious pluralism and secularization. In this regard, Brand’s chapter on the relationship between US-based evangelical ideals and the founding of the US is also a highly relevant contribution. Brand highlights the strong influences that have historically contributed to the view of the US as a promised land or a new Jerusalem. It might be relevant here to mention that the metaphor of the ‘new Jerusalem’ is not exclusive to the US, as it is also present in narratives that contributed to the founding of the 16th century Russian Empire under Ivan the Terrible (for details, see Roudometof 2014a, pp. 62–64). Another far less expected area of research is revealed in David C. D. van Alten’s chapter, in which he uses glocalization to interpret the features of the Roman Antiquity. The author interprets archaeological source material from within the glocalization framework, which helps account for the traits observed in religious material culture. This intertwining between archaeology and glocalization is not as idiosyncratic as one might think, as the relationship between the two has been the subject of a scholarly exchange (see Barrett et al. 2018).

Lastly, no discussion of the glocalization–religion nexus is adequate without addressing the theoretical ties between the concepts of glocalization and transnationalism. Conventionally, transnationalism has been applied primarily in connection to the lived experiences of individuals that are simultaneously embedded in two or more nation-states. In contrast, globalization is often used to signify processes that are planetary, interregional and intercontinental. But the line between the two is not clear cut. Although scholars of transnationalism have attempted to distinguish transnationalism from ‘strong’ versions of globalization as a set of worldwide or interregional processes, it is nevertheless true that ‘given the complexity of today’s world, the boundaries among the transnational, global, and diasporic religious modalities are very porous’ (Vasquez 2008, p. 164).

In this regard, the interdisciplinary field of Transnational Studies is a fellow traveler with the scholarship on the religion–glocalization nexus. Transnational Studies emerged in the 1990s in

connection with the study of post-World War II new immigrants or trans-migrants who moved from Third World and developing countries into developed First World nations (for an overview, see Levitt and Khagram 2007). New immigrants no longer assimilated into the cultures of the host countries but, rather, openly maintained complex links to their homelands, thereby constructing, reproducing and preserving their transnational ties. Immigrant transnationalism recast the relationship between people and religion (van der Veer 2002; Levitt 2001; Levitt 2007; Csordas 2009). In this volume, the relationship between transnationalism and glocalization is explored in Manéli Farahmand's article, in which she examines the uses of neo-Mayanité in diverse cultural contexts (Switzerland, Guatemala and Mexico). She traces the various transformations of this cultural and religious identity and analyzes them through a historical–ethnographic approach that offers important clues about the largely invisible cultural influences of this trend in several countries around the globe.

#### 4. Conclusions

In conclusion, it is important to view the glocalization–religion nexus not solely from within the inter- or transdisciplinary area of the study of religion but equally from within the transdisciplinary area of glocalization, sometimes also referred to as Glocal Studies (Roudometof 2015). Glocalization is a focal area of interest in a diverse tapestry of fields, areas of study, disciplines and/or specialties that include humanities and social sciences but also areas of research—such as information and communications technology and geoscience—that combine technological and social–scientific aspects (for an overview, see Roudometof 2016b). Cast in this light, religion comes under the rubric of the various forms of glocal belonging of which people avail themselves. The significance of glocal religions then rests in demonstrating that religiosity is not divorced from other forms of glocal hybridity.

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