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Introduction

1 In the Study of Religion the phenomenon of New Religious Movements (NRMs) has become increasingly popular, paralleled by the revived social awareness of religion itself. New forms of religiosity, religious organisations and religious-laden discourses seem to arise all over the world. Therefore, almost consequentially, these phenomena are discussed in relation to globalisation. However, surprisingly enough, these phenomena are rarely put into a greater context of globalisation theories (with a few exceptions, e.g. Warburg 2008). Religion remains discussed as somehow outside of society and opposed or only related to globalisation. In this essay, however, we shall argue that, in fact, there is a close interrelationship between the rise of new forms of religion and the globalisation of society. More precisely, the thesis holds that 1) religion must be seen as a global function system within the World Society and 2) that NRMs are not only products but at the same time crucial to the momentum of the process of globalisation of religion. In order to show this, we shall firstly provide a short introduction to globalisation from a systems theoretical perspective. Then we will shed some light on the rather confusing common definitions of NRM to suggest a narrow but more precise alternative. Finally, putting these aspects together, we shall show the role of NRMs as globalised religion as well as globalisers.

Religion and the emergence of World Society

2 In today's social sciences the notions of globalisation, Global or World Society have become increasingly popular. Many disciplines, most of all political science and sociology,

began to consider contemporary ›societies‹ in some way stronger interrelated and interdependent. In this context different theories of globalisation emerged and shaped, in Thomas S. Kuhn's words, a new ›paradigm‹ of social science (Kuhn 1967, 29). To date, the field of globalisation theories is multifarious and often the different approaches are mutually incompatible.

3 For reasons of space, this essay cannot provide a sound introduction into globalisation theories, but has to confine itself to a short outline of only one approach. Furthermore, concerning the focus on NRMs, we agree with Margit Warburg

> »that what seems to be needed in the study of new religions and globalisation is not so much new general theories on globalisation; it is rather a critical development of models, concepts and methods that build on existing globalisation theories but are specifically directed towards the Study of Religion, and in particular new religions from a globalisation perspective.« (Warburg 2008, 47)

4 In my view, the theory that is needed can be found in systems theory of Niklas Luhmann and Rudolf Stichweh.[1]

5 In his book »Die Weltgesellschaft« (The World Society) Stichweh (Stichweh 2003a) analysed the emergence and contemporary forms of globalisation. According to Luhmann, he defines ›society‹ by *communication* as well as by *availability*: society, as any other social system, consists *in* communication, i.e. its operations are communications. It must be understood as an autopoietically[2], operationally closed, self-referential system (Luhmann 1995, 16-41; 176-209). Society, accordingly, neither consists of groups nor of communities or larger collectives of human beings, but purely in and of its operations, *communication*, alone. *Society* as special type of social systems is the social system that consists of the *totality of all communications that are available for each other*. In its final consequence, this however leads to the conclusion that *today there is only one social system that can be described as society, namely the World Society* (Stichweh 2003d, 246).

6 This modern *World Society*, furthermore, can be observed as functionally differentiated: by differentiation society developed special *sub-systems*, each serving an exclusive *function for society*. For example politics provides binding decisions, law distinguishes legal from illegal actions and economy operates the accumulation of different forms of capital. As one of several different function systems, *religion* serves to provide final answers to ultimate paradoxical problems of communication (which means, of society) (cf. Luhmann 2002, 115-147; especially 137). *Functional differentiation*, furthermore, *integrates society* in a completely new form: society no longer is integrated by religion as it had been in pre-modern times or by morality as Emile Durkheim (Durkheim 1984, Luhmann 2008) thought it was. In contrast, the different sub-systems and parts of society are integrated merely by their difference: the functional exclusiveness of each system ensures the interconnectedness of the subsystem and the society as well as it frees other systems from the impossible task of fulfilling all functions at once. The *exclusive difference* of subsystems itself, therefore, guarantees the unity of the separate systems (cf. Luhmann 1998, 601, 604-608, 616-618). This functional differentiation became the primary form of differentiation of World Society.[3]

7 Rudolf Stichweh, focusing on the political and science system (Stichweh 2003c, Stichweh 2003b), provides many examples and analyses of processes of globalisation of these function systems. The role of religion, however, is almost completely neglected. In general, at least until 2011, religion has often been neglected within globalisation theories.[4] Unfortunately, this led to a lack of theory of religion in World Society.[5] As first

part of a solution, the following part will therefore try to shed light on the contentious task of defining the term ›NRM‹ and to suggest a new and more precise definition from a systems theoretical perspective.

New Religious Movements

8 As long as there have been sociological studies of religion, the question of defining different (organisational) forms of religion has been an essential task. For example, Max Weber distinguished between *church* and *sect* in order to understand and classify different forms of religion (cf. Weber 1988, 211). However, these terms, although they might have been considered as ›objective‹ sociological terms at Weber's time, nowadays have become value-laden and therefore problematic. Another, more recent suggestion is the distinction between *sects* and *cults*:

> »To sum up, sects are breeds of a common species. That is, sects are deviant religious movements that remain within a nondeviant religious tradition. Cults are a different species and occur by mutation or migration. That is, cults are deviant religious movements within a deviant religious tradition.« (Stark, and Bainbridge 1985, 26)

9 The use of these terms by anti-cult literature of church-bound academics, however, made this typology questionable as well (cf. Barker 2003, 15; Saliba 1995, 1–11; Chryssides 1994). This indeed can be understood as a problem of the field rather than a problem of certain terms and categories:

> »There are, moreover, numerous vested interests, both religious and secular, that make any drawing of precise boundaries a contentious and risky exercise.« (Barker 1989, 146)

10 The increasing popularity of the term ›NRM‹, therefore, can be understood as an attempt of a neutral terminology for an ›objective‹ study of those forms of religion (cf. Hock 2002, 101–102). However, to use the term ›NRM‹ requires a precise understanding of the *implications* of the term as well as it requires *limitationality*[6] of definition.

The problem of definition

11 First of all, the term ›NRM‹ is used by ›insiders‹ as term of self-description, by ›outsider‹ non academics (such as anti-cult movements; cf. Chryssides 1994) and by academics. In the latter usage, according to John A. Saliba, one can distinguish three types of definitions, namely theological, psychological and sociological definitions (cf. Saliba 1995).[7] Whilst insider and other non-academic definitions of ›NRM‹ often can have a derogative implication[8] *or* positive connotations (Barker 1989, 146), the *academic definitions try to avoid the normative trap*. Since this essay is written within the context of the Study of Religion, which understands itself as part of social science, we can leave the contentious field of definition beyond social science aside, noticing and being aware of the issues which could arise.

12 For a sociological observer the term consists of three parts, namely ›New‹, ›Religious‹ and ›Movement‹. The first term refers to what George D. Chryssides in his definition describes as »recent« (Chryssides 1994). However, he has to admit that this leads to a »somewhat vague nature« of the term. Yet, he does not see a problem with it. Nevertheless, the question remains: how ›new‹ does a religious movement need to be, in order to count as *N*

RM? ›New‹ clearly must be seen as a relative term in relation to ›old‹. Furthermore it changes over time: the former ›new‹ once becomes ›old‹ and probably has to face *new* New Religions (NRs)/NRMs. Considering the requirement of *limitationality*: how useful can such a vague term be?

13 ›*Religious*‹, compared to the first and the third part, seems relatively familiar. Although being far away from relying on a consensual definition of ›religion‹, defining ›religion‹ is the classical and constituting problem of the Study of Religion as a discipline. A Study of Religion perspective, therefore, has to opt for its own way of defining ›religion‹. There are some scholars of the discipline, who avoid or reject defining ›religion‹ at all; others tend to give only a working definition of ›religion‹ as a kind of a heuristic tool for scientific research. But how could we study NRMs if we are not clear about what we mean by ›religious‹? In other words, what is called ›religious‹ has to be observable, definable and distinguishable as ›religious‹.

14 The last part, ›*Movement*‹, originally stems from sociology and again seems to be open for competing definitions. Similar to Weber's definition of ›sect‹, ›movement‹ can mean that one has to actively convert to it to become a member. However, this is not distinctive enough since today conversion to any church or religion has become more popular. In a more loose understanding the term ›movement‹ can refer to a *less complex organisational structure* or group organisation. Then, however, the term can hardly be distinguished from terms like ›group‹ or ›community‹ themselves. Finally, in social movement theory, social movements normally are analysed with special focus on their political implication and mass mobilisation (cf. for example: McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 1996). In light of these problems with the category of NRMs, we suggest a more limited yet precise definition.

Working definition: a systems theoretical approach

15 Based on a systems theoretical approach we suggest distinguishing between ›New Religions‹ (NRs) and ›New Religious Movements‹ (NRMs), a task the previously mentioned definitions often fail to accomplish (cf. Barker 1989, 146). Or in the words of Peter Beyer:

> »[M]ost of those things commonly called religious movements in the sociological literature, especially the new religious movements, are in fact not social movements [...], but rather organizations.« (Beyer 2006, 109-110)

16 Concerning the fact that movement is a sociological term, we must therefore go back to the sociological terminology in order to render it more precisely. According to Niklas Luhmann (Luhmann 1996), we suggest to confine the term ›NRM‹ to a *certain type of social system*, namely the *›(protest) movement‹* (also cf. Japp 1999). These so-called ›New Social Movements‹ (Luhmann 1998, 847-849) can be seen as a *fourth type of social systems*[9].

17 *Movements define themselves*, differently to organisations, not by membership but by commitment, i.e. *by mobilisation itself*. The movement gets its form by its *form of mobilisation*. Often this form is protest, which is why Luhmann used both terms mostly synonymously. However, »[s]ocial movements do not have to be movements of protest« (Beyer 2006, 53). They »centre on issues, on themes of communication, they do not appear to be dealt with elsewhere.« (ibid.) Movements, thus, get their form as closed communication systems by their *mobilisation for particular problems*. This, however, normally makes certain forms of *organisation as part of the movement* necessary; otherwise the movement could only exist but not interact with other systems of society (Luhmann 1998, 847-849).

18 NRMs *as social systems* require another specification, namely their ›religious‹ character. ›Religious‹ in this sense does not necessarily mean that they identify themselves with a certain religion, but that they *address the religious constituting problem*, namely the problem of communicational paradoxes (Luhmann 2002, 115-147; especially 137). From a systems theoretical perspective religion must be understood as function system of society, i.e. as an autopoietic, self-referential, operationally closed communication system. In order to operate, the religion system uses the code transcendence/immanence as a primary distinction. The terms of the code have caused much contradiction and critique and often have been misunderstood as theological concepts[10]. Instead, the distinction of transcendence/immanence points towards the catalyst communication problem of religion, namely the distinction between the observable/unobservable. The exclusive function of religion for society is to exemplarily treat the fundamental paradox of communication, namely the unity of the distinction and the distinct or the unity of the observable/unobservable that can possibly occur in any communication[11] and find forms by which the paradox becomes operable. In other words, religious are those forms that point back towards the unity of the distinction observable/unobservable and find forms (names) for it (Luhmann 2002, 35). Thereby, religion transfers undeterminable complexity into determinable complexity and reliefs other systems from the necessity of providing last answers to fundamental problems of (possibly any) communication (cf. Luhmann 2002, 53–186). Furthermore, religion, in order to distinguish itself from its environment, uses programmes[12] observing the communications of the system and allocating them towards the values of the code. In conclusion, any communication that emerges by and functions for the autopoiesis of the religion system can be observed as religious communication.

19 Putting these parts together, a working definition can be:

> NRMs are a certain type of communication systems that get their form by a particular form of mobilisation of communication for religious issues.

20 By mobilising communication for ›religious‹ issues (as defined above) NRMs contribute to the autopoiesis of the religion system and thereby can be observed as religious. The realisation of the mobilisation, however, can take varied shapes; NRMs can, for example, have the form of *protest movements*, *revitalisation movements*, *individualisation movements*, *gnostic movements*, *reformation movements* or mixed forms.[13]

21 Still, one problem of definition has remained unsolved: the question of *recentness*. Considering the above mentioned systems theoretical analyses of modern World Society, we suggest confining *N*RM to religious movements that arose *as direct consequence of, or within the functionally differentiated society*. This definition has the advantage to bind the recentness to a radical shift in social structure. Whether or not a certain movement could be described as ›new‹, therefore, no longer depends on someone's changing locus in time or culture, but on ›objective‹ (i.e. empirical observable, structural) criteria. Accordingly, one could also call NRMs ›Modern Religious Movements‹. However, because of the already existing confusion, continuity of terms seems preferable over self-explicability.

22 Finally, the term must be distinguished from the term ›New Religion‹ (NR). From a systems theoretical perspective one could describe NRs as religions in their own right, i.e. *communication systems* that are autopoietically closed, self-reproducing *sub-systems of the world religion system*. They distinguish themselves from other religions by their particular realisation of the code of transcendence/immanence. This could be achieved in form of certain *dogmata*, *rituals*, *taboos*, forms *of inclusion/exclusion*, by which religious

communications from one religion become relatively incompatible with communications from another religion. In contrast to NRMs, which mobilise communication on religious issues, NRs must be considered as religious sub-systems that in elementary (system defining) regards achieved *operational independence* and *became a segmentary part of the world religion system*.[14]

23 By this definition of ›NRM‹ we certainly leave out various new forms of religion in modern society. However, limitationality of terms does not limit but contrarily *enable scientific progress* (Luhmann 2005, 394-395). Although, therefore, finding a precise definition is a valuable account, one certainly cannot stop here. By definition *modern*, NRMs are phenomena of the *functionally differentiated World Society*. However, the relation between (the emergence of) NRMs and the globalisation of the World Society, respectively the world religion system, so far, is only claimed by the definition. The question, therefore, is: *how* are these phenomena interrelated? Any new approach or definition in the study of NRMs, therefore, must also provide explanations of this interrelation in order to provide more than just a point of view situated in time and space. The following final explanations should be understood as hypothesis, which can indicate and certainly require further empirical research.

NRMs and the emergence of World Society

NRMs as globalised religion

24 We would first like to argue that NRMs must be understood as *globalised* forms of a *world religion system*. One can observe this on various levels.

25 On the organisational level it is evident that some NRMs can be regarded as globalised religions. Over time, and in response to *conditions of World Society*, some formerly localised or even unorganised movements develop forms of global organisation. They become shaped by the interconnectedness of communications, the development of telecommunication and the Internet, by the improvements of mobility and the increasing possibility of global migration. To a certain extent, those organisations reflect the current conditions of World Society. In World Society, organisations serve the function to distinguish between members and non-members, insiders and outsiders, (Corsi 2008; Luhmann 2006, 81–122; Luhmann 1998, 826–847) in order to define addressability within the movement. Thereby, organisation can be understood as *inclusion mechanism* in a global context. For example the *Falun Gong* movement, by now, has become a globally operating, organised movement, which even has a growingly global political mission (cf. Chan 2004; Gentz 2011).[15] Those developments certainly must be understood as affected and influenced by the broader process of globalisation. However, not only on the organisational level NRMs can be considered as globalised religion.

NRM and the global World Culture

26 NRMs are often characterised by a particular *inclusive doctrine*: in terms of World Society this points towards something one could possibly call *world culture* (Stichweh 2003e, 20–23). Various NRMs, although they might show local idiosyncrasies, tend to open themselves up to a wider, global horizon of meaning. Ideas and concepts themselves are taken over from other religions or cultural contexts from different parts of the world, or

are presented in a way, which shows how similar, how analogue or comparable (even combinable) those concepts are within a global cultural context. For example in many Western Zen-Buddhist schools (e.g. the German Willigis Jäger School, recently separated itself from the Japanese Sanbōkyōdan[16] school; cf. West-Östliche Weisheit, Willigis Jäger Stiftung 2011b) present Asian philosophy in a way that emphasises the parallels to European mysticism (cf. for example: West-Östliche Weisheit, Willigis Jäger Stiftung 2011a; Poraj 2006). On the doctrinal level, therefore, NRMs can be seen as increasingly shaped by a global cultural context.

NRMs as local adaptation/application of global cultural ideas/aspects

27 Besides *globalised organisations* and *inclusive doctrines* there also is another important aspect of NRMs as globalised religion. As already mentioned, often NRMs, although inclusive and globalised on the one hand, on the other hand seem to be locally specific at the same time. This, however, can not be understood as counter-evidence against globalisation theories. In contrast, it is only comprehensible if one keeps the global context in mind: globalised doctrines and organisations *must*, in order to make a difference within society, manifest in space and time. In other words, the global religion system of World Society necessarily must find its forms in concrete local contexts. According to systems theory with its focus on communication systems there is no contradiction: in World Society the single communicational act always has a *global* as well as a *local context/horizon of meaning*, which means the elements do not only have either local *or* global reference but both at the same time (cf. Stichweh 2003e, 16-17). This becomes clearer if one looks at the very same religious movements that show globalised inclusive doctrines. For example the Zen-Buddhist school of Willigis Jaeger, based at Würzburg, Germany, although almost doctrinally all-embracing inclusive and having its roots in Japanese Sanbōkyōdan Zen-school, found its concrete local form: based in a former Benedictine's cloister building (›Benediktushof‹), it established close contacts to the ›Wurzburg school of contemplation‹ (Spirituelle Wege e.V. 2010), to the world famous Benedictine monastery Munster-Schwarzach, but also to local people (non-believers) and infrastructural services. For example it is not possible to provide an apartment for every employee (cook, gardener, janitor, etc.) at the ›Benediktushof‹ itself. Therefore, the small village around becomes structurally related by the very fact of their new members of community. Although, for various reasons, such a ›symbiosis‹ could be problematic if it was not accepted by all parties involved, the ›Benedictushof‹ has been successful in maintaining good relations to the village (Holzkirchen, near Wurzburg).[17] Via these structural relations, the NRM itself also changes: for example they establish a close connection between the ›Benediktushof‹ and the local Catholic Church community; local festivals and traditional events often take place on the site of the ›Benediktushof‹; the café and the book shop regularly get visited by people from the village and are used for religious and non-religious chats, etc. For those dynamic structural relations NRMs as *mobilisation movements* provide the perfect form to become globalised as well as localised at the same time.

28 These examples show that NRMs in their globalised organisational structure, their inclusive doctrines and in their localised forms of concrete existence can be understood as *concrete forms of the globalised world religion system*. However, the analysis cannot end here. NRMs are not simply a product of globalisation *but at the very same time one of its main driving forces.*

NRMs as globaliser

NRMs as challenges: new concepts and solutions, new structures of expectations

29 In their structure and function very similar to protest movements, NRMs can present a serious challenge to religions within the world religion system: Keeping the above-given definition in mind, NRMs raise attention and mobilise communication on religious issues. If successful, those movements and their social visibility often cannot be ignored by religions, denominations or religious organisations. An example of this can be found within the Islamist Al-Qaida movement. Exploiting *violence* as certain type of communication (cf. Baecker 1996; Fuchs 2005), this movement claimed to seek justice in the name of Islam. Relatively shortly after the terrorist attacks in Washington D.C. and New York City on 9/11, 2001, one could observe how effective this strategy/method really was. The American Administration almost immediately described it as an act of war, and one or two days after the attacks a significant portion of the population of the USA reacted by displaying symbols, a performance of *rituals of solidarity* (Collins 2004). In this context it is of particular interest that especially ›Islamic *looking*‹ people (e.g. bearded, turban-wearing Sikh taxi-drivers) have been ›forced‹ to demonstrate and display their harmlessness or non-Islamic character (Collins 2004, 61; symbols in »protective use«). This, however, was not limited to New York, not even to the USA. All around the world Muslim communities ›felt‹ the need to reject and condemn the attack, or more precisely: to condemn the ›abuse‹ of the label of ›Islam‹ (cf. "September11News.com - International reaction"; "Statements from Leading International Academic Organisations for the Academic Study of Islam, Religion, and Middle East"; and even ten years after the attack Baş 2011).

30 More recently, the Arabic uprising movements can also be seen in this light and context: various Muslim movements (NRMs) such as, for example, the Muslim Brotherhood (Clarke 2006) became part of the uprising and entered the political protest and revolution with distinctly religious-political agendas, namely to establish an Islamic state. As political protests those movements clearly affect politics, but also less political communities and Islamic theologians had to take a stand within this conflict.

31 On a different level, besides terrorism and religious violence, NRMs also challenge ›traditional‹[18] religions and theologies by providing new religious concepts/doctrines (solutions). Reform movements and other NRMs (such as Afroamerican syncretistic cults and movements in Latin America such as the Maria-Lionza cult), not only in their local setting provide new challenges and problems for religions. Taking syncretistic NRMs in South America as an example, one can show that the uprising and the success of those movements heavily challenge the Catholic Church (Pinn, Finley, and Alexander 2009, xxv, 192). NRMs, because of their qualities as *movements,* are able to mobilise communications in local settings with a wider global connotation and effect. Once communication and discourses are mobilised, the ›traditional‹ religions and churches find themselves obliged to react.

Feedback and the contestations of the category

32 Closely linked to the challenging effect NRMs have, they can also be regarded as thereby *irritating* and *feeding back* their ›new‹ concepts and solutions; related and connected to a

world culture as a pool of concepts and symbols, NRMs also feed their own ›new‹ syncretisms, combinations, concepts and ideas back into this *world culture*. Thereby, new religious forms become available for other religions and religious movements. Those *cultural feedbacks* can be observed on almost every level and affect almost every kind of religion or religious form in World Society. Again using the example of South America, one could certainly link the uprising of syncretistic NRMs and their role in and for the social net of their social context to the developments of Catholicism, in particular the liberation theology and its political implications. NRMs, although often outside of so called ›World Religions‹ themselves, create expectations and demands that, once they are established, become relevant also for other religions and denominations. Furthermore, those structures of expectations in World Society easily can become de-territorialised: via the Internet and other forms of new media, successful attempts of new religious forms and concepts easily get spread into the world and thereby become de-contextualised, i.e. globalised. NRMs in this context function as *driving force* and *innovator* of globalisation of the *world religion system* and its concrete, as well as its general structures and forms.

33 Another helpful example is the Japanese Sanbōkyōdan Zen school, which itself »claim[s] to be an authentic Zen reform movement, rather than a new religion.« (Sharf 1995, 454) This movement, although marginal in Japan, has gained huge influence on the Western reception and adaptation of Zen and – even more importantly – on *the* stereotypical Western imagination of ›*The* (Japanese) Zen Buddhism‹. Sanbōkyōdan is a Zen Buddhist movement, which strongly focuses on the experience of *kenshō*. By losing large parts of Buddhist doctrines and other cultural specific parts of Zen practice, Sanbōkyōdan shaped a new form of Zen Buddhism, which was applicable to different religious and cultural contexts (Sharf 1995). The great impact and success the movement has had in the West, however, today react upon Japanese religions themselves. This becomes even clearer if one looks at the interrelations between the local-global-local contexts: Sanbōkyōdan, although it emphasises the universal applicability of its form of Zen Buddhism continues a Japan-centred structure (teachers must be authorised and ordained by the Japanese spiritual leader in a ceremony, based and held *in* Japan). By that the movement structurally links the globalised and universalised form of the movement with the Japanese context of religion and opens channels for feedback effects.

34 Many further examples could have been given (such as Shaku Soen and Suzuki Daisetsu and their role at the parliament of world's religions in 1893; cf. Borup; Thompson 2005; Clarke 1997); for reasons of space, however, these few examples have to suffice, only indicating what can be regarded as a more general feature of NRMs.

Conclusion

35 In this essay we sought to provide a new perspective on the topic of NRMs. We argued that in contemporary society one always must consider religion (and accordingly NRMs) in terms of globalisation and the context of *World Society*.

36 From this perspective, we then discussed the problems of defining ›NRM‹ and provided an alternative, informed by a systems theoretical perspective. According to this, NRMs must be understood as *modern religious movements*, which mobilise communication for religious issues. They gain their particular form as movement by their type of mobilisation (revolutionary, reformative, protest, revitalisation, individualisation, politicisation, etc.).

Taking this new definition, we sought to show how it can be applied to the Study of Religion in world society and improve our understanding of NRMs within the context of globalisation. This new approach led to the final hypothesis that NRMs not only must be considered as *globalised* but also as *globalising religion*. This, in turn, further specifies the definition itself by analysing the modern, ›new‹ character of NRMs in the relation to the emergence of the world religion system.

37 On the basis of a few examples we identified five relevant mechanisms: (1) NRMs are globalised as they become *globally organised*. (2) NRMs often rely and make use of *globalised cultural concepts* and *symbols*, available in a pool of *world culture*. (3) NRMs must be understood as the *local realisation* of religious forms (ideas and concepts) of a *global religion system*. (4) NRMs can successfully mobilise communication to religious issues. By that NRMs can be a serious challenge to ›traditional‹ religions and religious communities, which, thereby, become forced to react within the new global context. (5) NRMs provide new solutions and offers of meaning as well as they can establish structures that *feed back* to other religions, which, thereby, become globalised themselves.

38 This essay certainly leaves many questions unanswered. However, the definition given above, and the new perspective as well as the indicated hypothesis can and should be understood as starting point for further research. In this context, surely more research will be necessary, especially since the field of NRMs in World Society continuously increases in diversity as well as in complexity, but also the form of differentiation of society today experiences major changes (Baecker 2007).

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NOTES

1. For a profound introduction into sociological systems theory cf. Luhmann 1995; Luhmann 2008; forthcoming: Luhmann forthcoming // 2011.
2. Which means: self-reproducing out of itself, see also: Maturana, Varela, and Beer 1980; Maturana, and Varela 1998; Luhmann 1995, 32–38; Esposito 2008.

3. According to Luhmann, society does not necessarily have to have a dominant form of differentiation, but if such a form once becomes established, it determines the possible evolution and affects following differentiation, self-descriptions or structures of expectations (norms) of society (Luhmann 1998, 611).

4. The reasons for that probably could be found in the dominant notion of secularisation theory within sociology of religion or in the rejection of abstract and generalising grand theories within the Study of Religion (in its attempt to emancipate itself from theology and sociology of religion at the same time); see also: Klenk 2010, 4–7.

5. We are aware of the work of Peter Beyer (cf. for example: Beyer 2006; Beyer 1998; Beyer 1994), however, for reasons we cannot discuss here but discussed elsewhere (Klenk 2011), his application of systems theory of religion remains self-contradictory, lacking the complexity of Luhmann‘s analysis and theory of religion as function system. For example, Beyer criticizes Luhmann‘s notion of the code of religion as too Christian and seeks to replace it by a variety of different codes for different religions. He, thereby, overlooks the essential fact that Luhmann’s analysis of the code of religion is informed by the calculus of indication of George Spencer-Brown (Spencer-Brown 1999). The code, accordingly, must not be misunderstood as theological concept but must be conceived as etic terms observing the founding problem of religion itself (see below).

6. *Limitationality* must be regarded as elementary feature of scientific operations, i.e. it must be observable what a term *excludes* and what then still remains possible (see: Luhmann 2005, 392–406).

7. For analytical purposes, however, sometimes psychological and sociological approaches get combined in order to understand the emergence of NRMs more deeply (see: Bainbridge and Stark 2003).

8. For example, if ›movement‹ is understood as »not *real* religions« (Barker 1989, 145–146), although in the beginning ›movement‹ was a technical term from sociology.

9. Amongst the classical three types of systems, namely *interaction*, *organisation* and *societal systems* (cf. for example Luhmann 1998, 847-849; Beyer 2006, 36-37; 49-53). Although it still remains controversial, whether it really counts as own type or not (cf. footnote 3; Beyer 2006, 36).

10. For a prominent example cf. Beyer 2006, especially 79-97. Others misunderstood it as just a new form of Durkheim’s distinction between sacred/profane; however, this again is wrong since the sacred, already, must be seen as a re-entry of the transcendent into the immanent rather than the transcendent itself (cf. Luhmann 2002, 127).

11. However, this does not mean that it necessarily has to occur. In contrast, most communication has its own ways of mystifying the paradox of observation. Similarly, all function systems have to deal with further paradoxes of communication and they do so by creating own mechanisms to unfold these paradoxes. However, the ultimate and most fundamental paradox of observation, as it *can* occur in any communication, finds its ultimate ›solution‹ in the function system of religion.

12. Programmes, for example, can be Holy Scriptures, proclaimed revelations, the interpretations of a spirit medium, etc. Furthermore, programmes must be understood as complementary to the code itself; only by programmes function systems can distinguish themselves from their environment and thereby use the distinction of self-reference and other-reference for further differentiation of the system.

13. Of course, this is not an exhausting list; there could and should be done more research on a possible typology of NRMs. We are convinced, however, that this definition provides the basis for a substantial contribution in this field, enabling further sound theorisation.

14. For a more detailed analysis of religions as subsystems of the religion function system of society cf. Luhmann 2002; Kött 2003; Beyer 2006.

15. Understanding Falun Gong as NRM does not imply that it could not become a fully established NR. However, given the definition above, Falun Gong still seems to show the characteristics of a movement rather than an own operationally closed sub-system of the world religion system.
16. See also below.
17. Source: interview with Doris Zölls, one of the current spiritual leaders of the community (20/09/2009, Interviewer: Moritz Klenk).
18. The term ›traditional‹ religions refers to established religions, i.e. subsystems of the religious function system, that have precursors in pre-modern times. The term also implies that the ›religiousness‹ of these religions often seems to be beyond doubt, which is rather a second order observation of the Study of Religion perspective than a substantial argument.

ABSTRACTS

Der Artikel liefert eine systemtheoretische Perspektive auf die laufende Debatte zum Begriff ›New Religious Movement‹ (NRM). Nach kurzer Vorstellung einiger grundlegender Aspekte der Systemtheorie nach Niklas Luhmann identifiziert der Aufsatz drei Probleme des Begriffs der NRMs, geknüpft an die drei Bestandteile ›new‹, ›religious‹ und ›movement‹. Im Folgenden wird dann versucht, die drei Bestandteile neu und schärfer zu fassen. Der Artikel schlägt dazu eine systemtheoretische Re-Definition des Begriffes der NRMs als *religiöse Variante* sogenannter *Neuer Sozialer Bewegungen* vor. Diese Definition löst die zuvor geschilderten Probleme, indem sie NRMs als *besonderen Typen sozialer Systeme* (Movement) fasst, der seine Form durch die *Mobilisierung von Kommunikation für religiöse ›Probleme‹* (Religious) gewinnt. Ferner müssen NRMs als spezifisch modernes Phänomen sowohl im Kontext als auch als *Ergebnis der funktional differenzierten Gesellschaft* (New) verstanden werden. Im letzten Teil wird die Rolle der so neu definierten NRMs als ›globalised globaliser‹ für das weltgesellschaftliche Funktionssystem Religion evaluiert (Niklas Luhmann/Rudolf Stichweh). NRMs können demnach als Folge sowie als Triebkraft der Globalisierung von Religion in der Weltgesellschaft verstanden werden. Mit dieser theoretisch-argumentativen Analyse soll der Artikel neue Forschungsperspektiven skizzieren sowie das mögliche Potential der Systemtheorie für die religionswissenschaftliche Erforschung von NRMs aufzeigen.

This essay provides a systems theoretical perspective on the contentious debate on the term ›New Religious Movement‹ (NRM). Based on the systems theory, according to Niklas Luhmann amongst others, the essay analyses the general problems of defining NRMs. It identifies three different problems, in form of the indeterminacy of the three parts of the term, namely ›new‹, ›religious‹ and ›movement‹. Seeking to solve these problems the essay argues in favour of a systems theoretical definition of NRM as a *religious variation of a special type of social system,* called *New Social Movement*. This definition solves the discussed issues of the term by re-defining NRM as a *special type* of *communication system* (Movement) that gets its form by a particular form of *mobilisation of communication for religious issues* (Religious). Furthermore, NRMs must be seen as a *product of the functional differentiated society evolving from the late 17th century* (New). The last section, finally, puts the new definition into a wider context of globalisation by taking the theory of World Society (Niklas Luhmann/Rudolf Stichweh) into account. It discusses NRMs as ›globalised globalisers‹, which means as a product of the globalised World Society that at the same time re-affects the processes of globalisation themselves and thereby can be seen as a

globalising driving force of a world religion system. With its analytical and theoretical analysis the essay seeks to outline new possibilities for further research and indicates the benefits of the systems theoretical approach for the scientific study of religion with special regard to NRMs.

INDEX

Schlüsselwörter: Systemtheorie, Religion, Neue Religiöse Bewegungen, Soziale Bewegungen, Religionstheorie, Globalisierung, Kommunikationstheorie, Religiöse Gegenwartskultur, Neu-Religionen
Keywords: Systems Theory, New Religious Movements, New Social Movements, Theory of Religion, Globalization, Theory of Communication, Contemporary Religion, New Religions

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