

Nationalism and Religion

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Nationalism and religion have had an ambivalent relationship. Secular nationalism - the body of ideas legitimating the nation-state that emerged in eighteenth-century Europe and America and that by the mid-twentieth century had swept through the modern world - has usually rejected religion. But the nation-state has sometimes relied upon religious images and identities to buttress its power. Likewise, although supporters of religion often reject politics, including nationalism, increasingly religious identities and ideologies have become the basis for strident new forms of nationalism and transnationalism in a globalized, postmodern world.

AMBIVALENCE TOWARDS RELIGION

When modern secular nationalism emerged in the eighteenth century as a product of the European Enlightenment's political values it did so with a distinctly anti-religious, or at least anti-clerical, posture. The creation of a new mercantile society of presumably equal citizens required an ideological justification that was different than the religious sanction for a political order characterized by monarchy and hierarchy. The ideas of John Locke about the origins of a civil community, and the 'social contract' theories of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, required very little commitment to religious belief. Although they allowed for a divine order that made the rights of humans possible, their ideas had the effect of taking religion - at least Church religion - out of public life. At the time, religious enemies of the Enlightenment protested religion's public demise, but their views were submerged in a wave of approval for a new view of social order in which secular nationalism was thought to be virtually a natural law, universally applicable and morally right.

Yet at the same time that religion was becoming less political, the secular political world was adopting a religiosity of its own. In the early nineteenth century nationalism became clothed in romantic and xenophobic images that would have startled its Enlightenment forbears. The French Revolution, the model for much of the nationalist fervor that developed in the nineteenth century, infused a religious zeal into revolutionary democracy, taking on the trappings of Church religion in the priestly power meted out to its demagogic leaders, and in the slavish devotion to what it called 'the temple of reason. According to Alexis de Tocqueville, the French Revolution 'assumed many of the aspects of a religious revolution'. The American Revolution also had a religious side: many of its leaders had been influenced by eighteenth-century Deism, a religion of science and natural law. As in France, American nationalism developed its own religious characteristics, blending the ideals of secular nationalism and the symbols of Christianity into what has been called a 'civil religion.'

The latter part of the nineteenth century fulfilled de Tocqueville's prophecy that the 'strange religion' of secular nationalism would, 'like Islam, overrun the whole world with its apostles, militants, and martyrs'. It was spread throughout the world with an almost missionary zeal, and nationalism was shipped to the newly colonized areas of Asia, Africa and Latin America as part of the ideological freight of colonialism.

Secular nationalism reached its zenith in the mid-twentieth century following the end of World War II as colonial empires crumbled and new nations proliferated in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. As the formerly-colonial governments turned their political and economic infrastructures from territories into nation-states, the ideology of secular nationalism infused the efforts to

create public loyalty and a sense of legitimacy for public institutions in processes that came to be known as 'modernization' and 'nation-building'.

Leaders such as India's Jawaharlal Nehru and Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser symbolized the modern and Westernized nationalist who had little tolerance for what was perceived to be the irrationality of religion's customs and the divisiveness of its loyalties. Yet though the masses in new countries such as India and Egypt expressed a great deal of nationalist pride, their acceptance of a secular basis for national identity was not extensive. In developing countries in the late twentieth century, secular nationalism and religion were seen as competitors - just as they were in the modern West in previous centuries. Secular nationalism in the formerly-colonized countries in the late twentieth century came to represent one side of a great encounter between two vastly different ways of perceiving the socio-political order and the relationship of the individual to the state: one informed by the notion of a secular compact, the other by the authority and community conveyed through traditional religion. Given the fundamental character of the division, and the intensity of the loyalties to each side, it is no wonder that in the last decades of the twentieth century the encounter was so violent.

CRITICISMS OF SECULAR NATIONALISM

Religious criticisms of secular nationalism emerged in the late twentieth century in areas of the Middle East and Asia where nation-building was being attempted along blatantly European and American models. At the same time religious activists in other parts of the world - including industrialized countries - also began to criticize the tenets of secular nationalism, albeit for somewhat different reasons. Both kinds of criticisms followed one or more of these three lines of reasoning:

- *Secular nationalism is a Western intrusion.* The charge that secular nationalism is by its nature Western - and therefore inappropriately applied to other parts of the world - was levelled by the Ayatollah Khomeini against the policies of the Shah during Iran's successful religious nationalist revolution in 1979. Though Iran had never been colonized, the Ayatollah claimed that America and Europe's economic control and cultural influence amounted to colonization all the same, and he decried what he referred to as the Shah's 'West-toxification', an inebriation over things American and European. In Algeria the Islamic Salvation Front took a similar position during the 1991 elections, claiming that the secular nationalism promulgated by Algeria's military leaders was an extension of French colonial rule. Religious nationalism is also seen as the unfinished business of anti-colonialism in Egypt, India, Sri Lanka and elsewhere in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.
- *Secular nationalism is intolerant of religion.* The claim that secular nationalism is hostile to any political identity or ideology related to religion was a major theme of Christian groups in the United States, Jewish movements in Israel and many of the religious nationalist movements that erupted in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Chechnya in the 1990s. In many of the nations formerly associated with the USSR, religious activists saw the ideology of communism as a foil for an irredentist Russian nationalism, which barred religion not only for Marxist ideological reasons but also to keep national identities associated with religion from rising in the USSR-dominated states. Following the USSR's demise in 1992, many in these nations saw their religion as a new locus of national identity and loyalty.
- *Secular nationalism promotes a unified world order.* Some of the most extreme movements for religious nationalism have criticized secular nationalism for its universalist tendencies. According to these critics, the global ideology of secular nationalism sets the stage for the establishment of a new world order, one that promotes a single central political authority

and a unified world society and culture. The al-Qa'eda movement has developed a transnational community of Muslims based on the fear that the US military and cultural sphere of influence will lead to a form of global domination that will destroy Muslim societies. In the 1990s the Christian Identity and Christian Reconstruction movements in the United States fostered similar fears over the global aspirations of US political leaders, anxieties that were shared by such extremist movements as Japan's Aum Shinrikyo, a breakaway Buddhist group involved in a nerve gas attack on Tokyo's subways in 1995. In the views of these groups it was religion that protected national interests against the internationalism that they thought was secular nationalism's ultimate goal.

ETHNIC AND IDEOLOGICAL RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM

Religious nationalism has often been associated with ethnic religious communities as well as political-religious ideologies. In some movements the ethnic aspects have been primary, in some the ideological issues have been paramount, and in others both aspects have been equally important. The struggle of the Irish - both Protestant and Catholic - to claim political authority over their land is an example of ethnic nationalism. In the former Yugoslavia three groups of ethnic religious nationalists were pitted against one another: Orthodox Serbs, Catholic Croats and Muslim Bosnians.

The most confrontational movements of religious nationalism in the late twentieth century, however, have been ideological. Though quite different in other respects, Messianic Zionist movements for Jewish nationalism in Israel and radical forms of Muslim nationalism have both aimed at establishing a political order based on religious law. So have the Christian Identity and Christian Reconstruction movements associated with militia organizations in the United States. Movements that have been both ethnic and ideological in character have had double sets of enemies: their ethnic rivals and the secular leaders of their own people. The Hamas movement in Palestine, for example, simultaneously waged a war of independence against Israel while sparring with the secular Palestinian Authority.

RELIGIOUS NATIONALIST MOVEMENTS

By the first decade of the twenty-first century virtually every religious tradition in the world had provided justification for some form of religious nationalism:

Muslim concepts and movements

The theoretical constructs of modern Islamic nationalism were linked to the writings of Pakistan's Maulana Abu al-Ala Mawdudi, who founded the Jamaat-i-Islami (Islamic Association) in 1941 in British India before Pakistan was created; and Egypt's Hassan al-Banna, who established the Ikhwan al-Muslimin (Muslim Brotherhood) in 1928. These thinkers identified Western imperialism as an enemy of Islamic society and called for political organization to overthrow Western influences, if necessary by force, in order to establish a political order based on Islamic law.

In Egypt, successors of al-Banna included Muslim Brotherhood leaders Sayyid Qutb and Abd Al-Salam Faraj, both of whom were executed by the Egyptian government - Qutb in 1965 and Faraj in 1982, after he was accused of taking part in the assassination of Anwar Sadat. Faraj had argued that Muslims had a 'neglected duty' to undertake a *jihad* (sacred struggle) against the secular forces that threatened Islam, and he was associated with an extreme faction of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Jamaat al-Jihad. Another radical movement at the fringe of Egypt's

Muslim Brotherhood was the Gamaa al-Islamiya (Islamic Group) led by Sheik Omar Abdul Rahman. The movement was implicated in the 1993 bombing of New York City's World Trade Center and a string of bombings in Egypt, including an assault on a group of tourists at the Temple of Hatshepsut in Luxor in 1997. The aim of these movements was to discredit American and other international support for Egypt's secular nationalism.

In nearby Gaza and the West Bank of Palestine, these Egyptian groups and the writings of Mawdudi, al-Banna, Qutb and Faraj influenced a growing Muslim movement of Palestinian nationalism that eventually rivaled the secular Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) headed by Yasser Arafat until his death in 2004. This Muslim movement was founded by Sheik Ahmed Yassin and other religious activists in 1987 and was named Hamas, a word that means 'zeal' and serves as an acronym for the phrase Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya, 'Islamic Resistance Movement'. Soon after it was founded, Hamas supported the *intifada*, the grassroots Palestinian resistance movement, and rebelled against Arafat and the PLO after the secular Palestinian leader signed a peace agreement with Israel's Yitzhak Rabin in 1993. Infamous for its reliance upon suicide bombers in the Palestinian struggle for independence from Israel, Hamas continued to play an important role on the extreme right wing of Palestinian politics well into the twenty-first century. The movement suffered a significant blow to its leadership after the Israeli assassinations of Sheik Yassin and the political head of the movement, Abdul Aziz Rantisi, in 2004, but Hamas thundered back to victory in the Palestinian elections in 2006.

In other Arab regions the power of Islamic political movements has also made an impact. In Syria, Islamic activists have attempted to unseat the secular Ba'ath Party, and in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the other Gulf Emirates, where an official Islamic culture prevails and Islamic law is honored, rebel Islamic nationalists are also feared. In Jordan, in elections held after the Gulf War in 1991, members of the Muslim Brotherhood became the largest single bloc in the Jordanian parliament.

In Iraq after the US-led ousting of Saddam Hussein in 2003, religion became a major factor in resurgent nationalist movements among both Shi'a activists in the South and Sunni Arab Muslims in Baghdad and Western Iraq. Political parties were established along religious lines, including the Sunni Iraq Islamic Party, the Shi'a Da'awa Party and the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq. At the same time many of the Sunni insurgents who opposed the US invasion and occupation of Iraq favored a transnational religious and political allegiance. Some of these, including the Jordanian-born militant Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, had ties to the al-Qa'eda movement headed by Osama bin Laden.

In Iran, the ideology of Islamic nationalism that emerged during and after the 1979 revolution was propounded by the Ayatollah Khomeini and his chief theorist, Ali Shari'ati. Shari'ati employed socialist notions of revolution in formulating a Shi'ite Islamic political philosophy not unlike the Liberation Theology of Latin American Christianity. These ideas and Iran's example of a successful Islamic revolution encouraged leaders of Shi'ite Islamic movements elsewhere, including the Hizbullah and Amal organizations based in Lebanon that targeted both American and Israeli military units in the 1980s. Iranian ideas about religious politics have also been influential in the Shi'ite political movements in Iraq in the post-Saddam period from 2003. In Afghanistan, anti-communist Muslim groups supported by the United States led a decade-long liberation struggle against a Soviet-backed government during the 1980s. In 1996 an extremely conservative political group, the Taliban, succeeded in establishing military control over most of the country, including the capital, Kabul. Led by members of the Pathan ethnic community, who were former students of Islamic schools, these religious revolutionaries established an autocratic state with strict adherence to traditional Islamic codes of behavior. The Taliban allowed Osama

bin Laden and his al-Qa'eda movement to establish their international headquarters and terrorist training camps in the country. As a result, the Taliban regime was toppled by a US military invasion following the al-Qa'eda's September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. The Taliban movement continued to play a formidable role in resistance movements against the new secular government, especially in areas of Afghanistan dominated by ethnic Pathans.

In Pakistan, conservative Muslims who helped to oust Benazir Bhutto from office in 1990 and again in 1997 supported legislation that made the tenets of the Qur'an the supreme law of the land. Tension between religious and secular nationalists were exacerbated by the support given by religious activists to the Taliban and bin Laden's al-Qa'eda movement, and by the complicity of Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf to the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. Pakistan has also been accused by some Indian leaders of supporting Muslim separatists in Kashmir who engaged in sporadic clashes with the Indian army in the last decade of the twentieth century, which have continued into the first decade of the twenty-first.

In Indonesia, an extremist Muslim political movement described as Jemaah Islamiah ('the Islamic Group') ignited a series of bombs in Bali nightclubs in 2002, killing more than 200 people, including scores of young Australians and other visitors enjoying the popular tourist resort. A radical Muslim cleric, Abu Bakar Bashir, was arrested in connection with the bombing, but other attacks continued, including a 2003 suicide bombing at the Marriott Hotel in Jakarta. Part of the motivation of the activists was to purify Indonesian society of foreign cultural and economic influences. Elsewhere in Indonesia, Islamic activists have led a separatist movement in the Aceh region, where they instituted strict Islamic moral codes and engaged in a violent struggle with the army. Islamic activists in the Maluku Islands in Indonesia attacked members of the Christian community in 1998 in a wave of violence that continued for several years in an attempted purge of Christians on the island of Ambon.

Malaysia has also experienced outbursts of radical Muslim activism in the first decade of the twenty-first century, and in Southern Thailand there have been conflicts between the Muslim and Buddhist communities over political control. For some decades the Philippines government has battled with Muslim separatist groups, including the Moro Liberation Front, in the southern Philippines islands of Mindanao and Sulu.

In Algeria, protests mounted by the Islamic Salvation Front led to enormous electoral successes in December 1991. The movement, in soundly defeating the party that had ruled Algeria since its independence from the French in 1956, promised to give the former colony what its leader called 'an Islamic state'. Scarcely a month later, however, the army annulled the elections and established a secular military junta, outlawing the Islamic Front. The violent resistance to the junta's actions that followed included the 1992 assassination of Boudiaf, the head of Algeria's Council of State, and a series of bombings in Paris subways in the mid 1990s in protest against what was perceived to be France's support for the secular military leaders. In neighboring Tunisia, the outlawed Islamic Renaissance Party organized an opposition to the secular Tunisian government.

In Morocco, an Islamic political party, the Justice and Charity Party, gained a significant electoral following at the turn of the century. In 2003 a series of suicide bombings in Casablanca were linked to Islamic groups that were critical of what was alleged to be the Moroccan government's secularism, immorality and undemocratic policies. Among the targets were the Belgian consulate, a Jewish community center, and a Spanish restaurant.

Muslim activists from Morocco were also linked to a series of bombings in Spain in 2004 that targeted trains at Madrid stations, causing 191 deaths. Although the motives of the activists were unclear, the perpetrators were said to be concerned about Spain's support for US policies in Iraq and for the establishment of secular nationalism in what had been a Muslim nation in Spain some five hundred years ago.

In Sudan, Lieutenant General Omar Hassan Ahmed Bashir established one of the world's most influential Islamic regimes in 1989, masterminded by Hassan Abdullah Turabi. The Sudan was alleged to have been a training ground for Islamic activists world-wide, and during the 1990s the articulate, urbane Turabi became an international spokesman for Islamic nationalism. In northern Nigeria, Islam has fused with ethnic tribal politics.

In Turkey, the Islamic-oriented Welfare Party briefly came to power in 1996. Its leader, Necmettin Erbakan, was forced to resign in 1997 and the party was banned in 1998, but Muslim politics continued to be a significant factor in Turkey in elections in following years. Islam has also been linked to the rise of ethnic Muslim politics in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina in the former Yugoslavia; Serbia's Kosovo province adjoining Albania; Xinjiang, Ningxia, Gansu and Yunnan in China; and Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and the Islamic regions of central and southern Russia - particularly Chechnya - in the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Jewish concepts and movements

Concepts of Jewish nationalism have been tied to the creation of an independent state of Israel in 1948. Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak ha-Kohen Kuk, the Chief Rabbi of pre-Israeli Palestine, and his son and successor, Z. Y. Kuk, maintained that the secular state of Israel was religiously useful and that its purification could help precipitate the return of the Messiah. After the 1967 war in which Israel gained land from adjacent Arab states, some Jewish nationalists thought that the time had come for the biblical nation of Israel to be recreated. Rabbi Moshe Levinger and others established the Gush Emunim, an organization that encouraged Jews to establish settlements on the West Bank of the Jordan River to recover what was regarded as biblical lands from Palestinians.

An even more extreme form of Jewish nationalism was articulated by Rabbi Meir Kahane, who immigrated to Israel from the United States in 1971 and founded the Kach ("Thus") Party dedicated to the creation of an Israeli nation based on the Torah (biblical law) rather than secular principles. Kahane advocated a catastrophic form of Messianic Zionism that urged confrontation with Arabs, secular Jews and others perceived to be enemies of a Jewish religious state. Although Kahane was assassinated in New York City in 1990 by Muslims associated with the Egyptian Gamaa al-Islamiya, his movement continued to advocate violent encounters.

One of his followers, Dr Baruch Goldstein, killed Muslim worshippers at the Shrine of the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron in 1994. Yigal Amir, propelled by ideas similar to Kahane's, assassinated Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995. Supporters of this extreme Israeli Messianic nationalism resist any concession of territory to Palestinians and have been at the forefront of resistance to the Israeli government's withdrawal of settlements from Gaza and the West Bank.

Christian concepts and movements

Christianity has been associated with political power since it was embraced by Emperor Constantine in the fourth century, and has had a history of clerical influence on political

authority ever since. Recent Christian nationalists have traced their ideas to the sixteenth-century Protestant reformer John Calvin, who advocated a Christian religious basis for political order and established Geneva as a Christian city-state. Some modern-day Protestant activists have adopted Calvin as their role model, including the Rev. Ian Paisley, a fiery supporter of Protestant political power in Northern Ireland.

In the 1980s religious activists in the United States adopted Calvin's thinking in a movement that they called Christian Reconstruction. This movement advocated the reconstruction of America's economic system and legal order along Christian principles. A similar strand of revolutionary religious activism, the Christian Identity movement, has been associated with militia movements and has provided the ideological basis for such religious communes as the Freeman Compound in Montana and Elohim City in Oklahoma.

In the 1990s, followers of both Christian Reconstruction and Christian Identity were involved in the bombing of abortion clinics and in violent encounters with the US government, which they regarded as their ideological enemy. Timothy McVeigh, who was convicted and executed for his role in bombing the Oklahoma City Federal Building in 1995 - the largest act of terrorism on American soil prior to the September 2001 attacks - was motivated by an ideology designated by his favorite novelist, William Pierce, as 'cosmotheism'. Like many Christian Identity activists, McVeigh and Pierce expected racial struggle and guerilla war in the liberation of the United States from what they imagined to be its anti-religious secular despotism. Another Christian Identity militant, Eric Robert Rudolph, was implicated in a bombing attack on Olympic Village in Atlanta in 1996; he hid out in the Appalachian mountains for years until his arrest in 2003.

Hindu and Sikh movements

India's nationalist movement has had a religious side since the early twentieth century, when political activists such as Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Aurobindo Ghose added a specifically Hindu spiritual dimension to India's emerging movement for independence. In 1925 the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), 'National Volunteer Organization', which based its ideas on the writings of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, advocated the political preservation of what Savarkar called 'hindutva', a national identity based on Hindu culture. During the 1980s members of the RSS formed a new political party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), 'Indian People's Party', based on Savarkar's ideas. A critical moment in the resurgence of Hindu activism was the riot that led to the destruction of an old mosque on the site of what was reputed to be the birthplace of the Hindu God Rama in the North Indian town of Ayodhya in 1992. In riots between Muslims and Hindus that followed this event over two thousand people were killed. The momentum of Hindu activism brought the BJP to successful victories in state level elections, and in 1998 was able to establish a coalition national government. It was led by Atal Bihari Vajpayee, one of the BJP's more moderate leaders, who ruled until 2004 when the BJP was replaced by a revived secular Congress Party led by Sonia Gandhi and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

Behind many of the clashes between religious communities in India the central issue has been the very idea of a multicultural state - whether India will be dominated by one tradition or incorporate a diversity of cultures. In other cases the very unity of India has been at stake: in these incidents religion has been fused with political separatism. The independence struggle in Kashmir is one example of religious separatism in India. For many years, however, the prime example of this kind of violent religious activism was the Khalistan movement of militant Sikhs. The movement was a strident form of religious nationalism that arose in India's Punjab state in the 1980s. The movement, led by Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, who was killed in the Indian

army's assault on the Sikh's Golden Temple in 1984, aimed at creating 'Khalistan' - a new nation to be created in the Punjab and based on Sikh religious principles.

During its heyday, from 1981 to 1994, thousands of young men and perhaps a few hundred women joined the Sikh movement. They were initiated into the secret fraternities of various rival radical organizations. These included the Babbar Khalsa, the Khalistan Commando Force, the Khalistan Liberation Force, the Bhindranwale Tiger Force of Khalistan, and extremist factions of the All-India Sikh Students Federation. Their enemies were secular political leaders, heads of police units, some Hindu journalists, and other community leaders. The most spectacular victim was India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, assassinated by her own Sikh bodyguards in 1984. Over time the distinctions between valid and inappropriate targets became blurred, and virtually anyone could be a recipient of the militants' wrath. By January 1988, more than a hundred people a month were being killed; 1991 was the bloodiest year, with over three thousand people killed in the Punjab's triangular battle among the police, the radicals and the populace. One of the more spectacular incidents in 1991 was the attack by Sikh extremists on the Indian ambassador to Romania in Bucharest. The Romanian government helped to capture the Sikhs. They were killed, and later that year militant Sikhs kidnapped a Romanian diplomat in Delhi in retaliation. Behind the violence was an attempt to assert the traditional role of religion within Sikhism as a guide to both political and spiritual life. Even within the movement, however, opinion was divided over the viability of a separate Sikh nation-state.

Buddhist concepts and movements

The Theravada Buddhist tradition has had a long history of political interaction and religious warfare. In Thailand, kings are expected to have had training as monks, and members of monastic orders have played a role in twentieth-century political reforms. In Sri Lanka, Buddhist dynasties have ruled that island kingdom since the time of Mahinda in the third century BC. Buddhist monks were at the forefront of Sri Lanka's independence movement in 1948, and in 1953 an influential pamphlet, *The Revolt in the Temple*, began a religious critique of secular nationalism and the claim that 'Buddhism had been betrayed' by secular leaders. The demand for a Buddhist state came to a head in the 1980s when thousands of monks joined the revolutionary Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), 'the People's Liberation Front'. In Myanmar (Burma), Buddhist monks supported the unsuccessful democracy movement in 1988. In the twenty-first century the influence of Buddhist clergy and ideology in Sri Lanka's political life continues to complicate the efforts to maintain peace with the Tamil separatist movement in the northern portion of the island nation, a movement that consists largely of Hindus and Christians. In Thailand the perception that Buddhist ideology and leadership are privileged has spurred a violent response from Muslim activists in the country's southern peninsula.

In China, the rule of the Emperor has traditionally been thought to have been given divine sanction. Religion has also played a role in movements of political protest. Mahayana Buddhist and traditional Chinese ideas fused with Protestant Christian millenarianism in the ideology of the Taiping Rebellion (1848-65), and were aimed at establishing a religiously based dynasty. In more recent years the communist government has tried to control religion, both through suppression and state-sponsored official religious administrative units. In 1999 the government banned the popular religious movement Falun Gong under the pretence that it was a potentially dangerous cult. In Japan, Buddhism and Shinto concepts also supported state power. They were employed in support of Japanese nationalism during World War II and in movements of neo-nationalism in the 1980s and 1990s. New religious movements in the 1990s sometimes espoused new expressions of nationalism and political transnationalism. The Aum Shinrikyo movement was implicated in a nerve gas attack on the Tokyo subways in 1995, perpetrated in part to warn

the Japanese people of what it imagined to be an impending apocalyptic war. The leader of the movement, Shoko Asahara, derived his ideas from a variety of Buddhist, Hindu and Christian sources and aimed at the religious purification of the Japanese nation.

Tibet has traditionally been something of a theocracy, in that Buddhist clergy have dominated both the politics and religious life of the society. The national liberation of the country following Chinese control and the departure of the Dalai Lama in 1959 is both a religious and political cause. In Mongolia, the revival of Tibetan Buddhism as the national culture following the end of communist rule led in 1992 to the establishment of a Mongolian Buddhist Party which aims to make Buddhism the leading political ideology of the post-communist Mongolian state.

CRITICISMS OF RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM

The world-wide rise of religious nationalism in the last decade of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first can be attributed, in part, to the forces of globalization. European and American political ideologies were no longer seen as universally applicable. At the same time, the social and economic coherence of national societies was eroded by such forces of globalization as the global market, global media and popular culture, and the easy mobility of populations. These forces led in some cases to an attempt to reclaim national identity along the traditional lines of ethnicity and religion.

At the same time, the rise of religious nationalism has had its critics, both inside and outside religious quarters. These criticisms were often successful in generating new movements of opposition to religious nationalist ideologies and leaders:

- *Religion is an insufficient basis for political unity and national development.* This criticism implies the rejection of religion as a basis for national unity and a return of secularism as a political force. Significant gains that were made by religious parties in Turkey and in India were effectively countered by a resurgence of secular parties in those countries that were able to point out the inadequacies of religion-based politics for dealing with modern problems.
- *Politics is harmful to religion.* This criticism has emerged from within religious communities. It asserts that the political activism of religious leaders has been harmful to the spirituality and purity necessary for a religious life. Some of the most conservative Jewish religious leaders, for instance, have refused for religious reasons to be involved in Israeli politics. Some Muslims have accused their religious activists of making Islam into a political ideology, and thereby reducing it to the terms of modern politics. In Iran, a leading Muslim theologian, Abdolkarim Soroush, claimed in the mid-1990s that the political involvement of Islam in his country corrupted the purity of religion. A decade later, however, religious conservatives again seized the reins of power in Iran.
- *Religious politics should be transnational rather than national.* Some of the most harsh criticisms of religious nationalism are from even more radical religious positions that aim at a religious transnational rule. In Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East, some Muslim clerics have accused their fellow religious activists of being nationalistic and not appreciative of the transnational character of Islam. Part of the popular appeal of Osama bin Laden in many Middle Eastern Muslim societies is his rejection of the national boundaries created after the break-up of the Ottoman Empire.

The future of religious nationalism is therefore uncertain. Although some movements will continue to assert that religion is a viable option to the ideology and identity provided by secular expressions of ideology, other movements may founder. They may be rejected by a new

acceptance of multicultural states united in a secular ideology, or they may be overwhelmed by religious politics that aim at transnational ties and the emergence of alternative forms of globalization based on religious ideologies, identities and networks of support.

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