Religious conversion and globalization:
Towards a theoretical integration

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Abstract

This paper proposes a theoretical integration of the globalization perspective and research on religious conversion. It combines the global field model (Robertson, 1992; as further developed by Warburg, 2005) which accounts for multiple global interactions, with the conversion careers approach (Gooren, 2010), which systematizes the various factors influencing individual religious conversion at different levels. The notion of glocalization modes (building upon Dessì, 2013) includes the form and function of the interactions of global influences on individual religious change at the local level.

Key words: *Globalization, religious conversion, glocalization modes.*

要 旨

　本稿は，改宗論（入信過程のモデル）とグローバリゼーション理論との統合を提案する。一方，多様な相互作用によって形成されるグローバル領域論（Robertson〔1992〕及び Warburg〔2005〕によるロバートソン理論の再検討）を紹介する。他方，多種多様なレベルにおいて入信過程に働きかける諸要因をまとめたグーレンの改宗論・入信過程の説明モデル（Gooren, 2010）を検討する。グローバルな領域論とグーレンの改宗論との統合を提案する。さらに，（Dessì, 2013 を参考にして）グローカル化の様式（グローカリゼーション様式）の概念には形態及び機能を区別し，これを通してローカルなレベルにおいて個人の宗教変容に影響を与えるグローバルな相互作用が明らかにされる。

キーワード：グローバリゼーション，改宗・入信，グローカル化の様式

Introduction

Religions play a key role in the globalization process by providing symbolic resources for both conserving cultural identity and inducing transnational homogenization (Robertson, 1992). Through their transnational networks of fellow believers, religions spread their messages, institutions and practices and act as bearers of globalization, which both permeate and create boundaries throughout local societies (Lehmann, 2002).

Under the current stage of globalization, individuals throughout the world are joining religious groups and organizations which were not part of the historical religious landscape of their local societies. Yet, the phenomenon of religious conversion has received considerably little attention from the perspective of globalization studies.

In this paper, I further attempt at integrating the perspective of cultural globalization with research on religious conversion. To this aim, Warburg (2005, 2006)'s model of the "dual global field" –in turn an adaptation of Robertson (1992)'s notion of the global field- will be integrated into Gooren (2010)'s conversion careers approach. In addition, I employ the notion of glocalization modes, inspired in Dessì (2013)'s typology of Japanese religious participation in globalization.[1]

In a study of the globalization of the Baha'i faith, Warburg (Warburg, 2005, 2006) builds upon Robertson (1992) and proposes that globalizing religious movements operate in a "dual global field" that involves interactions among the international religious organization, its national/local religious community, the individual follower, and the world of believers. These, in turn, interact with the four components of Robertson's model. Even more interestingly, the dual global field

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addresses religious conversion (Warburg, 2006), though based on classical conversion theories.

Religious Conversion

Studies on religious conversion have tended to emphasize certain specific factors to explain this complex process of individual religious change.   Thus, theologians and religious studies scholars have accentuated doctrines and historical aspects; psychological research has stressed individual crisis and personality traits; sociologists have paid more attention to social networks (Greil, 1977; Lofland & Stark, 1965) and organizations (Stark & Finke, 2000); while anthropologists have focused on the role of culture (see Rambo, 1993 and Gooren 2007, 2010, for useful assessments on the literature).

A holistic, interdisciplinary theory appears with Lewis R. Rambo, who identifies a large array of factors affecting conversion (Rambo, 1993).   Though warning about the caveats of any universal definition of conversion, Rambo conceives it as a process of individual religious change resulting from the "interactions among the convert's aspirations, needs, orientations, the nature of the group into which she or he is being converted, and the particular social matrix into which these processes are taking place" (1993, p. 7).

In his conversion careers approach, Gooren (2010) elaborates an adaptation of the religious economies paradigm (Stark & Finke, 2000), pointing out that the notion of 'market' should be enlarged beyond the limits of national societies to consider the global order.   In an attempt at overcoming the disciplinary bias that overemphasizes some specific factors in individual religious change, Gooren (2007, 2010) puts forward a new synthesis of conversion approaches.   Building upon Rambo (1993)'s holistic paradigm, Gooren offers a systematization of the multiple factors influencing individual religious conversion.

Moreover, Gooren critiques the supply-side versions of the religious economies model with its stress on organizational religious competition as the determining cause of religious activity (Gooren, 2006, 2010).　In contrast, Gooren proposes that the dynamics of supply and demand sides should be analyzed by delving into the interconnections of the many factors at three levels: micro (the rational actor), meso (the religious organization), and macro (the overall religious economy and the religious market).
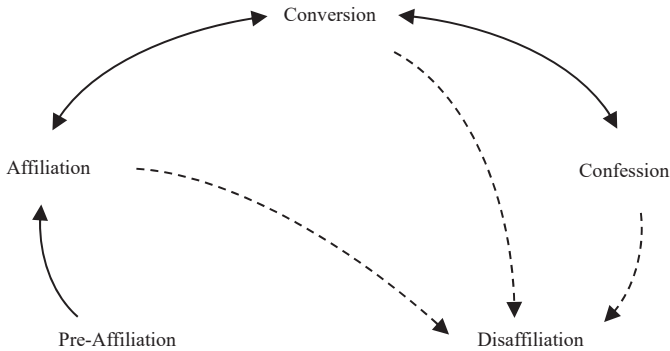

Figure.1. Typology of individual religious activity in the conversion careers approach (according to Gooren, 2010, p. 50).

Another element in Gooren (2007, 2010)'s new paradigm of conversion is his typology of individual religious activity, which he calls *conversion careers*, after a concept that had been used earlier in the field (Richardson, 1978).　He defines conversion careers as "the member's passage, within her/his social and cultural context, through various levels of religious activity" (2010, p. 67).　In it, Gooren distinguishes five levels of religious activity: pre-affiliation, affiliation, conversion, confession, and disaffiliation (Gooren, 2007, 2010) (see Figure 1).　Changes in the levels of religious activity throughout the entire conversion career may thus be explained by analyzing the different factors influencing the converting individual.

By presenting conversion as a process of *levels* of religious activity, the conversion careers approach overcomes the shortcomings of stage models, which view the phenomenon as a linear process.　But we should bear in mind that the labels of some of its levels might not apply to all kinds of religions, since terms like "conversion" and "confession" imply a Christian theological perspective and may not necessarily be employed in other religions.

Among the diverse influences affecting conversion, the new model acknowledges the "globalization factor" (Gooren, 2010, p. 79, 110).　However, it is not systematically linked with the conversion careers of the individuals studied.　If, as Gooren argues, institutional factors are crucial in the conversion experience, all of which are situated in the dynamics of globalization, then we should take into consideration the global interactions from which these evolve.

Integration of the dual global field model and the conversion careers approach

The dual global field model introduced above can be useful to analyze the multiple interactions occurring in the globalization of religious movements (Warburg, 2005).　In the original application of the dual global field model to the Baha'i movement, Warburg (2006) integrated religious conversion theory.　However, her study did not benefit from Gooren's recent contribution, which accounts for individual religious change in the dynamics of globalization more appropriately than classical conversion theory does (see review above).　In the theoretical integration proposed in this dissertation, the interactions between the components of the dual global field may be systematically linked to the diverse factors systematized in the conversion careers approach (Gooren, 2006, 2007, 2010).

In this perspective, the micro-level (individual, contingency, and social factors) pertain to the individual component of the global field model.　Institutional factors correspond to the interactions between the religious organization and the individual, the national society, the world system of societies, the global following, and

humankind.　Macro-level factors pertain to the interactions between the individual, his/her national society, the world system of societies, and humankind.　Of these interactions and factors, the most relevant for the study of glocalization modes and conversion process are those taking place between the religious organization, the converting individual, and the local society, though the understanding of glocalization only emerges when considering relations with other components of the global field.

The notion of glocalization mode in this framework is inspired in Giulianotti & Robertson (2007)'s forms of glocalization (relativization, accommodation, hybridization, transformation), as well as in Dessì (2013)'s typology of the ways in which Japanese religions participate in the process of globalization.　Especially useful in Dessì's contribution are the types dealing with the role of Japanese religions as carriers of globalization: the way these shape new glocal identities by selecting foreign cultural elements (glocalization leaning to selected external sources) and by influencing other cultures with Japanese religious elements (global cultural flows and glocalization) (Dessì, 2013).

Equally helpful is Dessì's discussion of the global-oriented attitudes of Japanese religions toward other religious options, which builds upon John Hick's classification of religious pluralism, inclusivism and exclusivism (Hick, 1983).　Although Dessì (2013) does not employ the term glocalization for each type in his framework, I choose to apply it in general on the assumption that glocalization is not only about adaptations, but also about relativization strategies to resist change (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2007).　The development of a religious organization in a new setting cannot evade negotiations with local particularism, which necessarily entails interactions between the global and the local (cf. Robertson, 1995).

Each glocalization mode may correspond to a certain type or a combination of several types of Dessì's framework.　A *glocalization mode* thus designates a specific manner by which a religious group or organization negotiates its resources (religious doctrines, identity, rituals, goals, organization structure and practices) with local particularism.　Glocalization modes are hence generated in the process of

relativization, since the recognition of competing alternatives leads to reconsiderations, accommodations and even reactions to other options (Robertson, 1992; Robertson & Chirico, 1985).

Furthermore, a glocalization mode has both form and function. The *form* may be a combination of resources of the new religion with elements of local particularism, in other words, a hybridization (García Canclini, 1995; Nederveen Pieterse, 1995). It can also be expressed as new interpretations or meanings (Robertson, 1995) assigned to the incoming religion in the local context, or even as changes in the beliefs and boundaries of this religion (Campbell, 2005).

In addition to its form, a glocalization mode performs a *function*. The resources of the new religion may be adapted to local particularism with the aim of finding acceptance and spreading its message, thereby achieving influence in society (Campbell, 2005). It could be a strategy implemented at the institutional level to promote the religious organization, or a new meaning conceived spontaneously by a small group of believers to interpret their sociocultural context, or a hybrid form created as an individual initiative to construct a new glocal identity.

In lieu of conclusions

The attempt at a theoretical integration explored above is still an undergoing project. Further conceptual definition is required, with attention to the specific point of interaction of global influences at the individual level.

For such a difficult endeavor, empirical research is recommended to identify the glocalization modes expressed in conversion narratives. Next, it is necessary to observe the ways in which the two aspects of a glocalization mode — form and function — originate and are implemented in the interactions among the components of the dual global field. Glocalization modes should therefore be examined with reference to specific interactions.

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