

Religion and Nationalism: Four Approaches

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Abstract: Building on recent literature, this paper discusses four ways of studying the relation between religion and nationalism. The first is to treat religion and nationalism, along with ethnicity and race, as *analogous* phenomena. The second is to specify ways in which religion helps *explain* things about nationalism - its origin, its power, or its distinctive character in particular cases. The third is to treat religion as *part* of nationalism, and to specify modes of interpenetration and intertwining. The fourth is to posit a distinctively religious *form* of nationalism. The paper concludes by reconsidering the much-criticized understanding of nationalism as a distinctively secular phenomenon.

‘Religion’ and ‘nationalism’ have long been contested terms. Both terms - on almost any understanding - designate large and multidimensional fields of phenomena. Given the lack of agreement on what we are talking about when we talk about religion, or nationalism, it is no surprise that one encounters seemingly antithetical assertions about the relation between the two – for example, that nationalism is intrinsically secular, and that it is intrinsically religious; that nationalism emerged from the decline of religion, and that it emerged in a period of intensified religious feeling.

Since both ‘nationalism’ and ‘religion’ can designate a whole world of different things, few statements about nationalism per se or religion per se, or the relation between the two, are likely to be tenable, interesting, or even meaningful; a more differentiated analytical strategy is required. Rather than ask *what* the relation between religion and nationalism is – a question too blunt to yield interesting answers – I seek in this paper to specify *how* that relation can fruitfully be studied. Building on the literature produced by a recent surge of interest in the topic, I delineate, develop, and critically engage four distinct ways of studying the connection between religion and nationalism.¹ The first is to treat religion and nationalism, along with ethnicity and

race, as *analogous* phenomena. The second is to specify ways in which religion helps *explain* things about nationalism - its origin, its power, or its distinctive character in particular cases.

The third is to treat religion as *part* of nationalism, and to specify modes of interpenetration and intertwining. The fourth is to posit a distinctively religious *form* of nationalism. I conclude by defending a qualified version of the much-criticized understanding of nationalism as a distinctively secular phenomenon.

Religion and nationalism as analogous phenomena

Consider first the strategy of treating religion and nationalism as analogous phenomena. One way of doing so is exemplified by efforts to define or characterize nationalism by specifying its similarity to religion, or by simply characterizing nationalism *as* a religion. An early statement of this approach, which can be traced back to Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Durkheim 1995: 215-6, 221ff, 429; Smith 2003:26), is found in the work of Carlton Hayes, who devoted one chapter of his 1926 book *Essays on Nationalism* to 'nationalism as a religion'. According to Hayes, nationalism mobilizes a 'deep and compelling emotion' that is 'essentially religious'. Like other religions, nationalism involves faith in some external power, feelings of awe and reverence, and ceremonial rites, focused on the flag. Straining a bit to sustain the metaphor, Hayes argued that nationalism has its gods – 'the patron or personification of [the] fatherland'; its 'speculative theology or mythology,' describing the 'eternal past ... and everlasting future' of the nation; its notions of salvation and immortality; its canon of holy scripture; its feasts, fasts, processions, pilgrimages and holy days; and its supreme sacrifice. But

while most world religions serve to unify, nationalism ‘re-enshrines the earlier tribal mission of a chosen people’, with its ‘tribal selfishness and vainglory’.²

More recently, Anthony Smith has provided a more sophisticated, and more sympathetic, account of nationalism as a ‘new religion of the people’ - a religion as ‘binding, ritually repetitive, and collectively enthusing’ as any other. According to Smith, nationalism is a religion both in a substantive sense, insofar as it entails a quest for a kind of this-worldly collective ‘salvation’, and in a functional sense, insofar as it involves a ‘system of beliefs and practices that distinguishes the sacred from the profane and unites its adherents in a single moral community of the faithful’. In this new religion - which both ‘parallels and competes with traditional religions’ - authenticity is the functional equivalent of sanctity; patriotic heroes and national geniuses, who embody and exemplify such authenticity and sacrifice themselves for the community, are the equivalent of prophets and messiah-saviors; and posterity, in which their legendary deeds live on, is the equivalent of the afterlife. It is this religious quality of nationalism, on Smith's account, that explains durability and emotional potency of national identities and the ‘scope, depth, and intensity of the feelings and loyalties that nations and nationalism so often evoke’ (Smith 2003: 4-5, 15, 26, 40-42).

While such characterizations of nationalism as a religion are suggestive and fruitful, I want to propose an alternative strategy for considering nationalism and religion as analogous phenomena. Rather than characterize nationalism with terms drawn from the field of religion, as Hayes and to a certain extent Smith do - faith, reverence, liturgy, cult, god, salvation, scripture, sacred objects, and holy days - it may be useful to connect both phenomenon to more general social structures and processes. Without any claim to exhaustiveness, I want to briefly discuss three ways of considering religion and nationalism (and ethnicity as well) under more

encompassing conceptual rubrics: as a mode of identification, a mode of social organization, and a way of framing political claims.

Ethnicity and nationalism have been characterized as basic sources and forms of social and cultural identification. As such, they are ways of identifying oneself and others, of construing sameness and difference, and of situating and placing oneself in relation to others. Understood as perspectives on the world rather than things in the world, they are ways of understanding and identifying oneself, making sense of one's problems and predicaments, identifying one's interests, and orienting one's action (Brubaker 2004). Religion, too, can be understood in this manner. As a principle of vision and division of the social world, to use Bourdieu's phrase, religion too provides a way of identifying and naming fundamental social groups, a powerful framework for imagining community, and a set of schemas, templates, and metaphors for making sense of the social world (and of course the supra mundane world as well).³

Like ethnicity and nationalism, secondly, religion can be understood as a mode of social organization, a way of framing, channeling, and organizing social relations. I'm not referring here to churches, ethnic associations, or nationalist organizations per se. I'm referring rather to the ways in which religion, ethnicity, and nationality can serve as more or less pervasive axes of social segmentation in heterogeneous societies, even without territorial concentration along religious, ethnic, or national lines. This is in part a matter of what van den Berghe, in an effort to distinguish social pluralism from cultural pluralism, called 'institutional duplication' (1967:34). Even when they are territorially intermixed, members of different religious, ethnic, or national communities may participate in separate, parallel institutional worlds, which can include school systems, universities, media, political parties, hospitals, nursing homes, and institutionalized

sporting, cultural and recreational activities as well as churches and ethnic associations (Brubaker et al 2006: chapter 9).⁴

Even outside such parallel institutional worlds, though more often in conjunction with them, religion, ethnicity, and nationality can channel informal social relations in ways that generate and sustain social segmentation. The key mechanism here is religious or ethnic endogamy, whether more or less deliberately pursued from the inside, or imposed from the outside.⁵ Religious injunctions against intermarriage, together with clerical control or influence over marriage, have often helped reproduce socioreligious segmentation. This, in turn, has helped reproduce religious, ethnic, and national communities over the long run and has worked to prevent their dissolution through assimilation (Smith 1986:123)

From a political point of view, finally, claims made in the name of religion - or religious groups - can be considered alongside claims made in the name of ethnicity, race, or nationhood. The similarities are particularly striking insofar as claims are made for economic resources, political representation, symbolic recognition, or cultural reproduction (the latter by means of institutional or territorial autonomy, where institutional autonomy involves control of one's own agencies of socialization such as school systems and media). These claims are part of the general phenomenon of politicized ethnicity, broadly understood as encompassing claims made on the basis of ethnoreligious, ethnonational, ethnoracial, ethnoregional, or otherwise ethnocultural identifications, which have proliferated in both the developed and the developing world in the last half century.⁶ Widening the analytical lens still further, claims made in the name of religious communities can fruitfully be seen as part of a very general pattern of the politicization of culture and the culturalization of politics.⁷

In this perspective, religion figures as a way of identifying ‘groups’ or political claimants, not as a distinctive way of specifying the *content* of political claims. Of course, politicized religion involves not only claims for resources, representation, recognition, or reproduction; it also involves claims to restructure public life in accordance with religious principles. I will return to this issue below when I discuss the question of whether there is a distinctively religious form of nationalism, defined by the distinctive content of its claims.

The three perspectives I have sketched suggest potentially fruitful ways of treating religion, ethnicity and nationalism as analogous phenomena, and as parts of a more encompassing domain. But they all abstract from the specific content of religious belief or practice, the specific ways in which belief may shape life conduct, and the specific role played by religious organizations and their relation to the state. As a result, their treatment of religion remains inevitably ‘flattening’, and they miss much of what is distinctive and interesting about religion and its relation to nationalism.

Religion as a cause or explanation of nationalism

A second way of analyzing the relation between religion and nationalism seeks to specify ways in which religion helps explain nationalism. Such arguments can be cast in several ways, depending on what it is about nationalism that is said to be explained (for example, its origins, persistence, emotional power, content, or form), and what it is about religion that is said to explain it (religious ideas, institutions, practices, or events).

Most of the literature in this tradition focuses on particular cases, specifying the ways in which particular religious traditions have shaped particular forms of nationalism. Thus, for

example, scholars have traced the influence of Puritanism (and Protestantism more generally) on English nationalism (Kohn 1940, Greenfeld 1992), of Pietism on German nationalism (Lehmann 1982), of Catholicism on Polish nationalism (see for a critical review Zubrzycki 2006), of Orthodoxy on nationalism in the Balkans (Leustean 2008), of Shinto on Japanese nationalism (Fukase-Indergaard and Indergaard 2008), of Buddhism on Sinhalese nationalism (Kapferer 1988), and of the Hebraic idea of covenant on Northern Irish, Afrikaaner, and Israeli nationalism (Akenson 1992).

A number of scholars, however, have advanced broader arguments, notably about the ways in which religion has figured centrally in the origins and development of nationalism. One important cluster of work has addressed the ways in which religious motifs, narratives, and symbols were transposed into the political domain and used to construct the first recognizably nationalist (or at least proto-nationalist) claims. Much of this work has focused on the motif of chosenness, or what Smith (2003) calls the 'myth of ethnic election'.⁸ This and associated motifs, narratives, and symbols from the Hebrew bible were central to political rhetoric and iconography in the Netherlands (Schama 1988:93-125, Gorski 2000b) and England (Hill 1993) during the tumultuous and tightly interlinked religious and political struggles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Gorski (2000b) has argued forcefully that this early modern "Mosaic moment" was distinctively nationalist in scope and content. In his most recent work, Smith agrees that this period saw the birth of nationalist movements and programs that he calls 'covenantal nationalisms' (2008: chapter 5).⁹ Chosenness and other religious motifs and symbols, Smith argues, are 'deep cultural resources' that continue to provide the 'basic cultural and ideological building blocks for nationalists' (2003:254-5; see also Hutchinson and Lehmann 1994).

Religion contributed to origin and development of nationalism not only through the political appropriation of religious symbols and narratives but also in more indirect ways. Scholars have suggested, for example, that the Protestant Reformation and the broader process of ‘confessionalization’ contributed to the development of nationalism in three ways: by generating new modes of imagining and constructing social and political relationships, promoting literacy in and standardization of vernacular languages, and bringing polity and culture into a tighter alignment.

The new ways of imagining and institutionalizing religious community fostered by the Reformation provided new models for political community. This line of argument emphasizes the egalitarian potential inherent in the notion of the priesthood of all believers; the individualism involved in the emphasis on the direct study of scripture; and the direct and unmediated relationship between individuals and God. These new ways of imagining religious community have a striking affinity with understandings of ‘the nation’ as an internally undifferentiated, egalitarian community to which individuals belong directly and immediately.¹⁰ Practices of congregational self-rule in sectarian Protestantism, moreover, furnished models for democratic and national self-rule (Calhoun 1997: 72). A complementary argument about new modes of imagining community focuses on the long-term trajectory of Christianity, furthered by though not originating in Protestantism. Drawing on Gauchet (1997) and Baker (1994), for example, Bell (2001:24-26) has argued that the intensification of the perceived gap between human and divine allowed the social world to be conceived in terms of its own autonomous laws. New understandings of nation - along with related foundational notions including society, *patrie*, civilization, and public - emerged in this context.

Second, by fostering literacy in and prompting the standardization of vernacular languages, the Reformation laid the groundwork for imagining nationhood through the medium of language.¹¹ The Protestant emphasis on direct, unmediated access to scripture promoted the development of mass literacy, while the concern to make the Bible accessible to the widest possible audience, and the explosion of popular religious tracts occasioned by multiplying religious disputes, generated a surge in printing and publishing in vernacular languages. The proliferation of printed material, in turn, gave a powerful impetus to the standardization of vernacular languages. In Anderson's argument about 'print-capitalism', the publishers of religious tracts and other materials sought wider markets and assembled varied idiolects into smaller numbers of increasingly standardized 'print languages'; these 'laid the bases for national consciousness' by creating 'unified fields of exchange and communication below Latin and above the spoken vernacular' (1991:44).¹²

The third line of argument focuses not on the Reformation per se but on the broader Reformation-era process of 'confessionalization' that embraced Catholic as well as Protestant regions and involved 'the emergence of three doctrinally, liturgically, and organizationally distinct 'confessions' [Catholicism, Lutheranism, and Calvinism], and their gradual imposition on an often passive population' (Gorski 2000a:152). Confessionalization substantially tightened the relation between political organization and religious belief and practice. In so doing it provided a model for and matrix of the congruence between culture and polity that is at the core of nationalism.

Confessionalization involved the fusion of politics and religion through the emergence of territorial churches that were subordinated (more or less fully and expressly) to secular political control. Intensified religious discipline and new forms of social control heightened pressures for

conformity. The persecution of dissent and consequent waves of refugees generated an ‘unmixing of confessions’ that anticipated the later ethnic and nationalist ‘unmixing of peoples’ (Gorski 2000a: 157-8). Rulers' explicit concern with the religious homogeneity of their subjects marked a sharp departure from the generic pre-nationalist condition portrayed in stylized fashion by Gellner (1994:62) in which rulers ‘were interested in the tribute and labour potential of their subjects, not in their culture’. Rulers were now very much interested in the culture of their subjects, though not in their language. The state-led cultural homogenization that was licensed by the formula *cuius regio, eius religio* provided a model for later, expressly nationalist modes of statist national homogenization.

Nationalism centrally involves a distinctive organization of sameness and difference: nationalist ideology demands - and nationalist social, political, and cultural processes tend to generate - cultural homogeneity *within* political units and cultural heterogeneity *between* them. The territorialization and pluralization of religion entailed by the process of confessionalization and codified in settlements such as the 1555 Peace of Augsburg and the 1648 Peace of Westphalia institutionalized and legitimated this distinctive pattern.¹³ Religious homogeneity - a model for (and often a component of) national cultural homogeneity - was produced and legitimized on the level of the individual polity, while religious pluralism was institutionalized within the wider state system. More broadly, the territorialization and pluralization of religion entailed by the process of confessionalization placed religion ‘in a competitive, comparative field’, in Benedict Anderson's phrase (1991: 17). The emergence of such a field - replacing the single vast field of medieval Christendom - made it easier to imagine a world of distinct, bounded nations.¹⁴

As this brief and highly selective sampling suggests, religion can be understood as contributing to the origins and development of nationalism in a great variety of ways. What these heterogeneous arguments have in common is their rejection of an older understanding according to which nationalism arises from the decline of, and as an antithesis to, religion. Of course nationalist claims sometimes *are* formulated in direct opposition to religious claims; but even in these cases - most strikingly in the French revolution - nationalism may assume a religious quality, taking over some of the forms and functions of religion. Moreover, earlier forms of nationalist (or proto-nationalist) politics and national (or proto-national) consciousness emerged in a period of intensified rather than declining religiosity. And scholars have suggested ways in which nationalism, like capitalism on Weber's account, emerged in part as an unintended consequence of religious developments (Gorski 2003).

Religion as imbricated or intertwined with nationalism

A third way of analyzing the connection between religion and nationalism sees religion not as something outside of nationalism that helps to explain it, but as so deeply imbricated or intertwined with nationalism as to be part of the phenomenon, rather than an external explanation of it.

One kind of intertwining involves the coincidence of religious and national boundaries.¹⁵ This has stronger and weaker variants. In the stronger variant, the nation is imagined as composed of *all* and *only* those who belong to a particular religion. This is illustrated by at least certain forms of Sikh nationalism and Jewish nationalism. In a weaker variant, local religious boundaries coincide with national boundaries, and religion may serve as the primary diacritical

marker that enables one to identify ethnicity or nationality, but the religious community extends beyond the nation. This is illustrated by the doubling of religious and ethnonational identities in Northern Ireland, or by the role of religious affiliation as a diacritical marker distinguishing Catholic Croats from Orthodox Serbs in the former Yugoslavia, both of whom spoke what used to be considered one and the same language.

In a second kind of intertwining, religion does not necessarily define the boundaries of the nation, but it supplies myths, metaphors and symbols that are central to the discursive or iconic representation of the nation. This theme has been developed most fully in the work of Smith (1986, 2003, 2008). The question that religious resources help answer in this case is not necessarily ‘who belongs’? but rather ‘who are we’? and ‘what is distinctive about us as a people, in terms of our history, character, identity, mission, or destiny’?

This second kind of intertwining involves the religious inflection of nationalist discourse. If one interprets nationalist discourse broadly as embracing not only the discourse that accompanies and informs nationalist movements or specific forms of nationalist politics, but any form of public or private talk about particular ‘nations’ or countries, then this offers a broad and fertile terrain for studying the connection between religion and nationalism.

There is for example a large literature on the religious or religiously tinged language and imagery that infuse American political rhetoric. Although this rhetoric is not for the most part linked to distinctively nationalist forms of politics, it can be seen as part of the phenomenon of nationalism, or nationhood, in a broader sense. Historically, religious language and imagery have deeply informed and infused ways of thinking and talking about America and ‘Americanism’, about the origins of the nation, its mission, its destiny, its role in the world, the ‘righteousness’ of its causes, and the ‘evil’ of its enemies. America has been represented as a

nation uniquely blessed by God, indeed chosen by God for a 'redemptive' role in the world, ordained to serve as a 'New Israel', whose providential mission it was to serve in exemplary fashion as a 'beacon unto the nations', or, in its interventionist Wilsonian form, to take the lead in recasting and regenerating world order, to 'lead the world in the assertion of the rights of peoples and the rights of free nations' (Woodrow Wilson, quoted in Stephanson 1995: 117).

The legacy of this discourse is evident today, even if the notion of a distinctive mission is seldom cast - in mainstream political rhetoric - in expressly religious terms. It may be difficult to imagine an American President declaring, as Theodore Roosevelt famously did in the 1912 campaign, that 'we stand at Armageddon, and we battle for the Lord'. But just days after 9/11, President Bush did declare it 'our responsibility to history' to 'rid the world of evil'. It may be hard to imagine a speech on the floor of the Senate today using exactly the language of Albert Beveridge, who in 1900 justified the war against the Filipino independence movement by claiming that God had made 'the English-speaking and Teutonic peoples.... master organizers of the world to establish system where chaos reigned', to 'overwhelm the forces of reaction throughout the earth', to 'administer government among savage and senile peoples', and to prevent the world from 'relaps[ing] into barbarism and night', marking 'the American people as His chosen nation to finally lead in the redemption of the world' (Tuveson 1968:vii; Bellah 1975: 38). Yet a century later, the rhetoric of mission used in connection with the war in Iraq and, more broadly, in connection with the 'global war on terror' and the mission of 'spreading freedom', has certain evident similarities.

Yet while it is easy enough to identify the ways in which religious or religiously tinged language and imagery are used to frame talk about the special character, mission, or destiny of a nation, it is more difficult to specify the precise nature of the connection between religion and

nationalism or nationhood in such cases. Consider briefly three conceptual and methodological difficulties.

First, what is religious about the religious or religiously tinged language, narratives, tropes, or images that are used to frame or color nation- or country-talk? Consider the political uses of the language of 'sacredness'. When state representatives or nationalists speak of 'sacred' ideals, 'sacred' territory, or 'sacred' causes, does this signal an intertwining of religion and nation (or state)? Or can it be considered simply one of many ways in which originally religious language can be used metaphorically in other domains? Allusions to the Bible, for example, permeate all of English literature, even literature that is in no obvious sense religious. Should we think of this in terms of the intertwining of religion and literature? Or should we note that, while the modern English language has indeed been profoundly shaped by religion, metaphors and other figures of speech that derive ultimately from religion can be used, in English as in any other language, to communicate in ways that are not distinctively religious? After all, sometimes a metaphor is just a metaphor.

When reference is made today to America's distinctive mission in the world, is this evidence of the religious nature of American nationalism? Or, if one were to trace the rhetoric of mission from the New England colonies of the seventeenth century through the present, would one be more struck by the progressive secularization of that rhetoric? The specifically religious resonance or force of the rhetoric of national mission would seem to be much weaker today than in the New England colonies or in the seventeenth century Netherlands. In the peroration to the *Protestant Ethic*, Weber (1958) spoke of victorious capitalism no longer needing the support of religion. Whatever the role of religion in the origins of nationalism, we might well say the same thing about victorious nationalism today (cf. Greenfeld 1992: 77).

One question, then, is what counts as religious language and imagery, as opposed to religiously tinged or originally religious but subsequently secularized language and imagery. A second issue concerns how to judge in comparative perspective - whether over time or across cases - the salience or pervasiveness of religious language or imagery. In almost any setting, the field of nation-talk is vast, heterogeneous, and chronically contested; one cannot judge the degree to which nation-talk is framed in religious terms simply by giving examples of such religious framing, no matter how numerous or vivid. To judge the relative importance of distinctively religious ways of framing nation-talk, as opposed to other ways of framing such talk, in different times and places, one would need a systematic discourse-analytic study of the field of nation-talk as a whole, so as to avoid sampling on the phenomenon of interest.

A further issue concerns the resonance or effectiveness of religiously framed, coded, or tinged nation-talk. The force, meaning, and resonance of national or nationalist rhetoric, like that of any other form of rhetoric, depend not on the rhetoric itself, or on the intentions of the speaker, but on the schemas through which the rhetoric is interpreted. This suggests that the intertwining of religious and nationalist discourse should be studied not only on the 'production' side, but also on the 'reception' side. In the American case, for example, even if the rhetoric of national mission used to justify post 9/11 foreign policy is not in and of itself distinctively religious, and indeed is cast in much more secular form today than in the past, that rhetoric may have religious resonance, and may be interpreted in religious terms, by some of those to whom it is addressed. It might therefore be claimed that the distinctive degrees and forms of American religiosity help explain the initially broad-based public acceptance of post-9/11 American foreign policies, and of the invasion of Iraq in particular. But how exactly to study the

intertwining of religious schemas of interpretation and nation-talk on the 'reception' side is far from evident.

Scholars have studied not only the religious inflection of nationalist discourse, but also the inverse phenomenon: national or nationalist inflection of religious discourse. More broadly, they have studied the 'nationalization' of religion in its organizational and practical as well discursive aspects: the ways in which religions - particularly supraethnic, 'universal' religions such as Christianity and Islam - have been transformed by their encounter with nationalism and the nation-state (Haupt and Langewiesche 2004:12f.; Schulze Wessel 2006:7-14).

In the Christian context, nationalization is in part a matter of what might more precisely be called the 'etatization' of religion, through which states have sought to establish control over church affairs, appointments, and property. In the realm of Orthodox Christianity, especially in southeastern Europe, the nationalization of Christianity involved the fragmentation of Eastern Christendom into a series of autocephalous national churches, which provided a key institutional framework for nationalist movements and promoted a strong symbiosis of religious and national traditions. The nationalization of religion is also a matter of the varying cultural inflections of religious thought and practice in different state and national contexts. This cultural inflection of religious practice has been fostered by the fact that Christianity, unlike Islam, has never been tied to a unifying sacred language, but has been from the start a 'religion of translation' (Hastings 1997:194). Although universalistic tendencies in Islam have been stronger than those in Christianity, scholars have studied the nationalization of Islam as well, delineating the various ways in which Islam has accommodated itself to - and been inflected by - differing national and state contexts (Lapidus 2001).

Religious nationalism as a distinctive kind of nationalism

The fourth and final way of analyzing the connection between religion and nationalism that I want to consider involves the claim that religious nationalism is a distinctive kind of nationalism. The claim is not simply that nationalist rhetoric may be suffused with religious imagery, or that nationalist claims may be framed and formulated in religious or religiously tinged language. This is indisputably true. It is not simply a claim about a religio-national symbiosis or interpenetration, which no doubt often exists. The argument I want to examine here concerns not the *rhetorical form* of nationalist claims, or the *language or imagery* used to frame them, but the *content* of those claims. It is a claim that there is a distinctively religious type of nationalist program, which represents a distinct alternative to secular nationalism.

The claim for a distinctively religious form of nationalism has been most fully articulated by Roger Friedland (2002; see also Juergensmeyer 1993). Friedland defines nationalism in statist terms. He characterizes nationalism as ‘a state-centered form of collective subject formation’; as ‘a program for the co-constitution of the state and the territorially bounded population in whose name it speaks’; and as ‘a set of discursive practices by which the territorial identity of a state and the cultural identity of the people whose collective representation it claims are constituted as a singular fact’ (Friedland 2002:386).

This statist definition allows Friedland to conceptualize religious nationalism as a particular type of nationalism. Nationalism is understood as a *form* with variable *content*. The form prescribes the ‘joining of state, territory, and culture’ (Friedland 2002: 387), but does not specify *how* they are to be joined. It leaves open the *content* of state-centered collective subject formation, the content of the discursive practices through which the territorial identity of a state

and the cultural identity of a people are 'constituted as a singular fact'. Religion provides one way of specifying this content. It provides a distinctive way - or a distinctive family of ways 'of joining state, territory, and culture.

Religion is able to do so, on Friedland's account, because it provides 'models of authority' and 'imaginings of an ordering power'(2002: 390). Religion is a 'totalizing order capable of regulating every aspect of life'(2002: 390) - though Friedland acknowledges that this is less true of Christianity, given its origins as a stateless faith. Religious nationalism joins state, territory, and culture primarily by focusing on family, gender, and sexuality: by defending the traditional family, as the key generative site of social reproduction and moral socialization, against economic and cultural forces that weaken its authority or socializing power; by upholding traditional gendered divisions of labor within and outside the family; and by promoting a restrictive regulation of sexuality, seeking to contain sexuality within the family.

This is a sophisticated and interesting argument. It usefully focuses attention on the distinctively religious content of programs for the ordering and regulating public and private life, rather than on the religious inflection of political rhetoric or the religious identities of those involved in political contestation. Neither of the latter is necessarily associated with a distinctively religious nationalist program. In Northern Ireland, for example, political rhetoric is often inflected by religious motifs, images, and symbols, and religion is the key diacritical marker that defines the parties to the conflict. Yet the conflict is not 'about' religion; no major claims are made about ordering and regulating public life in a manner conforming with religious principles. This is a classical nationalist conflict, not a case of a distinctively religious kind of nationalism (Jenkins 1997: chapter 8).

What, then, *is* a case of religious nationalism in this strong sense? Friedland casts his definitional net widely; he sees religious nationalism at work in a wide range of settings, including the U.S, India, Iran, Israel, Palestine, Turkey, Algeria, Egypt, and Pakistan. But while he discusses Christian fundamentalism and Hindu nationalism in some detail and touches on Jewish nationalism, he devotes his most sustained attention to Islamist movements. Since these pose in sharp form certain questions about the category of religious nationalism, I will focus on these.

There are certain striking similarities between Islamist movements and familiar forms of nationalism. Islamist movements invoke a putatively homogeneous pre-political identity (the ‘*umma*’ or community of Muslims) that ought, on some accounts, to have its own state, a restored Caliphate. They hold that public life should safeguard and promote the distinctive values of this community. They seek to awaken people to their ‘true’ identities and to bring culture and polity into close alignment. They protest against the ‘alien’ rule of non-muslims over muslims or of governments that are only nominally Muslim; and they seek to purify the polity of corrupting forms of alien influence (moral, cultural, or economic). In Friedland’s terms, they seek to join state, territory, and culture. In these and other ways, Islamist movements partake of the underlying ‘grammar’ of modern nationalism even when they are ostensibly anti-nationalist or supra-national. Islamists, moreover, have often allied with nationalist movements, and they have sometimes fused with such movements. Hamas, for example, combines a classical state-seeking nationalist agenda with a distinctively religious program of Islamization, though not without considerable tension (Aburaiya 2009; Pelham and Rodenbeck 2009). Yet most Islamist movements, although they work through the *state*, are not oriented to the *nation*.

The territorial nation-state remains the dominant political reality of our time; reports of its death or debility have been greatly exaggerated. Islamist movements – like other forms of politicized religion – accommodate themselves to this reality, even when they have transnational commitments or aspirations. The claim of the nation-state to regulate all aspects of life makes it an inescapable arena of engagement. In pervasively state-organized societies, ‘no movement that aspires to more than mere belief or inconsequential talk in public can remain indifferent to state power’ (Asad 2003:200). But the fact that Islamist movements seek to gain or influence the exercise of power within particular nation-states does not make them nationalist (Arjomand 1994, Asad 2003: Chapter 6).

Nationalism is a useful concept only if it is not overstretched. If the concept is not to lose its discriminating power, it must be limited to forms of politics, ideology, or discourse that involve a central orientation to ‘the nation’; it cannot be extended to encompass all forms of politics that work in and through nation-states (cf. Smith 1991: 74). There is no compelling reason to speak of ‘nationalism’ unless the imagined community of the nation is widely understood as a primary focus of value, source of legitimacy, object of loyalty, and basis of identity. But the nation is not understood in this way by most Islamist movements. This points to the limits of Friedland's state-centered understanding of nationalism. If Islamism is a form of nationalism, it is nationalism without a central role for ‘the nation’.

Some scholars have argued that the *umma* - the worldwide community of Muslim believers - is a kind of nation. On this account, the forms of transborder politicized Islam that have taken root especially among marginalized second- and third-generation immigrant youth in Europe - oriented to the global *umma*, nurtured primarily in cyberspace, articulated increasingly in English, and promoted by a new-class of internet-based interpreters of Islam (Anderson 2003),

who have broken the monopoly of traditional authorities - are therefore a kind of de-territorialized nationalism (Saunders 2008). Abstracting from the ethnic and national identities and the traditional religious beliefs and practices of their parents and grandparents, 'Muslim' has indeed become a powerful categorical identity in Europe. This holds even among the nonobservant, so it is correct to say that 'Muslim' is not simply a religious identity. But there is no compelling reason for regarding 'Muslim' as a specifically *national* identity. A key distinguishing feature of nation as an imagined community - and of nationalism as an ideology - is that any given nation is imagined as limited, as just one among many other such nations (Anderson 1991:7). The social ontology of nationalism is in this sense 'polycentric' or 'pluralist' (Smith 1983:158-9, 170-1). The *umma* is not imagined as limited in this way, as one nation alongside others. Nor is the *umma* imagined as actually or potentially sovereign - as the ultimate source of political legitimacy. The forms of politics built around this categorical identity are therefore better conceptualized under the broad rubric of politicized ethnicity I discussed in the first section of the paper - involving claims for resources, representation, and recognition - than under that of nationalism.

Conclusion

The four ways of studying the relation between religion and nationalism that I have distinguished and delineated are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive. They do not represent alternative theories: they do not provide different answers to the same questions, but ask different kinds of questions. My aim has not been to argue for the merits of one of the four approaches over the others; all represent interesting and valuable lines of research. I have sought

rather to give a sense of the range and variety of questions that can be asked about the relation between the large and multidimensional fields of phenomena we call "religion" and 'nationalism'.

I would like to conclude by reconsidering the much-criticized understanding of nationalism as a distinctively secular phenomenon. A secularist bias in the study of nationalism, like the secularist bias in many other domains of social science, long obscured interesting connections and affinities between religion and nationalism. Long-dominant modernizationist arguments, emphasizing socioeconomic modernity (Gellner 1983, Deutsch 1953), political modernity (Breuilly 1994, Tilly 1996, Hechter 2000), or cultural modernity (Anderson 1991), neglected religion or saw it as being replaced by nationalism. The paradigmatic instances on which the literature focused were European nationalisms between the late 18th and early 20th century; this truncated range of cases marginalized other cases - from early modern Europe, South Asia, or the Middle East, for example - in which religion was more obviously central. A widely shared understanding of the modern nation-state - an understanding at once normative and predictive - relegated religion to the realm of the private.

This secularist bias has been powerfully challenged in recent years (Van der Veer 1994, Asad 2003, Spohn 2003); and a substantial body of work, several strands of which have been discussed above, has explored the multiple connections and affinities between religion and nationalism. This work has highlighted the religious matrix of the category of the secular itself, and it has challenged the notion that modernity requires the privatization of religion (Casanova 1994). These developments are entirely salutary. But is there perhaps something in the secularist understanding of nationalism that, reformulated and shorn of various palpably untenable claims and expectations, might be worth preserving?

As a distinctive form of politics, nationalism involves demands for congruence between ‘the nation’ - however defined - and the state or polity; in a slightly different idiom, it involves claims that ‘the nation’ should be fully expressed in and protected by an existing or projected state or polity. The fundamental point of reference of nationalist politics is ‘the nation’; its social ontology posits nations as fundamental social units (Smith 1983: 178). Nations are seen as legitimately entitled to ‘their own’ polities, and as ‘owning’ those polities once they are established; authority is seen as legitimate only if it arises from ‘the nation’. This complex structure of political argument and cultural understanding involves a distinctive social ontology, a particular social imaginary (Anderson 1991, Taylor 2007), and an ‘ascending’ doctrine of political authority and legitimacy (Calhoun 1997).

The development and diffusion of this structure of political argument and cultural understanding, it can be argued, were made possible in part by a process of secularization. *Not* by the decline of religion, or by the relegation of religion to the private realm: as Casanova (1994) has shown, these aspects of the ‘secularization thesis’ are untenable. But the core of the secularization thesis -- the claim that the differentiation of various autonomous realms of human activity from religious institutions and norms has been central to, even constitutive of, Western modernity -- remains valid (Casanova 1994). This process of differentiation - and in particular the emergence of understandings of economy, society, and polity as autonomous realms - was arguably a precondition for the emergence and widespread naturalization of the social ontology, social imaginary, and ascending understanding of political legitimacy characteristic of modern nationalism.

Moreover, nationalist politics - based on claims made in the name of ‘the nation’ - remain distinct from, even as they are intertwined with, forms of religious politics that seek to transform

public life not in the name of the nation, but in the name of God. To be sure, as I have discussed above, nationalism and religion are often deeply intertwined; political actors may make claims *both* in the name of the nation *and* in the name of God. Nationalist politics can accommodate the claims of religion, and nationalist rhetoric often deploys religious language, imagery, and symbolism; similarly, religion can accommodate the claims of the nation-state, and religious movements can deploy nationalist language.

Yet intertwining is not identity: the very metaphor of intertwining implies a distinction between the intertwined strands. As I suggested above, religious movements that pursue a comprehensive transformation of public life do not become nationalist simply by working through the nation-state; nor do they become nationalist by allying with secular nationalists in anticolonial struggles or by deploying the rhetoric of anticolonial nationalism. Similarly, nationalist movements do not turn into specifically religious movements by virtue of deploying religious symbols, emphasizing religious traditions, or even making religious affiliation a criterion of full membership of the nation. Languages of religion and nation, like all forms of language, can be pervasively intertwined. But even when the languages are intertwined, the fundamental ontologies and structures of justification differ. We can be sensitive both to discursive intertwining and to this fundamental difference.

Notes

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¹ Indicative of this surge in interest are the collections edited by Hutchinson and Lehmann (1994), Van der Veer and Lehmann (1999), Geyer and Lehmann (2004), and Haupt and Langewiesche (2004).

² Hayes (1926), chapter 4; the quotations are from pp 95, 104, and 124-5. The centrality of this notion for Hayes is suggested by the title of his 1960 book: *Nationalism: A Religion*. In a somewhat more analytical discussion, Ninian Smart (1983) specified six dimensions on which nationalism can be compared to religion (though by 'nationalism' he means what he admits might better be called 'patriotism', namely 'devotion to [one's] own nation-state'). Thus understood, nationalism is weak in doctrine, strong in myth, strong in ethics, intermittent in ritual, strong in experience, and strong in social form.

³ On the ways in which people use religious terms to define civic identities, see Lichterman (2008).

⁴ The notion of social pluralism was developed with primary reference to colonial societies, but varying degrees of social segmentation and institutional parallelism can be found elsewhere, the 'pillarized' (or formerly pillarized) society of the Netherlands being one classic example of a relatively high degree of social pluralism.

⁵ Other mechanisms may be at work as well, including residential segregation and occupational niches. These are analytically distinct from institutional duplication, though they usually work in tandem.

⁶ Geertz's seminal essay on politics in postcolonial societies (1963) provided an early argument for treating all such claims together. See also Rothschild's argument that it would not help to separate out ethnicity from 'religious, linguistic, racial, and other so-called primordial foci of consciousness, solidarity, and assertiveness.... If religious, linguistic, racial, and other primordial criteria and markers were to be peeled off, it is difficult to see what precisely would be left to, or meant by, the residual notion of ethnicity and ethnic groups' (1981: 9). A more recent argument for treating race, ethnicity, and nation as a single field of phenomena is made by Brubaker (2009).

⁷ In addition to claims made on the basis of ethnocultural or ethnoreligious identity, broadly understood, these include claims made in the name of the deaf (understood as a linguistic minority: Plann 1997) or the autistic (as a neurologically based cultural minority: <http://www.petitiononline.com/AFFDec/petition.html>; cf Hacking 2009).

⁸ For Smith, the myth of ethnic election and divine covenant is constituted by a number of linked ideas including divine choice, collective sanctification, and conditional privilege (2003: chapter 3, especially 50-51).

⁹ Smith has consistently distinguished nationalism as a distinctive ideology and movement from national consciousness or national identity (see for example 2003:268). And he continues to argue that while national identities have deep roots in pre-modern ethnic and (often) religious identities (Smith 1986, Hastings 1997), nationalism crystallizes as a fully elaborated doctrine

only in the late eighteenth century (Smith 2008: x). But he now dates the first nationalist movements to these seventeenth century cases.

¹⁰ See for example Gellner (1983:142), for whom the key elements of Protestantism ‘foreshadowed an anonymous, individualistic, fairly unstructured mass society, in which relatively equal access to a shared culture prevails, and the culture has its norms publicly accessible in writing, rather than in the keeping of a privileged specialist. Equal access to a scripturalist God paved the way to equal access to high culture. Literacy is no longer a specialism, but a pre-condition for all the specialisms... In such a society, one's prime loyalty is to the medium of our literacy, and to its political protector. The equal access of believers to God eventually becomes equal access of unbelievers to education and culture’.

¹¹ For a different perspective on religion and vernacular languages, attributing less importance to Protestantism and more to Christianity per se (which never, unlike Arabic, had a sacred language), see Hastings 1997: 193ff.

¹² Smith (1986:27) has observed that scholars of nationalism have paid too much attention to language, and too little to religion. It is ironically partly through religious developments that vernacular languages acquired the distinctive importance that they would come to have as a key criterion and medium of nationality in Europe.

¹³ The Peace of Augsburg codified the territorialization and politicization of religion in the German lands by making the *jus reformandi* - the right to determine the religion of a territory - an attribute of [princely] sovereignty (Rice 1970: 165). Although the political fragmentation of Central Europe meant that the fusion of culture and polity associated with confessionalization occurred on lower levels of political space than those later associated with ‘nations’, the territorialization and politicization of religion were still significant in establishing the principle of the congruence of polity and culture and in providing both conceptual models of culturally homogeneous political spaces and organizational infrastructures for establishing them that were transferable to larger scales of political space and to other domains of culture.

¹⁴ Cf. Anderson 1991: 19: ‘The fall of Latin exemplified a larger process in which the sacred communities integrated by old sacred languages were gradually fragmented, pluralized, and territorialized’.

¹⁵ The coincidence between religious and ethnic boundaries is suggested by the term ‘ethnoreligious’; there is no corresponding combination term denoting the intertwining of nation and religion, or the symbiosis between nation and religion.

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