theories and methodologies

Re-vamp: A Response

JULIA REINHARD LUPTON

IS THE RESURGENCE OF RELIGION IN OUR MILLENNIAL MOMENT A CASE OF ZOMBIES OR OF VAMPIRES? ARE WE DEALING, THAT IS, WITH AN ATAVISTIC army of stumbling, mumbling idiots, or are we encountering a phenomenon with teeth: vital, adaptive, crazy-beautiful, and ready to take some revamped general education courses at Harvard? I think we can conclude from these essays that we are dealing with vampires. In other words, like today's teenage vampires, the reanimated religions on the contemporary world stage are not anomalous, exceptional, or archaic. Instead, globalization, by draining functionality and glamour from the nation-state, has summoned organized religions and postreligions to take on ever-more-powerful political roles. Hence the brazen entry of an array of latter-day saints into the sempiternal sunlight cast by the restless streaming of information, capital, and populations across planetary time zones, from jihadist organizers and evangelical Alaskans to Harry Potter activists and irate Apple users.

In *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville places religion at the origin of his inquiry into liberalism:

> When I arrived in the United States, it was the religious aspect of the country that first struck my eyes. As I prolonged my journey, I noticed the great political consequences that flowed from these new facts.
>
> I had seen among us the spirit of religion and the spirit of liberty march almost always in opposite directions. Here, I found them intimately joined the one to the other: they reigned together over the same soil. (479)

A child of the French Enlightenment, Tocqueville had assumed that religious institutions exist at cross-purposes with republican politics. Yet Americans, he discovers, "mix Christianity and liberty so completely in their mind that it is nearly impossible to make them conceive one without the other" (476). Instead of directly influencing the state, religion supports civic life, including habits of freedom, through the institutions of family and neighborhood. In Tocqueville's analysis, the rigorous separation of church and state incites "an innumerable multitude of sects" to mix and mate in the

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United States like so many libertine lagomorphs (472).

A few years later, in his polemic "On the Jewish Question," Marx would call attention to the same paradox, echoing Tocqueville but with more acid reflux. When modern states stop making property and a specific religious affiliation requirements for citizenship, Marx notes, they stimulate rather than retard property ownership and church membership. Freed from state control, "the religious consciousness runs riot in a wealth of contradictions" (39), occupying civil society as an intermediary sphere cleared by the exit of the state from matters of faith and finance. By peeling off the civil from the civic and freeing political membership from religious affiliation, the modern state cultivates an alienating split between private and public man. The modern centaur is half voter and half credit rating, and religion lies along the semiprivate hairline where domestic and civic bodies meet. Whereas Tocqueville focuses on the wealth of religious forms harbored in this border zone, Marx pushes the insight further: civil society not only nurtures specific types of religious life but also represents the generalization of the pragmatic principles of Judaism in Christianity:

> Judaism attains its apogee with the perfection of civil society; but civil society only reaches perfection in the Christian world. Only under the sway of Christianity, which objectifies all national, natural, moral and theoretical relationships, could civil society separate itself completely from the life of the state, sever all the species-bonds of man, establish egoism and selfish need in their place, and dissolve the human world into a world of atomistic, antagonistic individuals. (51)

The Jewish question, construed narrowly as the paradox of the Jew who achieves citizenship without relinquishing membership in Israel, will only be resolved, argues Marx, when state and church wither away, not only because their disappearance would make the question of any religious affiliation irrelevant but also because modern state forms themselves promote a spectral Judeo-Christian practice of selfhood.

Marx and Tocqueville are bemused by the thicket of religious expression in America, whose varieties have only continued to increase and multiply in the intervening century and a half. A recent Pew-sponsored study of immigration, religion, and civic engagement tracks the citizenship practices of "Roman Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindi and Buddhist congregations," all clustered in the Chicago metropolitan area (Kniss and Numrich 11). The study largely confirms Tocqueville's findings in 1840: namely, that religion plays a powerful socializing role in a political environment characterized by relative openness and mobility. Will Kymlicka has similarly argued that the "thinner" the public culture (the more minimal its membership requirements), the "thicker" the resulting spheres of civil society and the richer the possibilities for affiliations in overlapping communities.

Today's religio-political mashup diverges significantly, however, from the liberal solution analyzed by Tocqueville and Marx. Whereas Tocqueville paid tribute to an America whose priests and ministers "seemed to remove themselves voluntarily from power" (481), religious opinion makers today are happy to influence politics, the more directly the better. John Shimkus, a Republican congressman, apparently felt no shame reassuring the House Energy Committee that we need not worry about global warming because God promised Noah that he wouldn't flood the world again (Mail Foreign Service). Geraldine Heng, citing Bruno Latour, might attribute Shimkus's epistemological insouciance to the righteous relativism associated with cultural studies. David Theo Goldberg might point to the role of digital media in amplifying religious passions and practices, "conjur[ing] novel responses to concerns, perceived lacks, [and] constituted

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needs." Meanwhile, to the list of denominations assembled by Fred Kniss and Paul D. Numrich in their study of contemporary Chicago we might add the environmentalist, vegetarian, slow-food, and craftivist movements, which share digital platforms and social sensibilities with *Facebook*. These postsecular countercultures thrive in the territory staked out by Gauri Viswanathan for Theosophy, a sect that refused "both the authoritarian certainties of dogmatic theology and the materialism of secular reason." In other words, if you live in a thin civic culture, you may find yourself knitting some really thick socks, using a cable stitch composed of two parts organic, cruelty-free yarn and one part HTML code.

In this issue Saskia Sassen confronts the apparent anomaly of religion's resurgence in global modernity as a symptom of new distributions of territory, authority, and rights under globalization: as Vampires 2.0, not Zombies 101. As the traditional attributes of the nation-state become denationalized (through changes in banking, in media, in peacekeeping, and in population movements, for example), religions step in, "expan[ding] into domains once off-limits," whether they're reshaping political parties, health and climate policy, or consumer culture. Sassen speaks of "organized religion" to indicate her interest in religions as motors of organization, norm-forming and group-building machines that create internal coherence while brokering intergroup alliances. In her book *Territory, Authority, Rights* (2006), Sassen analyzes religion as a "complex capability," defined as "collective productions whose development entails time, making, competition, and conflicts" (8). Sacred kingship, monetization, and urban law were medieval forms of management whose tipping point from local custom into national norm marked the shift from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. In plural, liberal democracies like Tocqueville's America, Kymlicka's Canada, and Sassen's Netherlands, religions cultivated their organizational capacities in civil society, the associational space left over from and indeed sheltered by the minimal requirements for political belonging in jus soli democracies. Today, as those democracies lose their monopoly on territory, authority, and rights, along with the elusive recipes for subjective coherence, happy placemaking, and a sense of collective melody, organized religions are ready to fill the void, their sacred stories and established communication networks hardwired for crowdsourcing.

Modern Pentecostalism, which Mike Davis lauds as an emancipatory, largely self-organizing religious movement that succors the global slums abandoned by liberalism (195), was born in a mixed-race Los Angeles church in 1906 (Shapiro). Pentecostalism has one foot in Tocqueville's America, where a thousand churches bloom, and another in the empire whose Main Street is Wall Street and hence vulnerable to the monetary, information, and population flows that are denationalizing nation-states. In what Sassen calls with mock intimacy "our global modernity," religious cultures nourished in the Petri dish of civil society under liberalism rapidly turn political under new conditions of planetary connectedness, sprouting cosmopolitan tentacles and fantasmatically possessing states at the level of ideology, not structure. These new religious formations, moreover, feed on the Webbie support networks of fandom and branddom examined by Goldberg. Fasten your seat belts and silence your smart phones: Marx's "religious consciousness run riot" has entered a whole new phase.

Sassen's analysis of capabilities as belonging to one period and then jumping organizational logics by passing into another might seem at odds with Geraldine Heng's call for a "strategic diachronicity" that would resist misuses of "the coevalness of present and past, in the sedimented pluralities of the present." Yet Heng's account is ultimately, I think, consonant with Sassen's. Heng argues that when we intuit repetitions of medieval

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formations in contemporary life, we must always attend to the differences between past and present. So, too, Sassen cautions against the power of her own analogy between medieval and contemporary globalizations. Whereas contemporary globalizations are characterized by "the multiplication of partial or simple systems, each with a small set of constitutive rules," medieval world orders "addressed all of social life." If divine kingship is a medieval capability appropriated by popular sovereignty in the Renaissance (Sassen, *Territory* 19), the latest incarnations of charisma do not reinstitute a medieval sensorium but rather open onto something new and strange. Unlike Oz, whose frank embrace of smoke and mirrors belongs to an earlier, more secular public sphere, Harry Potter is a very nice boy *and* a very good wizard.

Like Heng, Leah S. Marcus aims to remap Europe by refreshing our knowledge of the global geographies of earlier periods. She sees Shakespeare, however, not as an ally in but as a deterrent to this project. Shakespeare, she concludes, is ultimately "insular" and "provincial": "His plays acknowledge cosmopolitanism and religious diversity but simultaneously reject them in favor of an achieved communal harmony that is at least implicitly based on commonality of belief and custom." I would argue, a bit differently, that the Republic of Venice offers Shakespeare an inherently experimental setting, a place to test the possibilities of pluralism *avant la lettre*. In *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*, Shakespeare does imagine Jews, Moors, and Christians in new alliances formed through adventures in intermarriage as well as through the varieties of conversion conducted within the republic's elastic borders (Lupton; Botwinick). As Marcus rightly insists, however, the solutions engineered by these plays are painfully imperfect. The forced nature of Shylock's conversion and Jessica's embrace of hers call attention to the loss of worlds entailed by the play's clumsy attempts at civic inclusion.

If Shylock had been allowed to remain Jewish while being included more fully in a properly pluralized Republic of Venice, Shakespeare would have delivered the liberal answer to the Jewish question (citizen *and* Jew) two centuries early. Yet because Judaism in the Renaissance was an "organized religion" in Sassen's sense—a self-regulating foreign body hostilely hosted by the Venetian state (Makiel)—neither Shylock nor Jessica could enter the larger Venetian community and remain formally Jewish. Under the ancien régime, there was no personal Judaism (though there were crypto-Jews, Jews who practiced not so much "in private" as "in secret," rebuilding community in forbidden spaces [Gross 106–23]). Kashrut, Sabbath, and circumcision are instruments by which Judaism organizes itself, constitutes itself as organized, as part of the premodern landscape of "diverse normative orders." In Sassen's terms, at the end of the play Venice has used conversion and naturalization procedures to produce "unitary national spatial, temporal, and normative framings" of its own mixed political being. These framings draw on capabilities already developed in other spheres, including Jewish self-government and legal reasoning, techniques that can become disaggregated and reassembled again—for example, in the Jewish emancipation projects of the Enlightenment or the Jewish state projects of the twentieth century.

So, too, when Othello reminds the Venetians in his final speech that he has "done the state some service" (5.2.338), he recalls the naturalization practices of the Venetian Republic as recorded by Gasparro Contarini in 1534. Describing the restrictive citizenship laws in Venice, Contarini acknowledges that "some forrain men and strangers have been adopted into this number of citizens," thanks to their having "done unto them some great service" (18). Although Othello's extravagant covenanting with Venice—through Christian conversion, military duty, and inter-

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marriage—ultimately fails, Shakespeare by no means discredits the bid by Othello and Desdemona to create a more perfect union. Indeed, I would argue that *Othello* manifests the kinds of experiments detailed by Bonnie Honig in *Democracy and the Foreigner* and *Emergency Politics*: Othello is a stranger whose appointments with republicanism are constitutive, not accidental. His attempt to exercise a new right (intermarriage as the egregious assertion of citizenship) also posits a new world and thus provokes what Honig calls "reluctance and panic" among everyone concerned, including Othello himself (*Emergency Politics* 54).

Finally, Amy Hollywood invokes the distinctiveness of humanistic inquiry to take religious studies as the exemplar of qualities and questions that "open spaces for other modes of being to become accessible." Heng, on the other hand, calls for new alliances with the quantitative social sciences, whose data harvests reveal the efflorescences of technology, urbanization, and pluralism that have occurred periodically across the globe. Heng and Hollywood, I think, would agree that we need both confident, self-conscious humanities, fully in charge of their special resources and traditions, and humanities that freely covenant with other disciplines. Taken not simply as one variable among others but as a distinctive mode of human becoming, religion will remain a crucial legacy in literary studies and a key bridge among the human sciences in the decades to come. Meanwhile, provocateurs as various as Glenn Beck, the new vampire glitterati, and devotees of the Church of Craft will continue to twist and fray our sense of what religion might be, and how it should behave in public.

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