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Religion and Nationalism
A Critical Re-examination

Geneviève Zubrzycki

Introduction

Religious and nationalist conflicts stridently mark the contemporary world, notably in the Middle East, the Indian sub-continent, the Balkans, Northern Ireland, and now in the United States as well. In journalistic accounts and everyday life discourses, it is often assumed to be the result of "age-old hatreds" stemming from irreconcilable worldviews or "civilizational fault lines" – a view that has become conspicuously redundant in the aftermath of September 11. We know how inaccurate this view is from a large body of works that have convincingly revealed how identities, attachments, loyalties, values, and even emotions are socially, culturally and discursively created, changing in time and space (e.g. Anderson 1983; Hobsbawm 1991; Bendelow and Williams 1998). In spite of these corrections, studies of nationalism typically suffer from three interrelated problems that slow further progress in better understanding the relationship between nationalism and religion. Let us briefly consider each, before proposing a different way to think about the relationship and suggesting, through the analysis of the Polish and Québécois cases, a more productive approach to the empirical study of the problem.

Surveying the Field

The evolutionist causal trap

Mainstream scholarship on nations and nationalism often points out that the emergence and rise of nationalism as an ideology is linked to the general trend of the secularization of society (Kedourie 1960; Anderson 1991 [1983]; Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1983ab; see A. Smith 2003: 9–18).[1] Historically, in this view, politics replaced religion as the ultimate reference, a process referred to as the "disenchantment of the world" (Weber 2001 [1930]; Gauchet 1985). In view of this historical

fact, some scholars have concluded that religion's demise is responsible for the extent of nationalism's success.[2] The argument most paradigmatically goes as follows: Starting with the Reformation, the authority of the Church was seriously diminished in temporal matters. The Enlightenment and later the French Revolution further diminished religion's power as a principle of social organization, as a basis for political legitimacy and sovereignty, and as the source of knowledge. Once the way was cleared, rationalism, politics, and eventually nationalism would become the new sacred principles of the modern era. Historical arguments of the *longue durée* identify these secularizing processes as turning points for the creation of a world system of nation-states, with nationalism – in tandem with, according to some, capitalism – as the new secular orthodoxies.

There is no doubt that these ideological revolutions and the structural changes that accompanied them had a tremendous impact both on the decline of religion as "sacred canopy" (Berger 1969) and on the slow emergence of nationalism and its political project, along with the creation of the nation as a cultural form. In Europe, the Reformation did cause irreparable damage to the Church, and the blows inflicted on religion by the Enlightenment were certainly significant for the emergence of a secular worldview: the Enlightenment not only advocated "Reason" over sentiments, but also claimed moral and political sovereignty from the Church. "*Écraser l'infâme*," in Voltaire's famous words, meant to individually free oneself from religious superstition and to be disenfranchised collectively from the control of the papacy. And a lineage from Locke to Rousseau, and culminating in the French Revolution, was key in forging a new political principle according to which political legitimacy stems from the People, and not from the King's divinely sanctioned rights.

What is problematic in many scholarly narratives, is therefore not those historical observations themselves, but the conclusion that nationalism's emergence and success was (and is) related to religion's demise; that the emergence of nationalism was *caused* by secularization.[3] As Liah Greenfeld points out, "the fact that nationalism replaced religion as the order-creating system (…) implies nothing at all about the historical connection between them and lends no justification to the kind of sociological teleology that is the essence of such reasoning" (1996: 176). The relationship between religious decline and the rise of nationalism is actually much more complex than is often assumed. To wit, historical sociologists have recently argued that nationalism has roots *not* in religious decline, but rather in moments of religious fervor and renewal (Greenfeld 1992, 1996; Gorski 2000b, 2003; Calhoun 1993; Gillis 1994; Marx 2003).[4] One moment of such religious élan was the Reformation, which "replaced the universalistic notion of Christendom with local and regional variants of the common faiths, mobilized popular participation, promulgated vernacular discourse and printed texts, and invoked the theological sovereignty of the people against the Church and monarchs" (Calhoun 1993: 219). Culturally, the Reformation allowed the development of a different kind of memory, one that was neither purely local nor cosmopolitan, as well as a new type of identity among elites, who came to share a bounded self-conception as "God's Englishmen," a proto-national (or national, according to early modernists) identity (Gillis 1994: 7). The Reformation's subsequent launching of national churches throughout Europe is seen as the basis for the development of nation-states, since it emancipated regions from

Rome, fractured the political establishment and furnished new political alliances along confessional lines.

The point, here, is that there is convincing evidence that nationalism's success is not necessarily attributable to religious decline and that we should not take the relationship between nationalism and religion as a zero-sum game, in which one can only win at the expense of the other.

Nationalism as religion: the functionalist trap

The evolutionist view of the rise of nationalism is taken one step further by scholars who suggest, after Émile Durkheim, that nationalism is a substitute for religion in modernity, with immense integrative power in an age of anomie or atomization (Durkheim 1995 [1912]; Hayes 1960; Kohn 1946; Tamir 1995; Llobera 1996; Marvin and Ingle 1999). Nationalism is portrayed as being pervasive in modernity because it fills the void left by religion's retreat. According to this functionalist view, nationalism has not only superseded religion, it has actually replaced it by *itself* becoming a modern religion, fulfilling functions of integration traditional religions once performed.

The words of early scholar of nationalism Carlton Hayes are foundational on this score: "[Nationalism], like *any other* religion, is to a large extent a social function, and its chief rites are public rites performed in the name of and for the salvation of a whole community" (1926: 105. Emphasis mine). Nationalism is not *like* religion; it *is* a religion. It is a religion, moreover, that serves society's survival. At the individual or psychological level, nationalism is seen as a functional substitute for religion in modernity because it fulfils deep human needs (Hayes 1960; Llobera 1996; Hobsbawm 1995: 172–3), whereas at the social level, nationalism fulfils the essential function of consolidating the group and its identity above and beyond individual needs. Indeed, nationalism is so compelling in modernity, according to Yael Tamir (1995), because it offers collective salvation by endowing human action with meaning that endures over time, carrying a promise of eternity. Membership in a nation promises redemption from personal oblivion, offers rescue from alienation, solitude, and anonymity, and it gives individuals the hope of personal renewal through national regeneration (pp. 433–4). Nationalism, then, "is not the pathology of the modern age, but an *answer* to its malaise – to the neurosis, alienation, and meaninglessness characteristic of modern times" (p. 432, emphasis mine). Here, nationalism fulfills the psychological need for individuals to belong and for the group to endure; it is the functional answer to the atomization of modern society.

In a slightly different slant, religion is viewed as having simply "metamorphosed into nationalism" (Llobera 1996: 146): "The success of nationalism in modernity has to be attributed largely to the sacred character the nation inherited from religion. In its essence the nation is the secularized god of our times" (p. 221). What really makes nationalism a religion – what Joseph Llobera calls the "essence" of the nation or of religion – is the functions they both fulfill. Both operate at the level of "deep elementary emotions" (p. 143). Nationalism is a functional equivalent of religion in the modern world, even a religion itself because it has all the trappings and rituals of religion, and also because "it has tapped into the emotional reservoir of human beings" (p. 143).

These arguments are problematic at several levels. First, equating nationalism and religion erases the distinct characteristics of each phenomenon. Second, presupposing psychosocial needs as natural – or eliding the process by which these needs are created and then fulfilled – mystifies as much as it explains. The reification and primordialization of needs imply that national identity is a "natural" phenomenon instead of the product of human agency, and suggests the inevitability of nationalism rather than its historical contingency. Lastly, the functional equivalence of nationalism and religion is dubiously premised upon a historical narrative of the secularization of the West, the vacuum of which was filled by nationalism. The varied and complex history of the relationship between nationalism and religion cannot be narrowed to a simple linear sequence, in which one form of social organization is succeeded by another (from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*), and one type of integrative cement is replaced by another (from religion to nationalism).

In addition to being theoretically and logically flawed, the evolutionist and functionalist perspectives are empirically wrong. Religion is obviously not part of some prior stage, but very much present in the modern world and highly significant in defining the nation and its discourse, as well as in shaping nationalist practices. Those perspectives moreover prevent us from understanding and explaining cases in which religious beliefs, symbols, and practices play a salient role in national identity and nationalism, and lead us to treat these as a residue or "survival" from a pre-modern period, thereby endowing them with primordial, atavistic powers. To escape these problematic generalizations, we need to rethink the relationship in a way that does not a priori preclude the coexistence of religion and nationalism, but instead attends to the historical contingency, the institutional and cultural embeddedness, and the social dynamics of the religion-nation relation. The question is not of the relative primacy of one or the other as carrier of collective identity, but rather to identify the historical conditions under which religion and nationalism are fused, split, or juxtaposed, and to pinpoint how exactly these categories are imbricated in social identities.

The perennialist trap

Unlike the evolutionist and functionalist views, which posit the disappearance of religion as a *sine qua non* for the emergence of nationalism and sees the "age of religion" and the "age of nationalism" as two radically different eras, the "perennialist" position is one that stresses continuity between religion and nationalism: according to its proponents (Smith 1986, 2003; Armstrong 1996; Hastings 1997), ancient religious communities provided the materials from which modern nations could later be built. This view is troubling insofar as it assumes a historical continuity between pre-modern communities, what Anthony D. Smith calls *ethnies*, and modern nations. The problem is that there is no necessary continuity between *ethnies* and modern nations, although – and this is key – such continuity is retrospectively constructed and reinforced in nationalist discourse and narratives. As we will see in the case of Poland, the identity of the nation as primordially and eternally Catholic was created and reinforced in a particular period by interested actors, and is intimately related to structural changes, ideological developments and political interests. This is not to say that Catholicism before the age of nationalism did not

play an important role in pre-modern Poland and in the lives of many of its inhabitants. It surely did. But Catholicism has not always been, as nationalists claim, the hallmark of the Polish nation.

The construction of national identity involves the creation of collective memories, rituals and symbols, their institutional maintenance and renewal, and the selective appropriation and annihilation of divisive memories and alternative identities (Renan 1996; Weber 1976; Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1983; Anderson 1983; Duara 1995). Claiming a direct continuity with ancient forms of community is therefore far-fetched, although the modern process of nation-creation involves the borrowing from these older communal forms of myths, heroes and symbols that create the illusion of the modern nation's ancient origins and therefore legitimize its modern existence.

Moving ahead

The relationship between religion and nationalism, as these few pages suggest, is extremely complex, and its treatment often problematic in the nationalism literature. Nationalism, Liah Greenfeld pointed out, is a secular form of consciousness that sacralizes the secular, hence the temptation to treat it as a religion (1996:), à la Hayes or Llobera. The temptation to treat nationalism as the religion of modernity must, however, be resisted since it obscures both the nature of religion and of nationalism. To understand the relationship between religion and nation in all its complexity, we must shed modernization theory's *a priori* assumptions, but without reifying the link between pre-modern and modern communal bonds, as perennialists do. The way forward is to highlight how religion can frame identities, shape actions and be used to mobilize masses, as well as show how nationalism impacts on the definition of religious identities and religious movements. Several important works, in the past decade, have undertaken this task under the rubric of "religious nationalism" (eg. Juergensmeyer 1993; Van der Veer 1994; Sells 1996; Tambiah 1996). This literature has been extremely important, taking as its primary focus violent inter-religious and inter-ethnic conflicts and the logics of various forms of group antagonism.[5] Yet for the purposes of this essay they will not be quite sufficient, since they do not take as their specific object of study how religion and national identity become entangled in a given group in the first place – what the fusion or fission between ethnicity (or national identity) and religion is dependent upon, nor when and how that relationship can be renegotiated and reconfigured.

In what follows, I discuss the cases of Poland and Quebec. My objective, in this section, is obviously not to present an exhaustive typology of the relationship between religion and national identity/nationalism, but to provide examples of *how* to study that relationship. The case-studies are illustrative of a way to think about, and a guide for the empirical study of, nationalism and religion. I develop an analytical framework that attends to the social dynamics, the institutional and cultural embeddedness, and the historical contingencies of the religion-nation nexus. Combining historical and ethnographic methods to identify variations in the configuration of nationalism and religion, I reexamine longstanding assumptions about the trajectory of social change and explicate how such categories are articulated in actual social practices "on the ground." I give particular attention to events and

symbols that simultaneously point to, and variously link, religious and national references, and their manipulations at key moments of political transition, as it is through those events and symbols that social actors experience, make sense of, and act upon the world.

Nationalizing and De-nationalizing Religion: The Case of Poland

Post-communist Poland provides a valuable case for research on the relationship between national identity and religion because it is one of the most ethnically and denominationally homogeneous nation-states in the world – its population is 96 percent ethnically Polish and 95 percent Catholic – yet conflicts about national identity and the place of religion in defining that identity have been central public issues in the last two decades. At the root of that phenomenon, I argue, is the reconfiguration of a historically defined relationship between state, nation, and religion in Poland, prompted by the fall of communism and the building of a legitimate national state (Zubrzycki 2006).

For most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in the absence of a state (or of a legitimate state, as under communism) the mobilizing discourse of the nation was articulated in ethno-religious rather than political terms, and the Catholic Church was seen as the "true" guardian and carrier of national values, providing institutional, ideological and symbolic support to civil society. The Catholic narrative of the nation was primarily created in the nineteenth century by Romantic poets who equated the Partitions of Poland – when the Polish state was carved up between Prussia, Austria, and Russia (1795–1918) – with the nation's crucifixion. Poland, in their writings, was the Christ among nations: sacrificed for the sins of the world, it would be brought back to life to save humanity from Despotism. With Poland transformed into a Christ figure, the cross was metamorphosed into a core Polish symbol representing the plight of the nation and its imminent salvation *qua* independence. This representation of the Polish fate became canonical, securely anchored in national self-understanding, and it resurfaced with special intensity under communism. Catholicism and the Catholic Church, during that period, were portrayed by the opposition as the basis of a moral community fighting an evil totalitarian regime imposed from outside and from above, and succeeded in providing a powerful narrative of the nation, one able to mobilize support against the party-state. The narrative was built around Poland's historical suffering, the notion of Poland as a chosen people, as well as the messianic myth of Poland as the bulwark of Christendom. The iconography of national identity and resistance to the oppressive foreign regime emphasized symbols traditionally associated with the nation, such as the miraculous Black Madonna of Częstochowa, as well as motifs taken from the Passion, such as the cross and the crown of thorns.

This narrative and its related "repertoire of action" was especially mobilizing in the context of statelessness; when national identity could not be constructed through official institutions, such as during the Partitions and during communism. But with the fall of communism and an independent state recovered, would Poland be a nation with, or without, the cross?

Indeed, the establishment of a "truly" Polish state in 1989 opened to question both the fusion between nation and religion and the tight bond between civil society and the Church. The construction of a state with the mandate to "genuinely" represent *Polish* interests also entailed specifying what Polishness "is," radically opening the discursive field on the nation. In this context, certain factions advocated maintaining a "Catholic Poland, united under the sign of the cross," while others demanded the confessional neutrality of the state and pressed for a more inclusive, civic-secular definition of national identity. When the state stopped being the "third element" against which civil society and Church could be mobilized, but rather the prism through which identities could be viewed and consciously be constructed, the meaning of Polish religiosity changed, and the provisional nature of what appeared to be a solid fusion of nation and religion began to show its seams.

This became apparent in the debates surrounding the controversial erection of hundreds of crosses just outside Auschwitz in 1998–9. Ultra-nationalist Poles chose the cross as the symbol of choice to mark Auschwitz as the place of *Polish* martyrdom – as opposed to the place of the Jewish Holocaust[6] – and as a strategy to firmly defend a vision of Polishness that was increasingly contested. But in the post-communist context, the symbol and the gesture signified, for liberal intellectuals from the Left and the Center, the imposition of a set of values and intolerance toward "others." It stood as the rejection of the principles of the *Rechtsstaat*, where particular allegiances are relegated to the private sphere. For liberal Catholics, the crosses at Auschwitz were seen as a vile political instrument, a provocation contrary to the Christian meaning of the symbol, while for many members of the clergy and Episcopate they were the shameful expression of Polish nationalism.

The war of the crosses, as the event came to be known, therefore highlighted deep divisions within Polish society – and within the Church itself – and brought to light the different ways in which various groups actually articulate, "on the ground" and in the public sphere, the relationship between national identity and religion. I show elsewhere (2006) that the event was *not* the confirmation or even the solidification of the nation-religion fusion, but rather a desperate attempt to revitalize a version of national identity in decline. It is precisely at the moment when the fusion of religious and ethno-national categories was being loudly contested in public discourse and civic life, and the categories were divorced in new institutional arrangements – in the 1997 constitution, for example (Zubrzycki 2001) – that strident counter-efforts by minority voices were deployed in an attempt to ossify a vision of the nation that was slowly eroding. That strategy, however, further contributed to the erosion it sought to stop. Though Poles remain overwhelmingly religious[7], the cross they now bear is no longer the symbol of their historical "Passion," nor that of the union of their faith with national identity, but rather – and quite counter-intuitively – a contested symbol expressing deep social tensions regarding Polish Catholicism.

Theories of nationalism and religion revisited

This brief example suggests that contrary to the neat, overly simplified evolutionist-functionalist models, nation and religion are variously interrelated in different historical and political contexts – in communist versus postcommunist Poland, for

example – and are evoked and mobilized differently by various social groups. Instead of thinking of the relationship between religion and nation as a dyad, we need to look at it as part of a triad in which the statehood plays a key role. Reading the relationship between nation and religion in Poland requires the analysis of the triadic relationship between state (re)formation, the (re)construction of national identity and the (re)definition of religion's role in society.

Whereas dominant paradigms in the field maintain that nationalism replaced traditional religion and even is a modern religion itself, through the sacralization of politics, this case suggests a much more complex and subtle relationship between nationalism and religion. Historically, the formation of Polish nationalism cannot be related to religious decline, as the evolutionists claim. Religious symbols and stories instead provided a vocabulary and grammar to speak of the nation and its mission after the Partitions. Romantic messianism found a congenial niche for the expression of this emerging form of nationalism in Catholic rituals and everyday practices. Through a slow and complex process in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Polish national identity and Catholicism became fused.

This is far from conforming to the functionalist model, however, according to which nationalism, after having superseded religion, replaces it, or even becomes a religion itself. The paradigmatic term for this model is civil religion, sometimes defined as an empirical object, sometimes as an analytical dimension of all social groups. "Civil religion," following the Durkheimian trajectory, attempts to describe or interpret the social sacralization of a given group's symbols.[8] In the modern era, according to this view, civic, or state symbols like the flag are worshiped by citizens as religious icons or totems, and state martyrs are revered as "saints." Nationalism becomes a religion, as "treason" and "heresy" become one and the same. But this will not do either.

Sacred-secular religious nationalism

Liah Greenfeld (1996), we have seen, suggested that the confusion between religion and nationalism stems from the fact that nationalism is a form of consciousness that sacralizes the secular, leading scholars to treat it as a religion, albeit a "civil religion." Although this is useful, it does not go far enough. The Polish case points to a different and overlooked process. Because of Poland's peculiar political history, it was not political institutions and symbols that were sacralized and became the object of religious devotion (following the French revolutionary model), but religious symbols that were first secularized, and then *resacralized as national*. Biblical allegories, religious symbols, hymns, and iconography as well as religious practices like processions, pilgrimages or simple participation in Sunday Mass were, in the nineteenth century, largely politicized as carriers of national identity during the period when the Polish state disappeared from the European map. As such, religion served as an alternative space providing civil society with an area of relative freedom of action in defiance of an oppressive or totalitarian state. A pilgrimage to Częstochowa, in this context, was a way to publicly "vote with one's feet" (Michel 1986: 85). Catholic identity, symbols and acts, were secularized through their politicization and ultimate fusion with national identity. Their significance was heightened or loaded; they became neon hyper-markers, but of Polishness.

The Polish case therefore suggests a peculiar form of the secularization of religion and religious symbols, through their political instrumentalization, and then their *re-sacralization*, now as *national* symbols. The cross in Poland is therefore a *sacred secular* symbol. It is sacred not only because of its Christian semantics (or even in spite of them), but because it traditionally represents, since the nineteenth century, Poland. In the place of religion yielding to nationalism or nationalism becoming a religion, here *religion becomes nationalism*.[9] The national sacralization of religious symbols, however, is meaningful and garners consensual support only in specific politico-structural contexts. The Polish case therefore points to the necessity of looking at the relationship between religion and nationalism as it is embedded within broad systemic processes related to state formation on the one hand, and as it is reflected in specific social dramas and cultural practices on the other.

Beyond secularization

It is in their secular form that Catholicism and its symbols were re-sacralized. They became the sacred symbols of national identity, only to be contested and potentially "secularized" again in the postcommunist period. "Secularization" in the sense I am using the term here would mean, however, returning to a more distinctly (or theologically orthodox) religious interpretation of Catholicism in Poland: to shift the Catholic Church's role in Poland away from identity politics and steer it back toward faith. "The challenge now," in the words of the late priest philosopher Józef Tischner, "is to return to the essence of the Church's mission – to religion," even at the cost of lower church attendance.[10] The goal for many Catholic groups is the de-politicization of religion and a deepening of faith. After Catholicism's long public career, they invite its privatization. According to them, privatization, usually understood as one aspect of secularization, would paradoxically be salutary for Catholicism now that there is no reason for its political role in the public sphere, and now that the "practicing non-believer" lost her reasons to practice. The Polish case thus turns secularization theory on its head: what is commonly seen as religion's revenge – the undeniable strength and pervasiveness of Catholicism in communist Poland's public life (Casanova 1994) – could instead be regarded as its weakening – its instrumentalization as symbolic vehicle of national identity and institutional support to civil society.

What secularization means is thus much more complex than the usual "decline of religion" one-size-fits-all proposition, as Casanova (1994) and Gorski (2000a) argued. For Mark Chaves, for example, secularization is, more specifically, the declining *scope* of religious authority. It is a process, moreover, rooted in concrete social struggles: "Secularization occurs, or not, as the result of social and political conflicts between those social actors who would enhance or maintain religion's social significance and those who would reduce it" (1994: 752). In the Polish case, this struggle is taking place not only between liberal, civic, and secular actors and conservative ethno-nationalist religious elites, but also between two great camps within the Church: that of post-Vatican II "open Catholics" and "purists," who argue for a de-politicization of religion and a deepening of faith, and that of "traditionalists" and "integrists" who maintain that Catholicism is primordially linked with Polishness and that the Church's mission is necessarily political (Zubrzycki

2005). The tension is between privatizing and publicizing forces, between opposed views of the role of religion and of the Church in the public sphere. In the religious field, the post-1989 period is best described by the polarization, within the Church, between these two orientations.

But this relative decline in the scope of religious authority and the ensuing privatization of religion do not necessarily imply the decline of religion, merely its decline as a carrier of sentiments of national affinity and solidarity. The point to be made here is that secularization turns on multiple axes: one is the level of public engagement in a given national environ, another is the level of authority over the public sphere in given national context, and still a third reflects the level of privately held and enacted religious sentiments. Secularization, it turns out, does not mean very much as a theoretical tool until it is operationalized within a given articulation of nationness.

Let us now look at another case where national identity, religion, politics and secularization are peculiarly intertwined.

From French Canada's Nationalized Religion to Quebec Religio-secular Hybrid[11]

The fusion of Catholicism and national identity in Quebec finds its origins in the nineteenth century, and, as in Poland, its causes are related to colonial domination by ethno-religious others. Following the British Conquest of New France in 1759 and the repression of the Patriots' Rebellion, in a series of Republican uprisings against the British colonial power in 1837, the Catholic Church emerged as the sole institution able to create, sustain and disseminate a national project. That project, however, was devoid of political content – the goal was not to change the political structures and free the nation from the British empire, but to ensure the nation's very *survival* within the new system by keeping the identity of its members alive. The survival of the nation therefore rested on maintaining the French language and the Catholic faith.

To carry that vision, the Church built a retrospective messianic narrative about the French Canadians' historical destiny in North America that gradually elevated St John the Baptist as its figurehead. Like the Baptist, whose Providential mission was to announce the coming of Christ and baptize him, the French had discovered Canada and brought civilization and Christianity to the pagan natives they evangelized; they also guarded Catholicism, the only "true faith," from the Protestant heresy surrounding them on the North American continent. The French Canadian people, in this powerful narrative, were an "apostolic people"; the chosen people, with a Providential mission supported by "the twin pillars of faith and language," according to Jules-Paul Tardivel, a leading clerical nationalist of the time. Religion, language and ethnicity became increasingly fused, one reinforcing the other, resulting in the creation of a cohesive national identity articulated in a coherent messianic narrative, and represented in the powerful figure of St Jean-Baptiste.

From the 1840s until the 1960s, the Catholic Church was the center of civic life, assuming functions usually reserved to the modern state: health, education, and welfare (Eid 1978). The Church was also active in cultural politics, organizing large

celebrations around Saint-Jean-Baptiste, officially named Patron Saint of French Canadians in North America by Pope Pius IX in 1908. Small bonfires blessed by village priests were succeeded by elaborate processions in the streets of Montreal and Quebec City on the Saint's name Day, June 24th. These religious processions slowly developed into expansive parades combining religious and secular themes and imagery. Hundreds of thousands of spectators gathered along the streets of these cities could admire dozens of floats amidst regiments of Papal Zouaves, religious banners floating with flags, religious hymns sung by children and folkloric airs played by marching bands. While the themes varied and the floats themselves were reinvented every year, the single constant component, year after the year, was the parade's last float, dedicated to the Patron Saint. St Jean-Baptiste was typically represented as a golden child in the company of a lamb[12] emulating popular Italian paintings of the Holy Family where Jesus and John play together. During the 1960s, however, that specific visual depiction of the nation came under harsh attack.

The decade marked the birth of modern *Québécois* nationalism. Despite their frequent conflation in (non-Canadian) English, "French Canadian" and "Québécois" are not synonymous. The two terms rather represent different identities and different visions of the nation, each historically specific. The term "Québécois" is a neologism that came into use only in the early 1960s, when many French Canadians living in Quebec re-imagined the borders of their nation, from the expansive Canada (or even North America as a whole) in which they were a minority, to the circumscribed territory of Quebec, cradle of their civilization, in which they were a majority.[13] The re-imagination of their community, however, also signified the death of the French Canadian nation. Despite the pervasive use of the term outside Canada, "French Canadians" no longer exist, as noted by historian Yves Frenette in the opening sentence of his *Brève histoire des Canadiens-français*.

Besides this territorial fragmentation of French Canadian identity and its subsequent disappearance as a meaningful cultural and political category, much actually distinguishes the French Canadian and the Québécois national visions. While the French language remains a core element of both versions, Catholicism was abandoned as an important or even a desirable marker of the nation in the Québécois project. Likewise, the Church was no longer perceived as a bulwark, but rather as a barrier to the successful development of the nation.[14] While the French Canadian national vision was primarily centered on the notion of ethno-religious survival, the Québécois project explicitly rejected that notion. Its aim was not to survive, but to *develop*. Indeed, the Quiet Revolution's modus operandi was to *catch up* ["rattrapage"] and modernize. The instrument of that modernization was to be the provincial state, whose functions were radically expanded and empowered in order to better represent the interest of the "new" Québécois nation within Canadian federal structures. The influence of the Church in Quebec society – both institutionally and ideologically – was seen as part of the very problem to overcome in order to achieve that goal.

The 1960s were therefore also marked by important structural transformations, chief among them the building of a modern provincial welfare state, which effectively replaced the Church in the spheres of education, health and welfare. This institutional marginalization of the Church was accompanied by the thoroughgoing and extremely rapid secularization of society characterized not only by a stringent

critique of the Church and a drastic decline in religious practice,[15] but also by a significant incidence of clergy renouncing their vows to reenter secular society. Within ten years, churches that once thronged with people several days a week now sat empty. Some were bulldozed; others were sold to developers who transformed them into condominiums or hotels; other remained only to be transformed from sites of ritual practices into sites of "cultural heritage."

In the context of the nation's redefinition and the politicization of a new national project during the Quiet Revolution, Saint Jean-Baptiste Day became the battleground between two visions of the nation – the French Canadian and the Québécois – and between two primary sets of national actors – the Church and a new wave of secular nationalists. As opposition to the religious narrative of the nation gained ground in the 1960s, it found its preferred target in Saint Jean-Baptiste and his diminutive lamb. The representation of the nation as a pre-pubescent saint was offensive to a new wave of nationalists on two principal grounds: they rejected the *religious* narrative of the nation expressed in, and fomented by the symbol, as retrograde; and they found the specific depiction of the nation as a *child* infantilizing because it underlined the nation's dependence.[16] The little St Jean Baptiste and his lamb were symbolic of a vision of the nation that the new Québécois nationalists understood as holding back the nation's potential. They both had to be purged. Under mounting social agitation, the lamb was removed from the traditional float, and at the close of the decade, in 1969, in the face of sufficient protest and even apparent danger to the "actor," the live character was replaced by an *adult statue* of the saint. That same year, the statue was spectacularly beheaded by protesters when they overturned the float during the parade, after which the traditional parades were permanently abolished.

On June 24, 1969, then, French Canada died at the hands of "Young Turks" who pressed for the birth of the Québécois nation, effectively closing a chapter in Quebec history and opening a new one. Gone were the saint and the parade. Yet if the religious icon and its phalanx disappeared, an abstract and secular "St Jean-Baptiste" remained. In 1977, the Parti Québécois' separatist (and secularist) government institutionalized June 24th as Quebec's legal national holiday. Solemn Catholic masses and the traditional parade gave way to secular festivities: "La Fête Nationale," the holiday's official designation, has since been celebrated with rock concerts, fireworks and public bonfires where the nation's bards and political figures renew their allegiance to Quebec amidst a sea of blue and white *fleur-de-lis* flags.

Three things here are worth noting: First, the choice of that date as the national holiday of the new Québécois nation; second, the name of the holiday and the use of the adjective "national" in a legal document, which is in itself a political statement; and third, the effacement of the association with the saint's day, marking the holiday as stridently secular. The Catholic heritage of the holiday has been thoroughly occluded in the documentation of the institution responsible for the organization of the Fête (with the exception of a single reference that appeared only very recently; Chartier and Vaudry 2007). In official publications and on the government's website, ample references were made to the pre-Christian origins of the summer solstice celebrations, and to the traditions inherited from the early days of the colony's festivities, but none to the saint himself, nor to his appropriation by the Catholic Church in the nineteenth century. A century of extraordinary celebra-

tions were simply disregarded, silencing an important chapter in the history of the holiday in Quebec and exorcising the ethno-religious genesis of the French Canadian nation prior to its Québécois redefinition. While the holiday is still commonly referred to as "La Saint-Jean," few under the age of forty could explain why the nation is commemorated on that specific day.[17]

Nationalism and religion: questioning the causal direction

While St Jean Baptiste's career trajectory in Quebec suggests that secular Québécois nationalism has replaced French Canadian ethno-Catholicism, one should be careful not to assume that the former has surfaced *because* of religion's decline – and in order to fill that void – a common assumption, we have seen, in the nationalism literature (Durkheim 1995 [1912]; Hayes 1960; Kohn 1946; Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1995). Eric J. Hobsbawm, for example, explains the existence of Québécois nationalism since the 1960s as a *response* to the Quiet Revolution's "social cataclysm," which created a "disorientated generation hungry for new certitudes to replace the collapsing old ones" such that "the rise of militant separatism was a surrogate for the lost traditional Catholicism" (1995: 172).[18] If nationalism in Quebec could be reduced to a simple causal relation – which it cannot – a more plausible argument would be precisely the opposite: the secularization of society was not the cause of the nationalist movement, but its *consequence*. The collapse of the Church as a crypto-state and the rejection of the religious narrative of the nation was the result of the creation of a mobilizing modern, political discourse of the nation and institutional transformations at the level of the provincial state. It was a new wave of nationalists arguing for a novel national project centered on Quebec who were instrumental in initiating the break with the Church and rejecting the religious narrative of the French Canadian nation. The struggles over the figure of Saint Jean-Baptiste and his ultimate "beheading" by left-wing activists could not be more suggestive. The consequence of that action during the parade-turned-protest were to be long-lasting in the way the state organizes its national festivities, how ordinary people celebrate their "national" holiday, and, perhaps most importantly, how Québécois think of and "act out" their nation.

As in the Polish case, the reconfiguration of national identity and religion in the 1960s' Quebec was not only carried out in institutions and through the renegotiation of Church-state relations, but also through the rejection of old narratives and the creation of new ones. That rejection was effected symbolically, in discursive repudiations and in ritual reversals across a decade, when parades became the platforms for protests that chipped away at the figurative castings of ethno-Catholic French Canadianness. Still, the choice of June 24 as the central national celebration monumentalizes in a sense the failure of the separatist national project, and the deep ambivalence toward it among even so-called *Québécois de souche* ("old-stock Québécois"), since the continued use of the saint's day as the National Holiday indexes the conspicuous absence of an Independence Day for Quebec. The Precursor was beheaded and the lamb of God sacrificed, yet the new covenant never arrived.

The fate of St Jean-Baptiste – first beheaded and then buried with the institutionalization of a secular national holiday on the saint's name day – moreover reveals not merely the negation of Catholicism's place in defining the *Québécois* nation (in

distinction from its former French Canadian version), but also the continued trace of a religious culture that still informs and infiltrates the "secular" one. Although the saint was beheaded and his float destroyed, St Jean-Baptiste has survived under the guise of a new assumed identity, "la fête nationale." Catholicism, likewise, may have disappeared from the public sphere and from the Québécois' everyday life – few believe and even fewer go to church – but when encountering religious Others, they remain Catholic in their secularism. Recent debates over the "reasonable accommodations" of religious practices of immigrants has demonstrated this quite clearly.[19]

Conclusion

The comparative study of nationalism and religion, the analysis of these two cases suggest, would be more productively advanced by devoting less energy to secularization, and more to the specific configurations of religious authority and religious cultures, on one hand, and national institutional contexts and national cultures, on the other. Religion and nationalism each have both institutional and symbolic or discursive forms, such that what began as an apparently straightforward problem of examining religion and nationalism, and their fission or fusion, has now become a more complex one that "secularization" does not usefully address.

For Poland and Quebec, as for other cases where national identity is experienced and expressed through religious channels at some historical point, the estimation of religious decline or ascent in relation to nationalism is a quixotic mission. Where the sacred is secularized and then resacralized in national form, and this transmutation repeated over and over again, the quest after neat models of the substitution of one for the other is a charging of windmills. The relationship between nationalism and religion is far from being fixed, as if on a pre-determined course, but in constant motion.

Events such as the War of the Crosses and the St Jean-Baptiste celebrations, then, become especially important for us to study because it is through such social dramas that the relationship between national identity and religion was actually reconfigured by social actors in post-communist Poland (1990s) and during Quebec's Quiet Revolution (1960s). I showed that by virtue of both the cross and St Jean-Baptiste carrying within them key national narratives, the symbols became objects of contestation through which social actors performed and transformed the relationship between their national identity and Catholicism. By doing so, I argued that the relationship between nation and religion is (re)fashioned at key historical junctures not only in and through political ideologies and institutional re-arrangements, but also in popular rituals such as processions, parades, and protests.

The relationship between national identity and religion is indeed mediated by, expressed in, and reconfigured through the use of symbols and the performance of rituals in concrete sites and during public, and highly publicized, events such as the War of the Crosses in Poland or the St Jean-Baptiste Day parades in Quebec. Dissecting such events and analyzing the debates they generate in the public sphere allows us to grasp the processual dynamics of nationalism and to tease out how broad institutional and structural changes such as state (re)formation and regime

transformations are related to micro-sociological phenomena such as identity formation. In the end, I am building a case for why this particular kind of multi-level research approach is not only more complete, but also critical for accurately identifying the mechanisms of social change and explaining the process of identity formation.

These brief empirical case-studies suggest the value of sociological analyses that take symbols and material artifacts seriously. I contend that both the fusion and fission of national and religious identifications, while depending on articulations of statehood, rely on specific events and practices and their manipulations of material artifacts which, despite the differing outcomes in Quebec and Poland, employ an analogous metaphysics of presence – an implicit faith in icons, crosses and banners as being possessed of transforming power. This attribution of power-in-objects is not "totemic," à la Durkheim – the sacralization in a material object of society *as it is* – but rather "polemic" – the graphic pressing of claims through symbols about how society *should be*. Concrete practices and material artifacts are employed by social actors to focus, magnify and exaggerate particular features of the religion-nation configuration, with the objective of changing the relative place of religion in national representations and narratives. And as such, we should pay attention to them.

Notes

1 Secularization theory is highly differentiated. José Casanova, in his remarkable historical-comparative study of public religions in the modern world, argues that secularization, commonly thought to be a single phenomenon (and consequently often developed into a single theory) is actually composed of "three very different, uneven and unintegrated propositions: secularization as differentiation of the secular spheres from religious institutions and norms, secularization as decline of religious beliefs and practices, and secularization as marginalization of religion to a privatized sphere" (1994: 211, see esp. chs. 1 and 8). Philip Gorski (2000a) differentiates between four main types of secularization theories: whereas some posit the disappearance and the decline of religion, others emphasize its privatization and transformation.

2 Benedict Anderson's take on the relationship between secularization and the emergence of nationalism is more nuanced than those of Gellner or Hobsbawm, and he expressly reject a simplistic causal argument: "Needless to say, I am not claiming that the appearance of nationalism towards the end of the eighteenth century was 'produced' by the erosion of religious certainties, or that this erosion does not itself require a complex explanation. Nor am I suggesting that somehow nationalism historically 'supersedes' religion. What I am proposing is that nationalism has to be understood by aligning it, not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it, *out of which* – as well as *against which* – it came into being" (1991: 12 emphasis mine). For him, there is no *necessary* connection between the dusk of the religious mode of thought and the dawn of nationalism. Rather, the decline of sacred communities, languages and lineages transformed modes of apprehending the world, making the nation "thinkable" (1991: 22).

3 The inverse causal relation is also commonly assumed: the contemporary rise of religious movements and the "re-enchantment of the world" are often attributed to the decline of the nation-state in the face of globalization.

4 The Reformation is either seen as containing the seeds of secularization or as a source of religious revival. According to either interpretation, however, it is a significant event in the formation of nations and nationalism. "Modernists" argue that nationalism is in essence a modern phenomenon, originating in the late eighteenth century, its birth often corresponding to the French Revolution. They look at the Reformation from a greater historical distance, seeing in it its long-term impact on the place of religion in public life. The Reformation, for them, therefore contains the seed of secularization that ultimately allowed the emergence of the nation form. "Early modernists," such as Greenfeld and Gorski, question the modernist position and identify the rise of nationalism in the early modern period. As a result, instead of seeing the Reformation as the beginning of the end of religion that then caused the emergence of nationalism, they understand it as a wave of religious *élan* whose *immediate* effect was to instigate nationalist movements and create national identities. While both positions link the Reformation with the eventual emergence of nationalism, each conceptualizes the relationship between religion and nationalism differently: modernists see nationalism resulting from religious decline, early modernists see its roots in religious enthusiasm.

5 More recently, however, scholars have turned to other concerns, and especially to the role of religious nationalism in state formation, power consolidation, and contemporary (domestic) politics. Roger Friedland (2002) has shown why and in what ways the nation-state is a vehicle of the divine for religious nationalists; Shenhav (2007) has argued that far from transcending religion, nationalism participates in a process of hybridization of the secular and the religious, as exemplified in Zionism and contemporary Israeli politics; and Fukase-Indergaard and Indergaard (2008) have revealed the peculiar role of religious nationalism in the making of the modern Japanese state. Following a different but related literature, Johnson (2005) and Gorski (2008) have resuscitated the concept of civil religion to analyze post 9/11 American politics. Gorski usefully distinguishes between civil religion, which he defines as the "sacralization of the democratic polity and celebration of the sovereign people" and religious nationalism, which is the "sacralization of the national state and a divine deputation of the common people, such that they may serve as the righteous arm of divine judgment."

6 For an analysis of Polish claims to Auschwitz and the ways in which they compete with Jews over the memory of the former death camp, see chs. 3 ("'Oświęcim'/'Auschwitz': Archeology of a Contested Site and Symbol") and 4 ("The Aesthetics of the War of the Crosses: Mobilizing 'the Nation'") of my book *The Crosses of Auschwitz: Nationalism and Religion in Post-Communist Poland* (2006).

7 According to recent data, 96% of Polish citizens are Catholic, 95% declare belief in God, and 77% consider religion an integral part of their everyday life. 56% participate in religious services at least once a week and 75% participate once or twice a month (CBOS, *The Meaning of Religion in the Life of Poles*, Statistical Report, Warsaw, 2006).

8 The term "civil religion" was first coined by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the *Social Contract*. It is mostly associated with Durkheim and Durkheimian perspectives. It was popularized in the United States in the late 1960s with Robert Bellah's article "Civil Religion in America" (1967), on the heels of which a veritable sociological industry grew up before again receding by the 1990s. For an interesting comeback of the concept after the events of September 11, 2001, see Johnson (2005).

9 This is far from the perennialist model of the relationship between nationalism and religion, which claims that the modern nation grew out of already existing religious communities. The association between Catholicism and Polishness was not natural, but historically specific. It is the result of a arduous process of construction that is never

totally completed and that requires extensive maintenance and upkeep in institutions of social reproduction – pedagogy, law, the state, the Church – and by public leaders through speeches, publication, political mobilization, and ritual performance.

10 Father Tischner spoke these words during a public discussion at the Dominican church in Cracow on November 22, 1993 (author's personal recording). This is also the opinion expressed by Jesuit Stanisław Obirek in a personal interview on May 22, 2004. Obirek has since left the Church.

11 This section is based the archival and ethnographic research conducted for a book manuscript in progress on religious narratives, visual symbols and the remaking of the nation in Quebec.

12 The Christian use of the symbol of the lamb originates from the Hebrew tradition. To protect Jews from the 10th plague brought by God to the Egyptians, God told Moses to instruct them to sacrifice lambs and mark their doors with the animals' blood so that the Angel of Death would "pass over" their house and save their firstborn sons from execution. Jesus celebrated his own "Last Supper" with his disciples on Passover, and with his proposal of a new covenant positioned himself as the sacrifice, *agnus Dei,* the saving lamb of God. In the French Canadian narrative, the lamb further signified civilization through the progress of the Christian missions.

13 The territorial narrowing of *Québécois* identity set off a ripple effect throughout Canada, causing other French-speaking Canadian groups to redefine their own identities along provincial lines: Franco-Ontarians, Franco-Manitobans, Saskatchewan's Fransaskois, Franco-Albertans, Franco-Columbians, and so on. Whereas Francophones in Quebec constitute approximately 80 percent of the population, they constitute only 10 to 14 percent of other Canadian provinces' populations, hence their common designation as "Francophones outside Quebec." Quebec has therefore also become, since the 1970s, the reference through which – and sometimes against which – French-speaking Canadians are defined and define themselves. On the transformation and fragmentation of French Canadian identity, see Thériault (1999), and Langlois and Létourneau (2004).

14 The opposition to the ethno-religious vision of the nation and to the clerical power in Quebec did not emerge ex nihilo during the 1960s. It has a long history, with its roots in the Patriots' liberal movement and running through the twentieth century. It however became more meaningful and effective in operating changes during the 1960s because it coincided with, and found its home in that decade's political developments.

15 Stats.

16 The lamb was also viewed as problematic. Recall the theological interpretation of the Saint as the forerunner of the Messiah, and of the lamb as Jesus (as when the Precursor declared, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" [John 1:29]) and, by extension, French Canadian religion/civilization. Critics emphasized a simpler and more insidious interpretation of the tableau. In their view, John the Baptist was the nation's patron and protector; the lamb was therefore the nation itself, exploited and ultimately sacrificed. In a strategic semantic shift, the new critics began to speak of the *sheep* instead of the lamb to draw attention to the image and push to the foreground a troubling set of associations: one of a docile and dumb nation, a nation that lets wolves "eat the wool off its back," and tamely follows directions when its own interests lay elsewhere. "The sheep" therefore became the symbolic foil against which a new political elite presented their national project, defined around the idea of progress, economic development, and political self-reliance.

17 On selective memory and the invention of tradition in 1970s Quebec, see Richard Handler's *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec* (1988).

18 Hobsbawm's functionalist argument is a perfect example of what I call "residual primordialism." He claims that the nation is an invented functional substitute for real, but lost, communities in order to fill an emotional void (1992: 46, 109). From this perspective, nationalism is related to social disorientation and disorganization, as well as to individual uprooting (pp. 172–3).

19 In fall 2006 and winter 2007, several incidents involving religious minorities and Quebec's secular majority prompted vocal opposition to what was perceived as public institutions' *over*-accommodation of minorities' religious needs. In response to public confusion and discontent over the hazy boundaries of "reasonable accommodation," in February 2007 Quebec Premier Jean Charest announced the establishment of the Commission on Practices of Accommodation Related to Cultural Differences (*Commission de consultation sur les pratiques d'accommodement reliées aux différences culturelles*). This public consultation and forum, co-chaired by sociologist Gérard Bouchard and philosopher Charles Taylor, was charged with exploring and explicating the meaning and practice of Quebec's official secularism in the face of increasing religious pluralism created by diverse immigrant populations. Public debate was not solely about the challenges faced by a secular host society and its religious "guests," but one about the very identity and secularity of Quebec, as briefs presented to the commissioners and their own 310-page report attest. Indeed, the year-long investigation of "reasonable accommodation" turned out to be the most significant critical interrogation about Québécois national identity since the 1960s, as political figures, public intellectuals, artists, business people, and ordinary citizens all lent their voices to the commission's work.

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