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Religion as a Transnational Force

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Eröffnungsvortrag

Religion is still an uncomfortable topic in much social-scientific and media analysis of the contemporary world, despite its massive presence in the latter – the elephant in the living room, ignored in polite conversation. The reason is that many intellectuals still believe in secularization theory, despite its pretty thorough falsification. With the exceptions of Europe and of the aforementioned transnational intelligentsia (important exceptions which also call for analysis), the world today is explosively religious. The two most powerful explosions, both transnational in scope, are resurgent Islam and globalizing Evangelical Protestantism – with very different social, economic and political consequences. However, every major religious tradition today is engaged in transnational outreach, with varying degree of success. There is also the transnational ideology of secularism – proposing that modernity, whether it is or is not secularizing, should be. In several countries there is a clash between secularist elites and strongly religious populations, with far-reaching political implications. Just as there can be no "Christian (or Jewish, or Muslim, or whatever religious) sociology", there neither can nor should be a secularist sociology. What sociology should do (and not only in the subdiscipline of the sociology of religion) is to contribute to the understanding of a crucially important phenomenon in the contemporary world.