Global shifts, theoretical shifts: Changing geographies of religion

Lily Kong
National University of Singapore, Singapore

Abstract
The paper evaluates the burst in geographical research on religion in the last decade. It examines: (1) the relative emphases and silences in analyses of different sites of religious practice, sensuous geographies, population constituents, religions, geographies and scales of analyses; (2) the rise in the discourse of postsecularization; and (3) four contemporary global shifts (growing urbanization and social inequality, deteriorating environments, ageing populations, and increasing human mobilities), the ways in which religion shapes human response to them, and the implications for new research agendas.

I Introduction

The last decade has seen much growth in geographical research on religion. No longer can the geographies of religion be considered a moribund interest within the larger geographical enterprise, as evidence of renewed interest and energy appears increasingly in the pages of journals across the discipline. In a few short years, several special issues of journals have appeared focusing on questions of religion,[1] as have new books and journal articles.

Reflecting on the geographical literature on religion that has emerged in the last decade, I am struck by two observations. The first is just how much the context of geographical research on religion has changed dramatically. Religious extremism, and especially Islamic fundamentalism, has grabbed global attention after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 in New York, the 12 October 2002 and 1 October 2005

bombings in Bali, the 11 March 2004 train bombings in Madrid, the explosions on 7 July 2005 in London, and most recently, the 26–29 November 2008 multisited attacks in Mumbai. Our geographical imaginations and religious sensitivities have been radically reshaped and sharpened, even as our human sensibilities have been assaulted. Because our world is now ever more interconnected, 'where what happens "here and now" is profoundly affected by what happens at other times and in other places' (Jackson, 2008: 299).

Perhaps less dramatic but no less impactful is the emergence of more variegated and complex religious landscapes in many countries as a result of migration. Islam, for example, has

Corresponding author:
National University of Singapore, 1 Arts Link, Kent Ridge, Singapore 117570
Email: lilykong@nus.edu.sg

become more prominent in western Europe because of immigrants from eastern Europe and North Africa, as well as asylum seekers from war-torn countries such as Iran, Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan (Knippenberg, 2006). This has resulted in the emergence of religious pluralism in historically more mono-confessional states. The ways in which religion has thrust itself centrally, more than ever before, into society, community, politics, international affairs and so on has prompted Peach (2002: 255) to suggest that 'religion seems destined to become the new area for social geographical research in the first decade of the twenty-first century'. Indeed, Peach (2006: 353) believes that religion may now be 'a more important variable for socio-geographic investigation than race or ethnicity'.

Apart from the changes in the global context of geographical research, my second observation is just how much has changed since the 1990s in terms of the volume and sophistication of academic (and geographical) attention given to religion. With new circumstances have come new areas of research inquiry. New sources of migrants, new religions, new conflicts, new territories and new networks have all become the subject of analyses. New theoretical lenses within the geographical discipline have also opened up new approaches for those studying religion. Different sites of religious practice beyond the 'officially sacred', different sensuous sacred geographies, different religions in different historical and place-specific contexts, different geographical scales of analysis, and different constituents of population have all gained research attention, areas which had been thought lacking a decade ago (Kong, 2001). Has the geographical study of religion finally arrived?

In this paper, I would like to examine the emphases and relative silences in geographical research on religion, and offer the third in a set of decadal reviews (Kong, 1990; 2001). The first part of the paper will use as a frame some of the 'differentiations' foregrounded a decade ago (Kong, 2001) as essential ways for the

geographies of religion to advance, and take stock of how far research has progressed in addressing those lacunae. The second part of the paper will situate this geographical research within a larger context of philosophical, sociological and historical research on postsecularization, as well as growing geographical attention to this concept. I will then proceed in the third part of the paper to consider the major global shifts that confront humanity now and which will likely continue to do so in the years ahead. I consider the place of religion in shaping human response to these larger dynamics.

II 'Differentiations' of the last decade

1 Different sites of religious practice

One of the areas which has secured the imagination of researchers in recent years is the need to acknowledge the significance of 'unofficially sacred sites'. Indeed, there has been a growth in the adoption of the lexicon of the 'officially' and 'unofficially' sacred, with growth in research on the unofficial, 'everyday, informal, and often banal practices' (Brace *et al.*, 2006: 29; see also Holloway, 2003; Gokariksel, 2010). In substantive terms, this has led to the study of a variety of religious practices and sites beyond churches, temples, mosques, synagogues and such: for example, museums (Kong, 2005), schools (Valins, 2003; Kong, 2005), sacred groves (Campbell, 2005), roadside shrines (Preston, 2002), media spaces (Kong, 2006), streetscapes (Ismail, 2006; Jones, 2006; Kong, 2008), sites of financial practice, particularly Islamic banking and finance (Pollard and Samers, 2007) and home spaces (Kong, 2002). This extension of research sites beyond the usual churches, temples and mosques finds common thread with scholars of religion as well. For example, Post and Molendijk's (2007) elaboration of their recent research programme entitled 'Holy Ground' shows how they begin to examine new ritual spaces, such as the 'independent

development of small-scale (constructed) spaces for contemplation' and the 'rise of various forms of memorial shrines', a reflection of the growing importance of such spaces.

Such studies properly recognize religion as neither spatially nor temporally confined to 'reservations', practised only in officially assigned spaces at allocated times. Instead, there are many ways in which everyday spaces can be implicated in religious meaning-making, legitimating, maintaining and enhancing, but also challenging religious life, beliefs, practices and identities.

Such attention to new sites of analysis has not been at the expense of rigorous, theoretically driven and theoretically informed research on 'officially' sacred sites. The work begun in the early 1990s on the politics of sacred places (Kong, 1993a; 1993b) has grown significantly in the last decade, with studies from diverse contexts, time periods and value systems. The majority of work has focused on the place of mosques in predominantly non-Muslim countries (Schmidt di Friedberg, 2001; Naylor and Ryan, 2002; Cesari, 2005a; 2005b; de Galembert, 2005; McLoughlin, 2005; Jonker, 2005; Gale, 2005; 2008; Saint-Blancat and Schmidt di Friedberg, 2005), but other sites have also been analysed, such as Chinese temples (Waitt, 2003) and the Jewish eruv (Watson, 2005). While the specific empirical contexts vary, what these studies demonstrate is that, despite the official rhetoric of multiculturalism in many cities, sacred spaces are often at the heart of intense contestation, with wider community resistances to the establishment of 'unfamiliar' religious sites or sacred sites of minority groups. Whether there is a public rhetoric or even constitutional position about multiculturalism does not obviate strong opposition by local residents to the religious sites of the 'other'.

2 Different sensuous geographies

The literature on the body and embodied identities within geography and the social sciences more broadly has given rise to many new lines of inquiry. In encouraging the examination of different sensuous geographies of religion (Kong, 2001), the opportunity emerged for geographers to examine embodied experiences of the sacred, joining with anthropologists in their study of rituals and the role and experience of the body in religious practice.

This area, however, remains relatively unexplored within geography, with the exception of Julian Holloway's contributions which are the most notable. Holloway (2003: 1962) reminds us that the body is both a 'producer of sacred space-time' and a 'site of signification in and of itself'. In the first instance, through the performance of ritual, the body (through rhythm and comportment) is 'central to affective making of sacred space'. Here, we are reminded of Butler's (1990; 1993) work on performativity as a potentially useful conceptual tool, where the idea of (ritualistic) repetition reinforces religious meaning and (re)produces sacred space and time (see Martin and Kryst, 1998). But the body is not just a vehicle for repetitive performance; it is a 'site of signification in and of itself', as Bailey *et al.* (2007) demonstrate in their study of young Methodist bodies in nineteenth-century Cornwall. They demonstrate how the bodies of young Methodist children become objects of inscription for the values of temperate Methodists. Similarly, the work on veiling among Muslim women is another example of how the body is the site of inscription of religious and social values (Gokariksel, 2010). But the body is not a 'mere receptacle'; in fact it has the power to signify and make sense of sacred space, as Holloway (2003; 2006) also shows in his study of the Spiritualist movement and its practices of meditation and the séance.

While progress has been made in acknowledging the role of the body in reproducing religious values and identities (or in challenging them), what remains unexplored is the different sensuous ways in which the sacred is experienced and reproduced. Connell (2005), in writing about

Australia's popular Hillsong megachurch, shows just where geographers might push the analysis. He highlights how sermons are characterized by visual and musical interludes, demanding audience participation, demonstrating the ways in which the church commands the senses to religious experience. Unfortunately, the nature of such sensuous experiences and their contribution to religious experience has not been examined in more detail.

3 Different constituents of population

Perhaps the dimension of 'differentiation' that has generated most research is that related to different population constituencies, particularly where age and gender have intersected, with attention focused particularly on young men and women. Another constituent group that has drawn much research attention is the migrant population.

The research on young people's religiosity and spirituality reflects a larger growth in interest in children and young people within geography, evidenced, for example, in the publication of the journal *Children's Geographies* from 2003. Because the work is relatively new, McKendrick's (2000) annotated bibliography of the geographies of children showed a healthy listing of papers exploring children's environments, from school to playground to home (not only by geographers), but there appeared hardly anything on the experience of children in religious places and faith communities.

The key geographical works in this regard are those by Dwyer on young British Muslim women, and Hopkins on young Muslim men in Scotland. Dwyer (1998; 1999a; 1999b; 1999c; 2000) examines identities structured through racialized, gendered discourses which construct young Asian women as the passive victims of oppressive cultures. She observes the intersection of these discourses with reworked Orientalist leanings that construct Islam as antithetical to 'western' culture and Muslim women as

the embodiment of a 'fundamentalist' and repressive religion (Dwyer, 1999c: 7; see also Kabbani, 1986; Lutz, 1991). Hopkins (2004; 2006; 2007; 2008), in his work on young Muslim men in Scotland, disrupts the dominant discourses that emphasize patriarchy and aggression, on the one hand, and effeminacy and academicism, on the other, by demonstrating that young Muslim men's masculinities are shaped by markers of social difference and locality, and thus are multiple and fluid.

Geographers have much room to intersect with non-geographers in the study of young Muslim identities, where some of the more notable works have also focused on the British context. Scholars have, for example, focused attention on the adoption of explicitly religious identities among young Muslims, and the mobilization of religious discourse in the construction and contestation of young identities (Knott and Khokher, 1993; Lewis, 1994; Joly, 1995; Kundnani, 2002). Outside Britain, Schiffauer (1999) has made the same arguments regarding young Turks in Europe. More specifically, some have noted that young Muslim people are increasingly defining their identities in terms of their religion, as opposed, for example, to their parental country of origin (Gardner and Shukur, 1994). In this regard, Gardner and Shukur (1994) have observed that religious discourse painting Islam as strong and positive has served as a tool for young people to subvert negative and racialized discourses that attempt to categorize them. Others, like Archer (2001: 87), argue further that such religious identity helps young Muslims to reject 'whiteness' and British identity, while unifying themselves as Muslim communities irrespective of different ethnic backgrounds. The apparent 'increases' in Muslim identification among young 'Asian' men, and their apparent resistance to assimilation (or the adoption of 'British' identities) has been positioned as problematic in both theoretical and public arenas (Archer, 2001: 88). Similarly, in the USA, research on young

Muslim and Indian Americans and their identities shows how religion can be a tool to contest racial marginality. Kurien's (2005) work on the identity struggles of young, second-generation Indian Americans and their use of Hindu identity is a case in point (regarding the US context, see also Rayaprol, 1997; Warner, 1998; Hermansen, 2003; Peek, 2005). Some scholars suggest that this form of 'reactive ethnicization' through religious involvement among the second generation may result in the embracing of puritan or even radical strands of religion (see Busto, 1996, for an explanation for the evangelical turn of many second-generation Asian American Christians; see also Yep *et al.*, 1998).

While geographers studying young people have been entirely focused on issues of youth identity construction, there are many more issues and phenomena pertaining to young people and religion that remain neglected. For example, the ways in which young people choose their religions (where they have choice), and how conservative or liberal their orientations become, are matters for context-specific analysis. As Sherkat and Ellison (1999: 381) note, 'All choices are embedded within sets of social relations that influence decision-making, and religious choices are particularly prone to such inducements'. While scholars from other disciplines have sought to draw links between social relations of young people – such as in the home and at church programmes – and the transmission and absorption of religious values, and the making of religious choices (Hoge *et al.*, 1994; Myers, 1996; Kelley and de Graaf, 1997; Sherkat, 1998), geographers have not yet applied their historically and geographically contingent analysis to these questions of religious choice and orientation among young people.

Returning the gaze to geographical work, while Dwyer's and Hopkins' works explicitly address the intersections of age and gender in the construction of religious identity, there have been other works that focus on (adult) women, focusing squarely on gender. In this regard,

Falah and Nagel's (2005) *Geographies of Muslim women* is a key resource, covering different geographies even if not different religions. The three main sections of the book capture well the range of key research questions: gender, development and religion; discourse, representation and the contestation of space; and geographies of mobility.

On 'gender, development and religion', research has developed on the ways in which gender roles are shaped by religion and the specific contexts of livelihood – for example, in rural mountain society (Halvorson, 2005), in Afghan society (Aaftaab, 2005; Davis, 2005) and in Moroccan sedentarized pastoralist communities (Steinmann, 2005). The desire of women in Afghan communities to work and learn, the misrepresentations of Afghan women as victims, and the role of the Afghan educational movement among refugees in Iran are some of the empirical contexts of analysis through which issues about women's empowerment within religion (Islam in these instances) are examined.

On 'discourse, representation and the contestation of space', research attention has focused on the representation of Islam, gender and Muslim women by the media, government officials, novelists and Muslim women themselves (see, for example, Ayari and Brosseau, 2005; Falah, 2005).

On 'religion and geographies of mobility', the analytic frame is anchored in the view that migration is not simply a matter of pure economic calculation on the part of individual migrants, but reflects the confluence of a variety of factors, such as economic need, religious identity, gender discourses and state development aims. Research has ranged over questions of how religion provides strength to female domestic workers, thus resisting exploitation, though Islam is deployed in domestic worker recruitment processes as well (Silvey, 2005); the ways in which mobility is both enabled and constrained by religious discourses and practices

(Freeman, 2005); and the ways in which transnational linkages between homeland and migrant destination shape transnational moral geographies and the relative conservativeness of interpretation of religious strictures (Mohammad, 2005).

More generally, the literature on religion and the migrant population has burgeoned, and Peach (2002: 256) reminds us that the arrival of new religions has changed the cultural landscape in 'the west', and brought about varied forms of interaction and negotiations between host communities and immigrant communities. To him, the contested, material expressions of religious affiliation arising from such intersections offer 'the most fruitful confluence[s] of the interest of social and cultural geographers'.

Several strands of work have emerged at the interface of human mobility and religion, recognizing the historical depth of present-day phenomena, the impacts of mobility on religious landscapes in sending and receiving countries, the construction of new religious identities, the place of transnational networks, and the intersection of transnational religion and domestic politics. I elaborate briefly on these below, to demonstrate the diversity and richness of research.

First, we are reminded of the historical depth of some present-day phenomena as numerous scholars share the results of their research on the historical migration of people to colonize other lands and how that had changed the religious landscapes of many destinations. From the Jewish colonization of Palestine in the 1880s (Clout, 2002), to the British colonization of America (and other colonies) from the 1700s (Endfield, 2006), the migration of people to resettle in distant lands has impacted the religious landscape of colonized nations in myriad ways. Often, they help to explain present-day religious landscapes of different countries. Imported religions (through missionaries or the import of slaves) have also led to the formation of new religions, tied in to European

denominations or mixed with indigenous spiritual beliefs, expressed with local flavours and interpretations (Chivallon, 2001; Clarke and Howard, 2005).

Additionally, migrants and travellers brought back cultural and geographic imaginings of colonized lands, and, through their influence, shaped images of distant lands among those who had not travelled to or were thinking of resettling in the colonies. These migrants and travellers, including religious missionaries, 'may have had a role to play in the accumulation of knowledge and the application, testing and development of theories regarding the environment and peoples of the places they described' (Endfield and Nash, 2002: 33). For example, British missionaries in America 'played a significant role as anthropologists, gathering and disseminating local information on cultures and custom, often capturing on paper local languages and folklore threatened with extinction' (Endfield, 2006: 659). These migrations thus contributed to building up a store of physical and social information on Britain's colonies in diverse places such as America and South Africa (Endfield and Nash, 2002; 2005; Endfield, 2006). Unfortunately, the 'historic interactions of the colonial period ... still influence European attitudes towards non-Europeans' (Khan, 2000: 32), and such attitudes are apparent in the repressive and superior attitudes towards minority groups that have migrated to European countries in more recent years.

Second, research has foregrounded how migration impacts on religious landscapes of receiving countries. This could be in the establishment of religious enclaves in which the initial immigrant population provides a support network and assistance to new migrants in the form of finance, residence and employment (Brown, 2000). It could also be in the spatial and architectural impacts on the religious landscapes, often the most visible and lasting evidence of migrant population presence. These physical imprints usually result from a change

in migration patterns, from labour migration to the immigration of families, which implies a sense of permanence among the migrant community. The sense of permanence is tied in with family reunification and subsequently develops in them a desire for space for religious expression (Wang *et al.*, 2002; Peach and Gale, 2003; Samers, 2003). The spatial structures are symbols of their permanence in their new communities and of their assertion of their belonging to the immediate neighbourhood. In fact, such religious institutions have a direct social role in integrating and settling recent immigrants to a new country, are centres where new immigrants may seek financial, economic and social aid, and are areas where the perpetuation of religious beliefs and practices takes place (Ebaugh, 2004; Agrawal, 2008: 44; Ley, 2008; Paerregaard, 2008). They also represent an immigrant group's assertion of its religious rights and difference (MacDonald, 2002; Connell, 2005; Agrawal, 2008; Ley, 2008; Paerregaard, 2008). As migrant groups seek to assert themselves and their practices in space, there can be implications for urban planning (Agrawal, 2008), even as they require adjustments to social policy. For example, government agencies will need to consider the level of permanence of migrants in their reactions to and control of migrant activities and settlement practices (Wang *et al.*, 2002). Temporary labour migration might require less intervention on the part of the government than permanent family migration in terms of how the state deals with the migrant communities' religious, social and economic needs, and in the demands made by migrants to have a space in their settled homes for religious expression (Samers, 2003).

Third, research has appeared on how migration impacts religious landscapes of the sending countries. For instance, Bilska-Wodecka (2006) has examined how state policy had led to forced repatriation of Greek Catholics and Jews from Poland post-independence in 1918, in order to pursue homogenization of the country through common religious affiliation, thus developing national belonging. The forced migration of large sectors of the population resulted in significant changes to the religious make-up of the country.

Fourth, geographers have examined the ways in which migrant communities form their own unique identities and the processes of identity formation. Attention has focused on the formation of diasporic identities as compound or hybrid identities, whereby immigrant populations adopt simultaneous identities that include religious, national and cultural affiliations (Dwyer, 2000; Chivallon, 2001; Hopkins, 2007).

Fifth, research has focused on transnational networks and ties and how they influence the ways in which migrants act, make decisions and develop identities (Ebaugh, 2004: 216). Particularly, research has been undertaken on the migration of Islamic communities and their continued maintenance of transnational ties to the homeland, as well as the maintenance of these ties across generations (Bowen, 2004). More work needs to be done to help shed light on the role of formal and informal religious organizations in influencing transnational flows and, in turn, how transnational dynamics influence traditional institutions (Olson and Silvey, 2006).

Sixth, there is a political dimension to be considered as transnational religious organizations intersect with domestic politics, though this work has tended to progress outside geography. As Haynes (2001) demonstrates, the Roman Catholic Church, the Zionist movement and global Islamic organizations are just some religious actors that seek to play a transnational role in domestic politics worldwide. It is important to understand the influence and motivations of such organizations, and to highlight the way in which they interact with issues of political movement, social justice and expressions of religious freedom in various countries. There may then develop among immigrant populations a struggle between affiliation to such transnational religious organizations and national identity. These processes of identity formation may be fraught with conflict, as struggles and

negotiations for authenticity among immigrant groups and indigenous people translate into issues of ownership, rights of access, belonging and acceptance.

4 Different religions

Amid the growth of geographical research interest in religion, a noticeable proportion of work in the post-1990s is focused on Muslim geographies: the geographical analysis of Muslim populations – their places, identities, communities and societies – at various local, national and transnational scales. This rapid growth in research attention to Muslim identities is spurred by observations of a growing 'Islamophobia'. In fact, Jackson (2008: 298) suggests that this research is particularly focused on youthful masculinities because '[w]hile, in the 1980s, it was young Black men who were thought to pose the most pressing threat to law and order (Cashmore and Troyna, 1982), it seems that radicalized Muslim youth are now equally if not more a focus of public disquiet'. More generally, given that Muslim populations in Britain and western Europe have experienced significant growth (Peach, 1990; 1992; 2005; 2006; Peach and Glebe, 1995; Vertovec and Peach, 1997), it is not surprising that much research on Muslims in Europe has emerged in the last decade, thus resulting in research that mainly focuses on Islam as a minority religion within multireligious or largely Christian societies (see, however, Aitchison *et al*., 2007, for an attempt to broaden the geographies). What remains disappointing is the relative neglect of other religions, including new religions, as well as those belief systems outside the group described as 'world religions'.

5 Different geographies and different geographical scales of analyses

From a time not so long ago when the small emergent literature on geographies of religion addressed a limited geography (eg, Australia, Singapore, Tanzania, Trinidad, Finland) (see Kong, 2001), the geographical range of research has been enlarged quite significantly, though some argue that still more needs to be done (eg, Marty, 2001, and Gale, 2007, note that research on the USA is still insufficient, while Henkel, 2005, believes that southeastern Europe has been neglected). Certainly, much of Asia remains under-researched by geographers.

Perhaps surprising for its earlier absence on the geographical agenda is the Middle East conflict, given the patently geographical expressions of long-standing conflicts and encounters. This has changed much in the last decade. Geographical lenses have been useful in showing how the struggle for identity and authenticity between the Jews and the Palestinians can be understood. For example, the first step to exercise Jewish hegemony over Palestine was to change the demographic composition of the country, achieved through massive immigration of Jewish communities to Palestine (Gorlizki, 2000; Falah, 2003). Other settlement processes were subsequently used – eg, renaming of physical features and landmarks into Hebrew (Gorlizki, 2000; Azaryahu and Golan, 2001; Feige, 2001; Shilhav, 2001; Golan, 2002), efforts to 'Judaize the map of Israel' with a 'distinct Hebrew toponymy' (Azaryahu and Golan, 2001: 178–80), and planning policies to reduce Arab ownership of territory, holding land for future immigration of Jewish communities and the restriction of Arab movement within the country (Falah, 2003; see Razin and Hazan, 2004: 82–84, for details of Arab agency in the face of Jewish hegemony). This kind of 'geopolitical manipulation' (Falah, 2003: 196) demonstrates the different geographical scales at which action may be taken, from the microgeographical to the urban to macro- interstate boundaries, even though they all stem from one common ideological belief that Jews have religious sovereignty over the land of Israel (Shilhav, 2001: 250; for discussions of how the

conflict might be resolved that sidesteps conventional negotiations, see Sharkansky and Auerbach, 2000; Dumper, 2001; Sheleff, 2001; Yiftachel and Yacobi, 2002).

As religion grows in its macro-geopolitical influence, and to rebalance the hitherto tendency to focus on micropolitics and microgeographies of everyday life, it is important for geographers to tackle 'larger-scale issues', not least so that we can 'intervene in public debate' (Murphy, 2006: 5). This does not simply mean undertaking 'larger empirical studies; it is to pose topically bigger questions and to be willing to offer broader-scale ideas about how they might be addressed' (Murphy, 2006: 6). However, I would add that geographers of religion should not jettison the micro-scale of analysis while addressing the bigger questions. For example, there is value in understanding the micropolitics of religious expression, if this understanding is allowed to be drawn back onto a larger canvas to help understand some of the larger conflicts and tensions in the contemporary world. But geographers do need to go beyond insightful analyses of the micropolitics of religious spatial expression to contribute to an understanding of larger social and political events confronting the contemporary world, including religious conflict and religious change. Thus, geographers might well be nudged to consider how the politics of mosque building, or conflicts arising from secular representations of religious community, or modifications to spaces of worship – as microgeographies and micropolitics – contribute to an understanding of the more macro-scale conflicts in the world. Similarly, in analysing and seeking an understanding of these macro-scale geopolitical tensions, insights may be drawn from careful analyses of the everyday micro-scale (see Hopkins, 2008: while young Muslim men might engage with factors thought to be 'global' or 'national', what matters are 'local' experiences, such as the character of the street, the placing of the home and the marking of the body).

III Postsecularization

Much of the research outlined above has proceeded without reference to the notion of a 'postsecular' world, simply recognizing the significance of religion (indeed, different religions) for different populations at different scales. However, in recent years, a small number of geographers have begun to adopt a discourse of postsecularism. I outline the recent turn to this discursive space, and contextualize it within a larger social science and humanities discourse, but sound a word of caution about overenthusiasm in its adoption.

Postsecularism is a seductive idea. In the most recent decade, the idea has caught the imagination of scholars, particularly in Europe, the UK and the USA. The idea has deeper roots in continental philosophy (eg, Marion, 1991; 2002; Gauchet, 1999; Derrida, 2001) and the works of critical social theorists (eg, Joas, 2000; Habermas, 2002; 2005; Matuštík, 2008). Within geography, engagement with this idea has been particularly evident from Europe (eg, Cloke *et al.*, 2005; Baker, 2008; Beaumont, 2008a; 2008b) where the discourse is focused primarily on the urban, in recognition that the shift from secular to postsecular is most 'intensely observed and experienced' in the city, in 'public space, building use, governance and civil society' (Beaumont, 2008a: 3). Beaumont (2008a: 6) refutes any suggestion that the postsecular is radically different from the secular, but approaches the idea in a more nuanced way:

> we use the term to indicate that within secularised social structures of modern late capitalism, religions, referring both to religious actors and organizations, are very much present and will not disappear irrespective of widespread aversion to the idea among certain liberal and secularist commentators. In other words, postsecular refers to the limits of the secularization thesis (Berger *et al.* 1999; Martin 2005; Davie 2007) and the ever-growing realization of radically plural societies in terms of religion, faith, belief within and between diverse urban societies. If we consider postsecular as the

indication of diverse religious, humanist and secularist positionalities – and not just an assumption of complete and total secularization – it is precisely the interrelations between these dimensions and not just the religious that are taken into account and the focus of attention. (Beaumont, 2008a: 6)

Reflecting this take on postsecularism, research on the city has focused on how ethics, spirituality and the sacred have 're-emerged' as influences in the development of urban space and community development (eg, Fenster, 2004; Graham, 2008), how cities are the site of multiple identity negotiation (including religious and secular identities) (eg, Goh, 2003), and the 're-engagement' of faith and politics particularly in the areas of governance and public service delivery (Farnell *et al.*, 2003; Cloke *et al.*, 2005; Johnsen *et al.*, 2005; Beaumont, 2008b; 2008c).

Without denying some European, and more generally, 'western' experiences of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, secularization theory needs to be clarified and evidence of secularization interrogated before accepting the emergence of postsecularization, and the 're-emergence' and 're-engagement' of the sacred and secular. While much of the earlier geographical research on religion (Kong, 1990, 2001, and that discussed in the previous section) did not use the language of postsecularism, it was clear that in numerous contexts the engagement of sacred and secular was not 're-emerging' but rather continuing. Thus, some caution may be needed in implying the arrival of the postsecular.

Jose Casanova's (1994) disaggregation of the secularization theory is helpful in this regard. Here, secularization is thought of in terms of three ideas: the decline in individual religious belief and practice; the privatization of religious belief and practice; and the institutional separation of social systems, such as the differentiation of religious institutions from the state, the market, science, education and so on.

If secularization is believed to be about the decline in individual religious belief and practice, I would suggest that the experiences in Europe have been overgeneralized to apply to other parts of the world. Even the experiences within Europe are not as monolithic as earlier suggested. Some of the 'evidences' of secularization need to be interrogated. For example, according to opinion polls conducted by the Hungarian state, the share of non-religious population (based on self-declaration) increased from 46.6% in 1972 to 60.7% in 1980 (Tomka, 1991). Such data, which has been used as evidence of increasing secularization, is problematic. The communist totalitarian regime had imposed an atheist, anti-clerical policy between 1949 and 1989. How reliable then is a poll conducted by the state to gauge religious affiliation?

If secularization is about the privatization of religion, then there is evidence that in the Europe of the 'secular' decades religion in fact continued to play a 'public' social and, indeed, political role. For example, churches in Hungary played an important role in maintaining civil society and ideas of national consciousness during the totalitarian communist regime even though it was an era marked by atheist and anti-clerical policy (Kocsis, 2006). In postcommunist Czechia, there has also been an increase in the influence and importance of church humanitarian organizations such as the Charity of the Roman Catholic Church and the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren. These organizations have been giving financial and material aid to the needy (Havlíček, 2006).

If secularization is about the institutional differentiation of social systems, then across the Atlantic in the USA religion has been more of a fundamental force in its foreign policy than openly acknowledged. It has extended to the ways in which American attitudes to abortion have become embedded in, and responsible for, the diminution of aid to foreign countries, for example (Kirby, 2001: 735).

Keeping the gaze on 'postsecularization' as a global shift may thus be misleading; it is not a discourse that can be universally and evenly

applied unproblematically without more careful consideration of what secularization means and how rigorously evidence for such has been collected. If what we are witnessing as 'resurgent' religious practices in some parts of the world are not actually a 'spiritual backlash against the "pathologies in the life-world" produced by an era of scientific rationality' (Vasquez and Marquardt, 2000: 122) but an abiding spirituality that has persisted in the face of modernity, then our interpretations of the force of religion in everyday lives today in geographically contingent situations may be different. The dangers of applying the discourse of postsecularization in a globalizing and totalizing way are that significant continuities are neglected and interpretations of present-day phenomena potentially flawed. Keeping this in mind, I turn now to how the sacred and the secular might intersect in major global issues confronting the world today.

IV Global shifts

In this section, I focus attention on the major global dynamics today and consider where religion intersects with them. I examine four key global shifts that are occurring and that look set to escalate: rapid urbanization and social inequality; a deteriorating environment; an ageing population; and increasing human mobilities. These represent some of the most pressing issues facing the global community that have been identified repeatedly. For example, the World Bank's Vice President for Europe Jean-François Rischard drew attention to three sets of issues: those involving the global commons (essentially environmental sustainability issues); those requiring global commitment (essentially social inequality, health, peace); and those requiring a global regulatory approach (including, for example, cross-border, financial, trade issues) (Rischard, 2003). Similarly, they are among the UN's Millennium Development Goals, which call for redress to social inequality, disease and environmental sustainability (United Nations,

2009). In what follows, I recommend key lines of inquiry that could characterize the changing geographies of religion.

1 Growing urbanization and social inequality

The first global shift is growing urbanization. According to a United Nations Report, since 2008 more than 50% of the world is now living in urban areas. The United Nations Population Fund predicts that 60% of the world's population (almost 5 billion people) will be living in cities by 2030. What role does religion play in urban areas where globalization, capitalist development and reindustrialization have been accompanied by unemployment, poverty and exacerbated inequalities? Indeed, what role can religion play in alleviating urban social problems, in enhancing urban social welfare, and in addressing urban social justice?

Pacione (1990) and Kong (2006) have called for socially relevant geographies of religion, and the opportunities for such work present themselves urgently in the context of urban social welfare. Justin Beaumont's recent work on faith-based organizations (FBOs) shows how geographers can join with other social scientists and scholars of public policy in examining the place of faith-based organizations in addressing urban welfare issues.

Faith-based organizations gained the attention of governments and scholars, particularly from the 1980s, as an alternative vehicle for providing social welfare services. They are formally defined by the EU-7FP FACIT project[2] as 'any organisation that refers directly or indirectly to religion or religious values, and functions as a welfare provider or as a political actor' (Beaumont, 2008b: 378). They are focused on addressing social inequality, through a sense of moral obligation and religious expectations. For example, some of the issues that faith-based organizations are concerned with are abuse of human rights by the state, urban poverty, social injustice, lack of

equal economic opportunities and inadequate housing. The social services they provide include emergency relief, child care and aged care services, care for drug addicts, and professional training. Many of the faith-based organizations are also involved in helping new immigrant communities adjust to a new destination (Ley, 2008), including offering language classes, financial advice, 'cultural assimilation' advice and help in finding housing and employment.

A number of factors have brought about the emergence and/or significance of faith-based organizations in providing urban social welfare. Capitalist development (which favoured division of labour and reindustrialization), exacerbated by globalization, has created unemployment, wage reduction and poverty for large populations in urban areas (Pacione, 1990; Beaumont, 2008c). In fact, 'the adherence to economic strategies founded on market principles restricts attempts to improve the life condition of those disadvantaged by the capitalist mode of productions' (Pacione, 1990: 194). In turn, the withdrawal of the welfare state (or neoliberalism/state restructuring) created a gap that needed to be filled, in particular, in the provision of social services necessary to those marginalized by capitalism (Pacione, 1990; Beaumont, 2008b; Jamoul and Wills, 2008). These factors allowed faith-based organizations the space and the opportunities to enter as important actors in social welfare provision.

As the work of FBOs gathers importance in European contexts, evidence is also gathering of social capital development processes at work with and through FBOs. Within the community and among organizations and agencies with which faith-based organizations work, relationships develop, reinforcing religious and community identity. This reduces some of the feelings of exclusion and isolation of the marginalized urban populations (Beaumont and Dias, 2008; Jamoul and Wills, 2008; Ley, 2008). In the end, faith-based organizations are 'a crucial site not only for bonding capital but also of a bridging

capital within and beyond the city' (Beaumont, 2008d: 2021).

From initial provision of social welfare services, faith-based organizations today undertake programmes and activities that sometimes question the structural forces that perpetuate social inequality (Pacione, 1990; Beaumont, 2008c; 2008d; Conradson, 2008), seeking to correct the fundamental causes of society that created such urban social problems in the first place. Education and empowerment are thus two key foci. Yet some of their activities and programmes may be viewed as non-violent acts of civil disobedience, as they question the social and economic policies developed by state governments. By giving a voice to the socially and economically disadvantaged (through campaigns that exert social and political pressure), faith-based organizations are questioning the success and relevance of government agencies in answering the problems of social inequality (Conradson, 2008; Jamoul and Wills, 2008). Protests, in the form of political campaigns, become acts that question the authority of the state, and bring about new forms of state-civil society relationships. In other words, they become sites of activism, where political power and governance are contested and negotiated (Beaumont and Dias, 2008; Beaumont, 2008c). Such forms of political action may occur without reference to religion, even if the impetus for action originated from a faith-based group. Indeed, because the agendas, activities and programmes are sometimes not directly related to spiritual concerns, the legitimacy of FBO engagement may be contested.

Geographical research into the relationship between religion and urban social justice is relatively recent. Much detailed work remains to be done regarding faith-based organizations in specific contexts, such as: the ways in which sociopolitical environments shape the development of FBOs; the specific nature of and impetuses for FBOs in different settings; the relative success in bringing about changes in urban social justice;

and the factors that limit or aid their success, including the internal and external dynamic relationships of FBOs (see, for example, Morse and McNamara, 2008; Olson, 2008). In places where political ideologies suppressed religion and where capitalism is relatively newly arrived, bringing along concomitant urban social problems (such as in China and Vietnam), how is religion re-emergent, and what room does it have to extend beyond the spiritual to the this-worldly? Whereas FBOs have inserted themselves in neoliberal conditions, are they able to find the space in different geographical and political contexts, and how have they to do their work differently to be effective in these different contexts?

2 Deteriorating environment

The second global shift, related to but not exclusively resultant from the first, is environmental degradation. Some may argue that this is not so much a shift in that degradation of the environment is not occurring only now, but that it is more an explosion in the awareness and attention given to the issue, following the award of the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize to former US Vice-President Al Gore and the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. What role can religion play in alleviating environmental crisis?

In a statement soon after Al Gore won the Nobel Peace Prize, he said in a statement of the climate crisis: 'We face a true planetary emergency. The climate crisis is not a political issue, it is a moral and spiritual challenge to all of humanity.' Without degenerating into the blame game generated by Lynn White Jr's 1967 thesis about the role of Christianity in environmental degradation, it is perhaps worthwhile to revisit the ways in which religious beliefs and sensitivities shape our attitudes and practices in relation to the biophysical environment. Certainly, many religions have a strong link between the biophysical world and human imagination and

understanding of the cosmic world (Stoddard and Prorok, 2003: 761), and this could provide a spiritual basis for social activism (Hart, 2006: xix). In specific terms, religion can play an influential role in a variety of ways.

One axis of analysis focuses on the religious belief systems that underpin human-nature relations. To understand how social activism can be underpinned by religious teachings, one turns, for example, to the religious traditions of St Francis of Assisi and St Benedict in Christianity which preach the importance of living in harmony with the natural world and the wise use of natural resources (Livingstone, 2002: 351), the notion of *ahimsa* (prohibition of violence to all living things) that influences Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, as well as other injunctions in religions such as Islam (Akhtaruddin, 1997). Yet geographical research in specific contexts is needed to offer clues to how theology and ecology are specifically and practically linked (Procter, 2006), especially since there has perhaps been more analysis of theological texts and what they say about the environment than there has been about actual human behaviour and how that may have religious influences. In fact, while selected religious teachings may advocate environmental respect, such prescriptions may not translate into behaviour (Mawdsley, 2006: 383).

In practical terms, 'religious' influence on the environment may be rooted in both religion as a social institution and religion as belief. Religiously inspired NGOs such as A Rocha International, and international religious networks such as Caritas within the Roman Catholic Church, give attention to environmental causes, and common religion and beliefs bring people together and provide the institutional framework from which they then negotiate their ways through religious ideology, organizational structures/strictures, and different international cultures and contexts. Simultaneously, the religious significance and symbolic meaning of places may well provide the rationale for

environmental protection and conservation – for example, sacred forests in India (Tomalin, 2009) or sacred cities like Medina for Muslims (Akhtaruddin, 1997). Ironically though, communities that utilize natural sites as spiritual sites may, by their own usage, despoil and contaminate the site (Huntsinger and Fernández- Giménez, 2000: 547).

3 Ageing population

The third global shift is an ageing population in many parts of the world. This is the process by which older individuals make up a proportionally larger share of the total population over a period of time. In the United Kingdom, for example, the percentage of the population aged under 16 has been declining since 1995, and dropped below the percentage of the population of state pensionable age (60) for the first time in 2007. While the average growth in the population aged over state pensionable age was less than 1% per year between 1981 and 2007, the figure was nearly 2% between 2006 and 2007.[3] In Japan, nearly one in five was aged 65 and above in 2007; in three decades' time, the figure will jump to more than one in three (Reuters, 2007). In the USA, the older population (65 years and above) made up 12.4% of the population in the year 2000 but this is expected to reach 20% by 2030.[4]

As the proportion of the elderly grows, what implications are there for elderly needs for physical, emotional and psychological health, and what is the significance of religion for ageing well? The interconnections between religion and old age are complex. Researchers have suggested that religion has value for the elderly as a personal resource and a coping strategy. How exactly does religion play that role, and what differences are there across varied cultural, political and economic conditions? Given the many anecdotal accounts about how churches in Europe are populated by the old, there would appear to be important impetus to examine the

question of religion in old age. This would seem to be at least as significant a research area as children's and young people's geographies of religion, which have hitherto dominated geographical research attention.

Acknowledging this global shift, therefore, it is necessary to direct research attention to elderly people and interrogate the ways in which religion and well-being are interconnected in old age, even recognizing that these intersections vary from place to place, from culture to culture, and over time. Just as important is the need to recognize that there can be life course changes for individuals in their religious beliefs, practices and affiliations. Earlier life experience and the place of religion in the more formative years can impact on how life adaptations are embraced in later life. How transitions are made between one stage of life and the next (eg, adolescence, adulthood, marriage), how happiness and fulfilment are construed, and how religion impacts these constructions at different points in one's life course may shed light on how old age is adapted to. What this suggests is a need for analysis of the relationship between religion and life course changes.

4 Increasing human mobilities

The fourth global shift is human mobility. Like environmental degradation, this is not a new phenomenon, but is gathering in intensity as the world becomes more globalized. Castles (2000: 274–75) cited UN figures showing how 'the global migrant stock (the number of people resident in a place outside their country of birth) grew from 75 million in 1965 to 120 million in 1990' and even more in the 1990s, 'reaching an estimated 135–140 million people, including some 13 million UNHCR-recognized refugees by 1997'.

While there has been a significant amount of geographical research on religion and migration, as earlier demonstrated, there remain myriad questions to address. How do different

impetuses for mobility shape the ways in which migrants negotiate their new destinations and their old religions? How does a labour migrant differ from a family migrant from a refugee, for example? How does the 'status' of the migrant (eg, a welcomed, perhaps even invited, 'global talent', versus a necessary but preferably invisible 'foreign worker' who is a garbage collector or construction worker) matter in analysing the role of religion in adaptation? How do subgroups within larger immigrant categories (such as 'south Asians') differ in their experiences, demonstrating how the category might not be monolithic (Ghosh, 2007: 224)? How do second-generation migrants deserve distinct analysis as compared to their parents in relation to their identification with their ancestral land and the practices thereof, including religious practices, and in their relationships with the local community? The relative role of religion, and particularly the resilience of transnational religious ties for different generations of migrants, deserves research attention.

The wider social and political significance of these myriad questions are clear. As human mobility grows and people find migrants of different ethnicities, nationalities, religions, cultures and class in their midst, the potential for misunderstanding and conflict, but also collaboration and understanding, grows. While it is often assumed and argued that migrant populations bring tensions, the likely extent and nature of such tensions vary with different migrant populations. Not all migrants are the same. These multiplicities need to be understood if more differentiated and nuanced ways of management are to be developed.

V Conclusion

Geographical research on religion has grown immensely in the last decade, and many earlier silences have become nascent areas of research or even areas of emphasis. Increasingly, geographers have come to recognize that in order to understand the place of religion in the contemporary world it is necessary to examine not just the overtly religious places, but also other spaces of everyday life that may occasionally take on religious functions and meanings (such as the museum and roadside) or be infused and shaped by religious values but which are neither overtly nor primarily about religion (such as home spaces and the Islamic banking system). The ways in which religion is experienced and negotiated are also multifaceted and multiscaled, from the body to the neighbourhood, city, nation, and across nations. Different constituents of population at different times in the life cycles also experience religion differently. Furthermore, while it is apparent that what matters for a Muslim may not for a Buddhist or a Wiccan, it is not always remembered that what matters for a Muslim in Indonesia may not matter for one in the Netherlands. The recent growth in geographical research has recognized these various differentiations.

However, there remain more questions that require research attention. I have identified four areas in which global shifts are occurring and proposed these to be some of the key areas where research attention deserves to be directed. I have reminded ourselves that we can understand these secular global dynamics better when we see their interconnections with religious and ethical values. Yet we need to be careful not to interpret the role of religion as a universally (re-)emergent force, because in some places these have been abiding rather than new, and the emphasis should be on continuities rather than discontinuities. We need to avoid a globalizing discourse of postsecularization. At the same time, I have also cautioned against the lure of the macro geopolitical questions to the neglect of micropolitics and microgeographies, or indeed the reverse. Keeping the balance is important.

What remains is for greater effort to be put into clarifying what religion is and is not. Thus far, geographers have tended to treat religion 'as an object of empirical study' (Korf, 2006:

326) rather than to engage more deeply with the theological and philosophical underpinnings of belief. This means not taking for granted the meaning of religion and the sacred, but studying the complexity of religion itself. This may lead some geographers to argue that the functional and perhaps even symbolic dimensions of religion find parallel in other phenomena that may not appear to be substantively about religion (for example, nationalism and environmentalism), and that geographers of religion have been unnecessarily confining in their object of analyses. There may indeed be similarities between these other phenomena and religion. Yet, the value of this acknowledgement for me would not be to encourage a widening of definitions of religion, but to draw appropriate analytical implications of geographical research on religion for these other phenomena and for human geography more generally.

These are exciting times for geographers of religion. There is much that we can contribute to an understanding of religion in the historical and contemporary world. Other scholars of religion have begun to acknowledge the spatiality of religious experience, if not always the contributions of geographers. For example, religious studies scholar Thomas Tweed's (2006) theory of religion argues that 'being human has much to do with our imagining and making places, (re)making the places we have made, and (dis)placing ourselves in the world' (Prorok, 2007: 226), thus incorporating notions of spatiality in every analysis. In fact, Prorok (2007: 226) admires Tweed's 'geographical state of mind' and believes that his work has much to contribute to theoretical inquiry in the geography of religion. Similarly, Kim Knott (also a scholar of religion) advocates in _The location of religion_ (2005) a 'spatial analysis', prioritizing the spatial over the temporal, the synchronic over the diachronic, looking at contemporary everyday spaces to identify the location of religion within them.

However, apart from exceptions such as these, geographical insights have not yet significantly influenced religious scholarship in other disciplines. As geographers developing a variety of fruitful and insightful approaches to the study of religion, some consideration might be given to how we can collectively make an impact beyond geography, through the journals we publish in, the conferences we choose to attend, and the multidisciplinary research projects we get involved in, as ways of propagating and circulating geographical insights in the study of religion.

Notes

1. See: _International Journal of Urban and Regional Research_ (2002); _Social and Cultural Geography_ (2002); _Environment and Planning A_ (2006); _Annals of the Association of American Geographers_ (2006); _GeoJournal_ (2006); _Geopolitics_ (2006); _Population, Space and Place_ (2005); and _Mobilities_ (2008).
2. FACIT (Faith-based Organisations and Exclusion in European Cities) is a research programme funded by the European Commission – Seventh Framework Programme. The research focuses on the social and political significance of faith-based organizations, particularly in European countries (see www.facit.be).
3. UK Office for National Statistics, http://www.statistics.gov.uk/hub/population/index.html (last accessed 14 March 2009).
4. Administration on Aging, http://www.aoa.gov/AoARoot/Aging_Statistics/index.aspx (last accessed 14 March 2009).

Acknowledgements

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