Social Security in Religious Networks
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Anthropological Perspectives on New Risks and Ambivalences

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Human being always have to deal with insecurity and risk. Rather than jumping into the emptiness as Yves Klein on our cover photograph they usually seek security in different kinds of safety nets such as kinship or friendship networks or formal insurances. In recent decades intensified globalisation, new epidemics such as HIV/AIDS, natural disasters and radical political change have posed new challenges for such social security arrangements worldwide. Simultaneously, the role of religion in society, once thought to have diminished in the process of modernisation, has regained public and scholarly attention. This volume sets out to explore the roles and relations of various religiously motivated actors in the creation of social security.

The potential of faith-based communities to contribute to social security has evoked contradicting appraisals. When globally distributed faith-based organisations, such as Caritas or Buddhist and Islamic Relief, provide aid to those who suffer most in times of crisis, global religious networks are frequently judged in a positive light as delivering the social good, strengthening worldwide solidarity and securing stability in the process. On the other hand, religious networks are simultaneously seen as ideologically driven to support their own members only, at the expense of excluding or even harming others. Their provision of spiritual and material security in this context is considered damaging to society, especially against the background of September 11. Likewise, on a smaller scale, local religious groups receive praise for their capacity for community development and the provision of social integration, but are accused at the same time of alienating their members from other social networks, such as their families.

Notes for this chapter are located on page 15.
or society in general. These conflicting assessments of religious activities in the field of social security are often based on a conflation of different layers of actors, practices and ideologies. In this volume, we move away from one-dimensional images of the kind contained in ideological visions and policies. We aim instead at developing well-defined analytical concepts and a profound ethnographic knowledge of local circumstances in an attempt to grasp the ambiguous role of religious networks in creating social security. In order to approach this field of inquiry, we propose to combine network and social security concepts as developed in anthropology. Bringing these perspectives together will allow us to generate innovative insights, with particular regard to situations of accelerated social change, increasing global connectedness, and the interrelatedness of religiously informed relations and other social networks.

**The Dynamics of Social Security Arrangements**

Anthropological research on social security emerged in the 1970s and 1980s in the context of scholarly debates on development in the Third World. In these countries, state-organised provisions reached only a small section of the population and social security relied on complex arrangements between family, kinship and community (Partsch 1983; Midgley 1984; von Benda-Beckmann et al. 1988, 1994; Ahmad et al. 1991; Lachenmann 1996, 1998). Consequently, the concept of social security that focused on provisions distributed or organised by the state in industrialised countries hitherto taken for granted was criticised as inapplicable to developing countries. At the same time scholars began to recognise the pluri-agent nature of social security provision in Western welfare states as well (Johnson 1987; Zacher 1988). As evident in the concept of welfare pluralism, most people in Western countries also receive resources from state agencies, NGOs or insurances, and simultaneously from their personal network of kin, friends, neighbours or co-believers. Thus scholars dealing with social security in both contexts began to criticise the singular dichotomies of public/private, formal/informal or even modern/traditional types of provision. Care provided by parents for their children, for example, is rarely seen as formal social security, although in many cases it is to a certain extent legally prescribed (von Benda-Beckmann and von Benda-Beckmann 2000). Following these considerations, we rely on the wide concept of social security as developed by Franz and Keebet von Benda-Beckmann (2000). They define social security as ‘the dimension of social organisation dealing with the provision of security not considered to be an exclusive matter of individual responsibility’ (2000: 14). This broad definition leaves room for the notion of social security as provided by a variety of sources, agents, institutions and networks. It also indicates that risks and responsibilities are not given but socially constructed. Furthermore,
analysing social security entails taking actors’ expectations of the future and of the actions of others into account. Comparing elderly care in the US and Japan, Hashimoto (1996), for example, has convincingly shown that differences in the provision of kinship care are informed by life scripts and expectations concerning anticipated needs in old age.

This and other studies have likewise shown that social security is not merely a matter of providing tangible material resources, such as food, shelter, or health care to people in need, but also contains important social as well as emotional and spiritual aspects. Very often it is not the material outcome that makes people feel secure, but rather a network of social relations to which they can relate and refer in times of crisis and need (Risseeuw 2001; see also Caldwell 2007 and the various articles in Pina-Cabral and Pine 2007). However, the embeddedness of security in social networks incorporates an inherent ambiguity. A social network to which an individual (or a group) belongs can refer makes the future more predictable. At the same time, inclusion in one network frequently means exclusion from others.

While earlier studies on social security were influenced by a somewhat ‘positive mood’ or modernist discourse based on the notion of potentially enhancing worldwide welfare, recent studies tend to underline its ‘fragmentation’ (Carter 1998) and the production of insecurity and exclusion in specific settings of welfare arrangements (Nettleton and Burrows 1998; Risseeuw 2001; van Euwijk 2004; de Jong and Roth 2005; Rohregger 2006). This ambivalence is also evident in social security arrangements created by religious networks presented in various chapters of this volume.

In an effort to understand the ambivalent character of social security in religious networks, we consider the five layers of social security as proposed by Franz and Keebet von Benda-Beckmann (2000: 14) valuable. They conceptualise the first layer as the above-mentioned ideological notions, and their cultural and religious ideals with regard to risk, vulnerability and caring responsibilities. These can differ from one society to another, between the various agents of social security such as the state, the family or religious networks, and also between the individual members (see also K. von Benda-Beckmann 1994; Zelizer 1997; Hashimoto 2000; Haney 2002; Bartkowski and Regis 2003; Marcus 2006; Murphy 2007). Secondly, they describe the layer of institutional provision, which is often based on legal prescriptions and clearly defined rights and obligations and is usually more restrictive than the ideological background. The social relationships between recipients and providers constitute the third layer, which again can differ from the normative and institutional level, focusing as it does on the interactions between people. The authors refer to social security practices as the fourth layer, where concrete social security provisions take place. Finally, there is the layer that deals with the social and economic consequences of social security practices for the providers and recipients, as well as for the wider social field.
Applying this approach to social security also allows us to cross the nation-state boundaries so prevalent in the numerous comparative studies on welfare state typologies (cf. Esping-Anderson 2003). Globalisation and increasing migration flows lead to the travelling of ideas about need and obligation, and produce transnational social security practices. The effects again are ambivalent (von Benda-Beckmann and von Benda-Beckmann 2000: 10). Migrants, for example, provide, on the one hand, for their families back home by sending money and material goods. As a result of their absence at home, on the other hand, they may fail to provide social and emotional support to their families. When young people leave home and migrate to look for work, those who stay behind bear the brunt – especially if they are unable to fulfil work obligations (in agriculture, for example) or caring activities that were primarily carried out by those who had left (Leliveld 1994, 2000). Although there may not be a distinct lack of labour, those who stay behind could feel left alone. Many who migrate perform care work in richer countries, leading to the development of new forms and mixtures of social support/dependencies in global care chains (Hochschild 2000; see also Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003; Constable 1997; Parrenas 2003). Applying a broad concept of social security allows for an assessment of the ambivalent contribution of religious networks in a globalised world. At the same time, using the term network in the anthropological tradition enables us to emphasise an actor-centred and relational perspective.

The Making of Religious Networks

Speaking of ‘religious networks’ rather than ‘religion’ helps to avoid an ethnocentric definition of religion in the institutional sense of the church, for instance. In addition, the term facilitates highlighting the diversity of religious social formations (Vergemeinschaftung) in several social and geographical settings. Unlike a group, which is assumed to be constructed by relationships of one type, social networks are created by overlapping relations such as kinship, friendship and religion (Mitchell 1969: 15). Although we concentrate on a specific content of the relation in employing the term religious network, we do not rule out that actors may attach additional or overlapping meanings to their relationships.

Originally developed in the context of African inner migration, anthropologists introduced the term network to grasp the seemingly new fluidity of social relations in urban conditions. In these early studies, researchers of the later so-called Manchester School focused on certain social relations rather than norms, and analysed their influence on behaviour, above all with regard to conflict resolution (Epstein 1969; Kapferer 1969; Mitchell 1969). With her study on married couples in London, Elisabeth Bott (1971 [1954]) introduced
the specific notion of personal networks (Wellman 1993: 432; see also Jansen 2006: 42–44). Despite the fact that social network theory lost its attractiveness in anthropology from the 1970s on, it continued to be applied in sociology in the context of sophisticated computer-based methods. Nevertheless we use the term in its anthropological tradition to underline the fluidity of social relations and the interconnectedness of networks, and their extension to non-members and the outer world in general. Rather than aiming at formal descriptions of religious networks in terms such as density or reachability, we seek to stress the multiplexity of relations and interactional criteria, as well as the ways in which norms and values are communicated. In our understanding, religious networks include organisations with formal membership regulations as well as informal links between individuals. We therefore propose to define a religious network as composed of social actors linked to each other through religious practices, ideologies or institutions.

Employing a flexible religious network concept does not mean that boundaries have no meaning for the actors concerned or the forms of social security these boundaries create. Religious networks are constructed by means of constant boundary work, where the most salient distinctions lie between religious specialists and lay people, long-time believers and newcomer adherents, and insider congregants and outsider non-members (Bartkowski and Regis 2003: 17). The essays collected in this volume concentrate on lay people who regularly attend religious services as well as on religious experts such as Christian pastors, Voudou priestesses or Islamic teachers. The network concept allows for a description of diverse relational patterns, thereby making it possible to comprehend various types of hierarchies within the religious network, such as clientelist or egalitarian relations, and individual positions. Single actors in the network, for example, could occupy a central role or act as so-called bridge persons that link the religious network to other networks and groups. The papers in this volume represent this diversity and include loosely knit religious migrant networks, locally and translocally based individuals and institutions, as well as highly formalised Catholic congregations. Several organisational principles and religious ideas influence how social security is created within the framework of these networks. Using the concept of network, we can also grasp also less-institutionalised patterns of behaviour (Schweizer 1996: 37) and analyse a variety of religious activities in the context of creating social security.

Social Security in Religious Networks

Combining the theoretical concepts outlined above allows for a better understanding of how religious networks create notions of social security and develop specific forms of provision. In exploring these processes we will take
the different layers as described above as points of departure. Hence we focus on the ideas, relations and practices that surface in religious networks, analysing them in their interrelatedness to other providers.

Firstly, as mentioned above, social security is always bound to future expectations, and religious belief contributes to these expectations. Instead of taking need as obvious, the authors in this book explore the social construction of specific perceptions of risk and security in religious networks. One of the principal forms of social security provided by religious networks is undoubtedly spiritual or ontological security. However, we should not overlook that the spiritual security religious faith provides can simultaneously enhance material vulnerability.

Ideas on what constitutes legitimate need and assistance contribute to the second layer of analysis – the different relationships through which care is or should be provided in religious networks (Zelizer 1997; Bartkowski and Regis 2003; Read 2005). ‘Visions of charity’, as Allahyari calls them in her comparative ethnography of a Catholic and a Protestant-based food programme for the urban poor, provide ‘blueprints for how food is served, for understandings of the poor as guest or clients, and for organizational relations to the state’ (2000: 13; see also Murphy 2007). Charity ideologies differ and authorise religious actors to direct their services and provisions to a certain strata of the religious network only, and sometimes to all of the co-believers, occasionally also to strangers. Consequently members and non-members are provided with different forms of social security that pursue different sets of rules, logic, ideas and strategies with regard to the solidarity of its members, and result to varying degrees in institutionalisation. Adherents of a specific community may in some cases even be unaware of social security provision, a side effect of network membership, since believers might not see this as constitutive of their network activity and instead stress the idea of a common faith. Other religious networks give more prominence to mutual assistance. Support given or received on the basis of moral attributes could allow members to consider themselves more or less as insiders, essentially defined as in need of, or eligible for care. With regard to accusations of sorcery in Burkina Faso, Badini-Kinda argues that religious belief can even legitimise nonassistance, that is, to family members, friends, and co-believers, as well as to strangers (2005: 155). In their comparative work on poverty relief programmes of various congregations in the south of the US, Bartkowski and Regis (2003: 19) phrase this ambivalence by distinguishing between two forms of faith-based social capital. Bonding faith-based social capital refers to ‘strategies of congregational inreach such as communal worship and mutual aid’; while ‘congregational outreach to disadvantaged non-members and the formation of interdenominational relief agencies’ constitute examples of bridging faith-based capital. These practices highlight the ambiguity of social security provided by religious networks and demonstrate that religious ideology can also mean social exclusion.
The question of eligibility hints at the practices of inclusion and exclusion implied in the concept of need and charity developed by religious networks. Material resources such as food and shelter or access to medical care are frequently limited and hard to come by. Once social networks provide access to these resources, it can be assumed that the latter will be cut off to those who are not members of the network. To belong or not to belong to a social security network can therefore turn out to be a question of access to resources, and in a wider sense one of social inclusion or exclusion. In addition, it can be taken as given that members in hierarchical positions pursue disparate aims. Franz and Keebet von Benda-Beckmann (1998) argue with regard to state officials that their respective social security arrangements should be part of the analysis, because their personal needs and obligations greatly influence the distribution of state resources and community networks. In the same vein, the inclusion of church officials or other key figures in the analysis allows for challenging insights into the nature of the relation between religious networks and social security. Religious experts, much the same way as state officials, pursue their own social security strategies, for example, by making pleas for donations to enhance their own well-being, or distributing resources differentially for their own purpose. In line with this thought, the chapters in this book look at the various social security ideologies and concepts that circulate in religious networks, and the resultant relations that exist between recipients and donors, as well as the respective practices and consequences. Several contributions highlight the ambivalent nature of these ideologies and practices, since they are in most cases embedded in hierarchies and entail exclusionary practices, or even the denial of assistance. The authors describe various forms of security ranging from spiritual to material provision, religious ideologies of solidarity, and concepts and practices of charity aimed at non-members.

The different layers of creating social security in religious networks can only be satisfactorily analysed when seen in their embeddedness in society as a whole. Prevailing ideas on need and social security practices are either in accordance with or in opposition to other normative systems in the respective society, such as state legal prescriptions or kinship norms and values. The manner in which charity is practised in religious networks is often closely linked to state and kinship frameworks of provision. The state is not only a key provider of social security but also in a position to legally define who is needy and what type of social security should be provided. As Marcus (2000) has shown for the homeless in New York, broader political tendencies can contribute to the definition of new groups in need. Also, most states define, enable or restrict the scope of other actors in the provision of social security. In many Western countries, for example, legislation takes the charitable nature of churches for granted (Dal Pont 2005). Still, current social security arrangements differ greatly. Whereas in some countries of continental Europe, such as Germany and Austria, relations