

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Franz Winter

**Somatic dimensions in the ritual practice of the new religious movement *Terra Sagrada*.
An analysis with reference to Rosa's theory of 'resonance'.**

The study of so-called new religious movements has been a major aspect of the history of religious studies in the second half of the 20th century. This was closely related to the fact that since the 1960s and 1970s a major debate emerged particularly in the Euro-American horizon in regard to the growing presence and importance of a couple of newer religious movements. Most, but not all of them had their origin outside the Euro-American horizon and in Asia with countries such as India, Japan, or Korea as an important source. With their often new and sometimes seemingly strange behaviour (when looked upon by mainstream society) they soon were regarded as deviant and highly problematic developments that should be criticised from various angles. Initially this debate was dominated by (mainly Christian) theologians who were searching for explanations for this new phenomenon, mostly with a rather critical bias towards these new religions that were commonly referred to as 'cults'. Most of these scholars were following common patterns of exclusion and problematisation of smaller and marginal religious communities and began to develop a certain frame of interpretation of these newer movements that became dominant and was eagerly accepted by mainstream society and the media (Ashcraft 2018: 73–102). This approach once was labelled 'cult essentialism' which is an adequate description of this phenomenon (Hall et al. 2000). Early studies by scholars of religious studies tended to work on a counter-narrative to this paradigm and sometimes took an apologetic standpoint (Ashcraft 2018: 149–152). Both approaches make up part of general developments in the respective society that changed after the 'cult'-debate that had its heydays in the 1990s. In the following decade a more neutral approach became relevant, a way that might be defined as neither condemning nor defending new religious movements in general.

The formation period of a religious movement is always characterised by major attempts to define its positions in a mode of delimitating and outlining clear boundaries (Riesebrodt 2007, 46–54). In doing so new movements try to form a coherent community that has clear markers of identification to the inside and delimitations in regard to mainstream society outside.

It is exactly this point where the theoretical framework of Rosa's theory comes in as it seems very useful in regard to the analysis of the self-definitions, the identity building, and the emergence of new patterns of the worldview emerging in these kinds of new movements. It focusses on the issue of identity and somatic dimensions of self-awareness etc. This makes it—*inter alia*—ideal for an analysis of the ritual aspects of these movements from a comparative perspective. However, when introducing Rosa's theoretical frame another important aspect comes to the fore, i.e. defines the 'good' resonance Rosa proposes and what to do with definitions of resonance within movements that clearly show a closed and delimitating attitude towards mainstream

society? Should we define that as 'repulsive' (to use Rosa's terminology) and not as resonant (within this particular sphere)?

The project will deal with a new religious movement that is rather young: The movement Terra Sagrada is a European off-spring of Afro-American traditions such as Candomblé and Umbanda and has a rather limited and small membership (that is rather accessible and open to research, though). Its core teachings center on practices that lead to the incorporation of ghosts that is also the essence of its main ritual of initiation. In regard to the situation in German speaking countries there is a PhD thesis that was finished recently and that can help as a basis for further endeavours (Tranh-Huu 2020). This thesis focusses on the various motivations of members on the basis of a religio-psychological frame and takes the importance of rituals into account, that are essential for the movement. This material is an ideal starting point for a research project that combines these results with the above-mentioned theoretical frame of Rosa. One example would be the highly important 'somatic' dimension of the ritual and its performance as becomes clear with the presentation.

Results of this research project might enhance aspects of the portrayal of contemporary developments in European society when it comes to the importance of religion. This kind of micro-study gives insight into one particular societal layer that is often rather superficially referred to as 'holistic milieu' without going deeper when it comes to the individual motivations and the prospective benefits of becoming a member. With the additional help of Rosa's theory we might understand the mechanisms easier.

References

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