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BOOKS REVIEW

Luca Ozzano. 2020. The Masks of the Political God: Religion and Political Parties in Contemporary Democracies. ECPR Press/Rowman &Littlefield. 259pp.s

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1. Introduction

In his book, The Masks of the Political God, Luca Ozzano offers an excellent introduction to religiously-oriented political parties across the globe today. As a work of comparative scholarship, the book breaks ground in its categorization and analysis of religious political parties. Leveraging six case studies – across four continents and five religious traditions – Ozzano offers a portrait of how religious movements publicly organize in democracies over time. The "over time" is important as Ozzano's case studies focus on patterns of political party evolution and change. The book is rich in political history and contextualizes the messy specifics of electoral strategies, coalitions and maneuvering which constrain and drive religious parties' actions.

As a portrait of religiously oriented political parties spanning across the globe, the book works best as an exercise in categorization, as a mapping of the varieties of religious political parties and of major trends over time. The concluding chapter of the book, in some ways the book's most innovative and interesting, makes use of this categorization to offer important lessons and patterns. In particular, the chapter highlights and contextualizes the religious specificity of the global populist wave - with a first peak circa 2016 - as Trump, Modi, Salvini, Netanyahu, Bolsonaro, Putin and Erdogan reveled in a right-wing form of populism that they linked to Protestant, Hindu, Catholic, Jewish, Orthodox and Muslim populations. These patterns have important implications for larger debates in the field of religion and politics. While the book draws critical links to these debates, it is less interested in developing their full theoretical weight than it is in surveying the variable political histories of religious political parties. In other words, the book's contributions are more in the realm of comparative politics than political philosophy.

In this review, I begin by considering the core strengths of The Masks of the Political God, including its novel categorization of religiously oriented political parties in democracies and its survey of contemporary patterns of religious political parties operating in contemporary democratic contexts across the globe. I then develop two points which the book stimulates for further reflection about religion and democracy today. The first reflection considers the book's engagement with the inclusion-moderation hypothesis and its conclusions regarding the relationship between democracy, political parties and processes of religious radicalization. The second reflection links that discussion to contemporary debates about the relationship between political theology and democracy, and the religiously-informed ideas about national legitimacy that populist religious leaders have increasingly dabbled with today.

2. Categories, patterns and maps

After a brief survey of major theories, mostly canonical, on the relationship between religion, modernity and democracy (which includes discussion, among others, of Weber, Dobbelaere, Rawls, Habermas and Casanova), Ozzano outlines the benefits of employing a social cleavage framework to analyze the growth, variety and continued relevance of religiously oriented political parties. In this he builds squarely on the work of Lipset and Rokkan (1967) to whom he turns to develop a framework to explain how politicized social cleavages have shaped political party systems in Europe and around the globe. In particular, as theorized by Lipset and Rokkan in the 1960s, Ozzano argues that European political party systems continue to reveal the importance of religious vs. secular social cleavages tracing back to church-state conflicts during the critical phase of modern state-making across Europe (and with echos to party systems outside the West). These religious cleavages, throughout the 1990s, continued to be expressed in various center-right political parties who defended traditional, conservative religious values, particularly in the realm of sexual ethics and family relations, while making variable alliances with market forces.

Ozzano then notes the development of a new social cleavage, unexpected by Lipset and Rokkan and connected to the social and economic upheavals associated with processes of globalization at the beginning of the 2000s. These new social cleavages, he argues, could be categorized differently than the traditional/conservative cleavages in their emphasis on the importance of religious identity as opposed to religious values. He especially associates this new cleavage with the emergence of civilizational discourses in Europe and elsewhere. Reflecting civilizational discourses, a new group of religiously oriented political parties have defended national or European Christian identities against non-Christian others more than they have defended values discourses or institutional affiliation with a religious organization.

2.1 Conservatives and Nationalists

This two-step, historical social cleavage analysis feeds directly into the book's categorization scheme. While the book names five major categories of religiously oriented political parties (more on that below), the two categories that show up most often in the book's survey and case studies are the "conservative" and "nationalist" types. The conservative typology can be most closely associated with the larger family of Christian Democracy parties in Europe, conservative values-voters throughout the 1980s and 1990s in the United States, and a range of Muslim reformist parties, including the Moroccan PJD, Tunisia's Ennahda and the early-2000s version of the Turkish AKP. Ozzano describes these parties as tending towards the catch-all,

uniting various sociopolitical classes around a values-centered religious discourse which is not in opposition to liberal democracy and not easily deciphered in terms of classic left/right, urban/rural, educated/not divides.

Ozzano contrasts the religious conservative typology with a religious nationalist one, which he argues is much more centered on defending a religious identity against threats of others, both the near-others (elites, minorities, etc) and the far-others (people and customs hailing from threatening, outside civilizations). Religious nationalists have a more conflictual relationship with liberal democracy, particularly in its association with pluralism and globalization, and is especially manifested in the rise of right-wing populist movements.

Critically, Ozzano argues that religious nationalists are ambivalent or confused about their attachment to conservative religious values. Piety, church attendance, and political theology are not the goals or animating force of these parties and Christian identity- as in Marine Le Pen's National Front- is more often held up to defend, he argues, a free, liberal European past and national belonging as it is to defend church privileges or moral interests. One of the novelties of this new social cleavage, therefore, and underwriting its populist appeal is the way in which nationalist religious parties defend religiously popular policies over and even against the desires and discourse of their traditional religious authorities. This can be seen particularly in the case of populist party positions on immigration in recent European politics, especially in Catholic majority countries, which appeal to Europe's Christian identity but are at odds with the Holy See's clearly expressed preferences on the issue. Tensions between Islamist inspired political parties across the Middle East and the institutional ulema might be read in a similar light. In this, Ozzano emphasizes the transnational dimension to religiously oriented party politics over the last two decades and its impact on identity discourses.

2.2 Progressives, Fundamentalists and Camp

Ozzano also lists three other types of religiously-oriented political parties, including "progressives," "fundamentalists," and "camp." Camp parties, a term he borrows from scholarship on Israeli politics, refer to smaller ethno-religious groups seeking to preserve a stance of separation. These parties, he argues, are regularly-appearing but non-dominant characters in the religiously oriented party universe.

Progressive and fundamentalist religious parties, on the other hand, turn out to be rarer beasts in contemporary democracies. Ozzano locates some elements of Italy's Christian democratic party family- particularly that linked to Romano Prodi's Margherita faction - and Israel's Meimad alliance as examples of progressive religious parties. He categorizes earlier 1980s versions of Tunisia's Ennahda and the Welfare Party (RF) in Turkey as fundamentalist religious parties. Both types appear to be unstable in Ozzano's survey of religious political parties. The progressives tend to collapse in democracies due to the tensions they hold between their religious and social goals, which often split their electorate between more secular progressive parties and more religious conservative ones. The fundamentalists are rare in democracies because they are institutionally blocked from organizing, forced to go underground or banned outright.

The usefulness of these categories- and the patterns they help us to observe- are illustrated across the book's six core case studies in India, Israel, Italy, Turkey, the United States and Tunisia. And it is in the last chapter of the book, the slim end of its conclusion, where Ozzano begins to flex the theoretical insights that the categories provide. On the one hand, the case studies and the categories illustrate how variable religiously oriented political parties may be, and how they may change and evolve in their political goals and political bases over a single party lifetime. In other words, the categories highlight the variation and multi-vocality of

religiously oriented political parties. At the same time, Ozzano observes compelling patterns within this variation. Progressive parties appear unstable. Democracy appears to mostly prevent the emergence of fundamentalist political parties but not necessarily the moderation of existing religious parties. And there has been a major, global shift towards religiously oriented nationalist parties. The next two sections draw on Ozzano's work to reflect further on these last two points, namely the relationship between democracy and the dynamics of party moderation, on the one hand, and the rise of religious nationalism, on the other.

3. Inclusion, exclusion and moderation

One of the book's theoretical emphases is on party trajectory, that is, how single political parties evolve in democratic contexts in response to electoral competition, economic stress and other political stimuli. In doing so, the book pays close attention to the inclusion-moderation hypothesis and an associated body of theories which drove much work on religious political parties in the 2000s and 2010s (including my own). In many ways, the inclusion-moderation hypothesis was employed to analyze the democratizing pathways embraced by reformist movements and parties in Muslim majority countries throughout the early 2000s. This includes the AKP in Turkey, reformist Presidents in Iran, the al-wasat party in Egypt, and Muslim movements and ideas in Malaysia and Indonesia, among others.

The inclusion-moderation hypothesis drew on classic political science work on the median voter theory to explain how the dynamics of electoral competition, party institutionalization and governing priorities tended to move political parties- including those with revolutionary pasts- whether communist, Islamist or ultramontane- towards the political center. While most scholars (see, among others, Schwedler 2006, Tezcür 2009 and Wittes 2008) were cautious about the conditions under which moderation might occur; the limits of electoral inclusion as a mechanism of change; and the possibility of reversals; they worked within the shadow of modernization theories and their optimistic assumptions about the universal possibilities of progressive democratization. In this scholarship, "moderation" and the adoption of "normal" party issues were also generally associated, implicitly or explicitly, with the eventual or inevitable secularization of both politics and religion. The secular transformation of Christian democratic parties and European polities across the second half of the twentieth century and their gradual loss of a distinctive religious orientation loomed large in the historical background of these debates.

Ozzano challenges this scholarship throughout the book. Writing from the vantage point of 2020, he argues that democratic party competition does not seem to motivate much religious moderation. Rather, religious nationalists have grown in strength and used the levers of democratic competition to delegitimize electoral competitors, political enemies, and liberal ideas. He goes so far as to suggest that Cavatorta's (2013) insight that it is political exclusion, rather than inclusion, which sometimes determines party moderation might be a more general rule than we thought. Strong democratic state institutions can capably block fundamentalists from political power and force them to change their message if they want to participate in the decision-making process. Kramer, writing in 1997, was even more blunt- the countries with the tamest Islamist parties in the Middle East, he argued, and the furthest along the path to democratization – Turkey and Tunisia by his estimates- were those countries where a strong secular military had forced them to be that way.

The Masks of the Political God offers an important critique of the inclusion-moderation hypothesis which requires further reflection. That said, I am suspicious of a generalized exclusion-moderation theory and reluctant to completely discard the inclusion -moderation hypothesis for a number of reasons.

First, on the legacy of the moderation thesis, Ozzano is right to question its flatter versions and any mechanical assumptions it makes about electoral competition manufacturing moderation- itself a loaded and problematic term (for discussion, see Khan 2007 and Mamdani 2005). Among other things, as I have written elsewhere (Driessen 2012, 2014), the inclusion-moderation hypothesis tended to over-identify moderation with secularization and, therefore, to miss the wide range of ways in which religious forces remained politically and socially relevant across global society even when religious political parties transformed, failed or diminished. As Ozzano's case studies attest, the contemporary politics of religious nationalism reveal the dynamic ways in which religion remains available to be marshalled for political ends in societies- both developed and less- across the globe.

The current religious-populist resurgence, however, does not negate many of the rich insights of inclusion moderation theories. Nor does it foil the long history of political science scholarship on the institutionalization of political parties- religious or otherwise- and its impact on the issues they mobilize around in democratic contexts. For all of its limits, the inclusion moderation hypothesis continues to shed important light on the key elements which drove the democratic transformations of multiple political parties, including mid-century Christian democratic parties in Europe as well as reformist Muslim parties in the early 2000s across the Middle East and south-east Asia. Cross-national data as well as multiple qualitative studies offer important evidence in this regard (see for a start, the fascinating data collected by Kurzman and Naqvi 2010, and updated by Kurzman and Türkoğlu in 2015).

In this sense, the current revival of religious populism across regions helps reveal both the political context of these transformation processes and their limits. There is only so far to the center any party can go before new opportunities incentivize a swing in the other direction. As Ozzano writes throughout the book, the disruptive forces of globalization, particularly in economic terms, created these opportunities and fed the construction of the new social cleavages which built the populist tide.

This insight reveals the extent to which inclusion moderation theories, and much scholarship on political parties, assume "normal political times" in their analyses. The transformation of religious or communist or nationalist political parties into more liberal democratic ones generally happened along a trajectory of successful democratic modernization, marked by a combination of economic growth, availability of political rights and freedoms and relative social peace. The move of parties to the center, in this sense, could be read as part of the wider historical drift of modernization trajectories towards a post-ideological phase in which liquid modernity replaced big ideas and mass-based parties.

The inclusion-moderation hypothesis, from this angle, reads a bit like Fukuyama in 1989, in that the triumph of democratic inclusion moves global societies towards a very moderate – and very boring by Fukuyama's account- end of ideological history. Such incredibly boring moderation which might well "serve to get history started once again." Only that instead of boredom or existential ennui alone, it has been exogenous shocks in the form of economic crises- the sort which produce new forms of social cleavages- that have created new opportunities for religious radicalization within democratic arenas.

In other words, the inclusion moderation theory might well help us to understand political party evolution in normal political times. But the rise of religious nationalism, and religious un-moderation, might require different theories built for anormal times.

4. Religious Nationalism and Religious Nationalist Ideas

In this last section I want to briefly reflect on the rise of religious nationalism as chronicled in Ozzano's book and bring attention to the ascendant role that ideas and political theology seem to be playing within it. Throughout his survey of religiously oriented parties, Ozzano observes a striking pattern of growth of religious nationalism across a number of regions and religious traditions. He highlights this growth as the result of global insecurities associated with the economic crises beginning in the 2008 Great Recession, coupled with the impact of the war on terrorism, both of which facilitated the use of religious identities and civilizational rhetoric as a "glue" to bind a variety of social grievances into nationalist movements and parties.

As the last section began to note, this shift towards religious nationalism could be described as resulting from the breakdown of "normal" democratic politics, as well as the long-term tendency of liberalism to produce demobilization, fragmentation and feelings of rootlessness, eventually leading to what Ozzano terms a new politicization of a traditionalist-communitarian versus libertarian-universalistic cleavage.

This political divide has inspired an increasing number of actors and intellectuals to call into question the contemporary relationship between religion and liberal democracy. In these critiques, religious concerns about political legitimacy and social mobilization are paramount as are fears that liberalism is in the process of damaging or destroying the moral and religious sources on which it originally stood. This is why the work of Carl Schmitt, who makes it into a footnote in Ozzano's book, has found such renewed significance for a diverse group of political theorists working on the relationship between religion, politics and liberal modernity, from Habermas (2008) to Hallaq (2013).

In my reading, Ozzano's description of a broad shift from religious conservative political parties to religious nationalist political parties over the last 25 years, which is a shift away from liberalism, reflects these religious concerns. And in doing so, it reveals the ascension of a more aggressive political theology about the right relationship between religion and liberal modernity.

In previous decades, both the non-conflictual investment in democracy by religious conservatives as well as the religious "moderation" chronicled by inclusion-moderation theories were built on a promise that religious values could be synthesized in productive ways with liberal ones, or at least lived out productively within a liberal democratic framework.

Christian values voters confidently mobilized for this promise through the 1990s across Europe and the United States, as did Muslim reformists in the MENA region and south-east Asia. Religious nationalists increasingly do not. Instead, they have often embraced, as Viktor Orban has done with pride, an illiberal, anti-liberal or post-liberal political label.

Why? As Ozzano argues, some of this is certainly due to the global economic crisis which has led to mobilization around religious-national identities. Some of it, however, is also due to a heightened feeling that whatever synthesis had been achieved between traditional religious values and liberalism had been broken or a false chimera to begin with. In this regard, the rise of Catholic sovereigntists in Europe or the increased hostility towards Vatican II by Catholic traditionalists in the United States could be interpreted as a growing disillusionment with past attempts at compromise or aggiornamento with liberal modernity. The post-2013 nationalist turn of Erdogan's AKP might also be read in a parallel light, as being at least partially spurred on by feelings of betrayal at the hands of European democracies who blocked his reform-oriented attempts at joining the EU and whose courts ruled in favor of a secularized public sphere. The sparse international

mobilization in favor of democracy in contemporary Tunisia and the 2013 democratic debacle in Egypt might lead to similarly pessimistic conclusions by religiously-oriented parties in the MENA region.

Whether or not these assessments are fair or accurate, what I want to note is that the perception of being hoodwinked by liberal democracy has fueled nationalist mobilization not simply around religious identities but around religious ideas about the state and society as well. In other words, what might have begun as a civilizational or nationalist rhetoric relatively divorced from theological or philosophical concerns has taken on a religious life of its own (Driessen 2021). Today we see the growth of this religious salience at work among Christian Nationalists in the West, but you can trace it in the trajectories of nationalist movements elsewhere, including in Israel and India (see, among others, Walzer 2015). And I worry that the economic grievance analysis, by itself, risks underestimating the substantive religious critique of liberalism which religious nationalists are mounting, and their rejection of secular liberal modernity not just through identity and culture claims but through a powerful, religiously-inspired philosophical critique of liberalism (Hazony's 2018 The Virtue of Nationalism and Deenen's 2019 Why Liberalism Failed are representative in this regard).

That democracy remains capable of stopping fundamentalist political parties offers grounds for hope about its global future; that democracy can also facilitate the growth of religious nationalist parties motivated by strategies of conflict is sobering. Understanding and responding to the ideas underwriting the new post-liberal nationalist critique – and finding new ways to manage the religiously-identified conflict that it lays bear- will be consequently important.

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