
CONFLICT AND PEACEBUILDING

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OVERVIEW

Arguably, the most audible expressions of religion are associated with social and political conflicts from civil wars and anticolonial wars of independence and with questions of immigration, toleration, and assimilation in liberal Western democracies. In all these instances, religions are often invoked to justify acts of violence and protest between and within nation-states. Examples include the controversy surrounding the publication of the cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* in 2005; the murder of the Dutch film director Theo Van Gogh in 2004 by a Muslim extremist in Amsterdam; the campaign against same-sex marriages (marriage equality) in the United States; the struggle between Sinhalese Buddhists and Tamils in Sri Lanka; Islamicization campaigns, and mobilization of ethno-religious identities in the Sudan; the tragedy of September 11, 2001; suicide bombings in Palestine/Israel; and the veil controversy in France. These all exemplify the audibility of religion—whether in public debates about the character of

the society, as in France and the United States, or in the dynamics of violent conflict, as in Palestine/Israel, Sri Lanka, and the Sudan. Indeed, to varying degrees, religion sometimes constitutes an integral part of the practice of social protest and civil and international wars. Religion's role is especially obvious when it is invoked to justify acts of violence, such as suicide bombing, and the ritualized executions of such acts. But religion is also evident in generating and challenging conceptions of common identity, such as nationalism.

Because religion undoubtedly plays a role in the dynamics of conflict, it has become clear that religion and religious people (leaders and lay persons) may play a role in peacebuilding as well. This chapter therefore explores religious practices in peacebuilding or conflict transformation. Among other activities, the practice of religious peacebuilding involves engagement in interfaith dialogue, whereby religious individuals across national and ethnic divides discuss the roles of religion in conflict. Such interactions may be transformative in and of themselves, because they often help cultivate interpersonal

relationships, challenge stereotypes and received narratives, and embolden a sense of common humanity. The term “religious peacebuilding” is also applied to describe the work of peacemakers whose motivation to act on behalf of victims and for the implementation of peace and justice derives from their particular understanding of a religious tradition. Likewise, the concept of “religious peacebuilding” may resonate with the activities of religious faithbased and/or non-governmental organizations working toward conflict transformation in various contexts. But to study the role of religion in the transformation of conflict, it is imperative to begin by recognizing and analyzing the role of religion in social and political conflict. Clarifying the role of religion in public life and in the formation and reformation of political and social identities is key to understanding the role of religion in conflict and conflict transformation, or peacebuilding.

RELIGION IN CONFLICT

General Reflections: Is Religion a Cause of Conflict?

The presupposition of the “religious” as an agent of conflict and intolerance is indeed consistent with the basic assumption of an unrevised theory of secularism that assumes the “secular” to signal a neutral space in what the political philosopher John Rawls called “an overlapping consensus” of incompatible “comprehensive doctrines.”¹ Thus, the converse of this perception of public religion as intolerant and conflictual is the supposition that only the neutralization of religion and minimization of its influence on the political life of the community would curtail this insidious dimension of human history. Notably, the liberal secularist tradition, of which Rawls is the preeminent contemporary voice, was first articulated by John Locke and other political philosophers of the Enlightenment on

the backdrop of the bloody European wars of religion, and it has subsequently maintained a profound suspicion toward political and public expressions of religion. On the surface, this suspicion seems to be vindicated by the evidence of what came to be called “resurgent religion” in the post-Cold War era, but it represents an unrevised framework that does not account for the significant role that religion plays in the formation and reformation of the political in contexts of both peace and war. A more nuanced framework for the analysis of religion in conflict and peacebuilding underscores the public nature of religion and the incoherence of the thesis of governmental neutrality—incoherence most pronounced in zones of conflict defined by ethnoreligious national claims and objectives. This emphasis on the ‘publicity’ rather than the ‘interiority’ of religion suggests a conceptual critique of the normative assertions of the thesis of secularism which in its unrevised form argues that modernity has necessitated the privatization and eventual disappearance of religion from the ‘public’ or interchangeably ‘secular’ space of social exchanges. Another variation of the discourse of secularism presupposes the values of individualism, liberties, and tolerance, among other hallmarks of the doctrine of modernity, as being ultimately grounded in “Judeo-Christian” roots, thereby feeding into an Orientalist worldview. Both narratives of secularism, according to political theorist Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, inform and delimit international relations theory and practice, and especially the framing of foreign policy with Muslim-majority countries.²

To understand the role of religion in peacebuilding, one needs to get a clear understanding of the role of religion in conflict. There are different ways to respond to the question concerning the role of religion in conflict. Pivotal to this inquiry, however, is recognition of the centrality of nationalist agenda. In other words,

the analysis of the role of religion in conflict necessitates an exploration of how religious and national identifications interrelate and where they intersect in the ethos and perceptions of nationalist campaigns and mechanisms of socialization. The modern nation is intricately related to religion and culture and to other indices of identity. Benedict Anderson famously explains that the modern nation was *imagined* selectively out of its religious and cultural building blocks.³ In deploying the notion and act of the imagination, Anderson clearly distinguishes himself from the eminent scholar of nationalism Ernest Gellner and from other Marxist analysts who studied the nation as an invention construed as a mechanism for generating social cohesion from above.⁴ Although Gellner's view of nationalism betrays a Marxist functionalist understanding of the nation, Anderson's emphasis on the nation as being *imagined* out of the cultural and religious resources that preceded it shows important continuity and interrelatedness between religious and national conceptions of identity. With that idea, Anderson observes a critical paradox about modern nationalism: its concurrent modernity and perceived antiquity.

Importantly, what the nineteenth-century social theorist Max Weber famously identified as the "elective affinity" between religion, ethnicity, and nationality is not automatic, arbitrary, or inevitable. In his work *Faith in Nation*, which deals with the emergence of nationalisms in Western Europe, Anthony Marx concludes that the processes of erecting centralized state infrastructures, in the three cases of England, France, and Spain, necessitated a policy of a systematic exclusion of what he referred to as the "domestic other."⁵ Often state officials capitalized on pre-existing prejudices and even violent periodical practices, such as pogroms, as a mode of galvanizing a centralized control over the institutions

of the budding pre-modern state. The exclusion of the domestic others, such as the Huguenots in France and the Jews and Muslims in Spain, implies the concurrent articulation of the nation as aligned with a particular religious or ethnic identification. Notwithstanding these exclusionary origins of the modern nation-state, Anthony Marx argues for a necessary progression toward greater inclusivity, as manifested in Western models of democracy. He uses this argument to suggest that contemporary non-Western nation-states with obvious chauvinistic tendencies are not categorically different from Western liberal democracies, but rather only developmentally tardy or at a different stage.

There are obvious problems with this view, not the least of which is the rather paternalistic presuppositions inherent in it. Yet Marx's analysis brings into sharp contrast a few critical points relevant for the present discussion of religion in conflict and peacebuilding: (1) it relates to the connection between conceptions of nationhood and the construction and reconstruction of states and vice versa; (2) it highlights "power" as a crucial variable of analysis in any attempt to understand why certain conceptions of nationhood became dominant and ingrained in particular given contexts; (3) it illustrates how state infrastructures may indeed affect significant and transformative changes to the definition of membership in the nation; and (4) finally and most importantly for our discussion, Marx's historical study focuses on the instrumental role of religion in the construction of nations. Despite this recognition, his analysis intimates a modernist and unreconstructed position on secularism and liberalism that leads him to suggest a teleological progression from an initial reliance on exclusionary religious identities to the eventual diminishing relevance of religious identity as a factor of membership in the modern liberal nation-state.

In his *Chosen Peoples* and other works on nationalism, Anthony Smith, on the other hand, underscores the continuous and persistent role of religion in the formation and reformation of nationalism.⁶ “Nationalism,” according to Smith, is not a modern phenomenon, but a social consciousness whose roots go back to antiquity and to religious sources. Studying the three cases of Egypt, India, and the United States, Scott Hibbard explores the enduring relevance of religion to political practice and the articulation of national consciousness. Consistent with the already discussed critiques of the secularism thesis, Hibbard observes that, in the three cases he scrutinizes, despite its intentional marginalization in the 1920s during the height of secular ideologies, rather than diminishing in importance, religion (especially illiberal and conservative interpretations of it) has gained momentum.⁷ Hibbard explains this phenomenon by looking at religion as “uniquely able to provide a moral sanction for political action.”⁸ Therefore, he concludes that rather than dichotomizing modernity with so-called “fundamentalism,” one needs to analyze the “resurgence” of religion as the development of thoroughly modern interpretations and embodiment of tradition, explicitly suited for modern political contexts.⁹

Drawing on the work of social theorist Max Weber, David Little similarly discusses the interrelation between conceptions of religion, ethnicity, and nationality as multidirectional and complex. In other words, a movement away from the exclusionary founding moments of modern nationalisms toward greater inclusivity does not constitute an inevitable move. Nor ought religion to become irrelevant or of a diminishing importance in the liberal secular state. This intricate and multivariable analysis of religion leads Little to a conclusion about the potential constructive role of religion in conflict transformation: to the same degree that religion

cannot be singled out as a cause of conflict, it can similarly not be dismissed as irrelevant to conflict and peacebuilding:

While I agree that defining religion as inherently violent is unsupportable, I disagree that no good use can be found for the concept. In fact, once we better understand what the idea of religion is good for, the more we can appreciate why the pejorative reading is so misguided. We can also better appreciate, I believe, why opposing “the religious” to “the secular” or to the “liberal nation-state,” is similarly amiss. The correct conclusion is the rather unsurprising one that religion, properly identified and examined, *may or may not* cause violence; it all depends on the circumstances.¹⁰

Specific Cases: A Murder in Amsterdam and Murders in Hebron

Ian Buruma describes Mohammed Bouyeri, the murderer of Theo van Gogh, as a:

. . . twenty-six-year-old Moroccan-Dutchman in a gray raincoat and prayer hat, [who] blasts the filmmaker Theo van Gogh off his bicycle on a dreary morning in Amsterdam. He shot him calmly in the stomach, and after the victim had staggered to the other side of the street, shot him several more times, pulled out a curved machete, and cut his throat—“as though slashing a tire,” according to one witness. Leaving the machete planted firmly in Van Gogh’s chest, he then pulled a smaller knife from a bag, scribbled something on a piece of paper, folded the letter neatly, and pinned it to the body with this second knife . . . It was in fact a long rambling tract, written in Dutch with few quotations in Arabic, calling for a holy war against the unbelievers, and the deaths of a number of people mentioned by name. The tone was that of a death cult, composed in a language dripping with the imaginary blood of infidels and holy martyrs. The Dutch is cor-

rect but stilted, evidence of the author's lack of literary skill perhaps, but also of several layers of awkward translation.¹¹

This chilling description of the murder of Van Gogh points to the role of transnational Islam. It is indeed likely that Bouyeri's indoctrination and exposure to Islamist ideas happened via the Internet and was inspired by various cyber-circulated documented killings of the enemies of Islam.¹² But it also points to the murderer's marginalized social location in Dutch society, and it opens the discussion for complex socioeconomic and cultural exploration of the conditions that led to the execution of such an act of violence. The question that emerges most urgently is whether Bouyeri's allusion to Islam transforms this violent murder into a religious act.

Importantly, the justification of acts of violence through an allusion to biblical or religious warrants is not the domain of Islamists alone. Another example is Baruch Goldstein's massacre in the Cave of the Patriarch (known to Arab-Muslims as the Ibrahimi Mosque) in the West Bank city of Hebron in February 2004 during Ramadan and the Jewish holiday of Purim, which concurred that year. This was a brutal attack on Muslims who prayed at the mosque in the Cave. Baruch Goldstein, an Israeli-American settler and member of the extremist Kach movement, opened fire on worshippers. According to Israeli reports, 29 Palestinians were killed and more than 125 wounded. The majority of Israelis and Jews the world over condemned the attack, explaining that such an act constituted a gross violation of Jewish ethics and values. But some sectors of the population began to celebrate Goldstein as a martyr for a cause. For instance, Rabbi Israel Ariel of Gush Emunim (the settlement movement for Greater Israel) eulogized Goldstein as follows:

The holy martyr Baruch Goldstein is from now on our intercessor in the Heavens. Goldstein didn't act as an individual: He heard the cry of the Land [of Israel] which is being stolen from us day after day by the Muslims. He acted in order to relieve that cry of the Land! . . . The Jews will inherit the Land not by any peace agreement but only by shedding blood.¹³

Authentic versus Inauthentic Religion?

The two murderous episodes instigated by Goldstein and Bouyeri bring into the foreground the question whether religion in those cases is the cause of violence or whether it is merely a rhetorical cloak. Because of the explosive rhetorical audibility of religion in conflicts of various natures, the question of the role of religion in conflict surfaced alongside attempts to locate a connection between religion and violence. Some analysts and observers, such as Charles Kimball in *When Religion Becomes Evil*, have rendered religion as a cause of conflict.¹⁴ Other analysts have dismissed it as epiphenomenal, arguing that conflicts that seemed "religious" were *really* indicative of some other underlying cause. Still others have devoted their attention to whether specific religions are inherently more prone to produce violent behaviors than others. In particular, the principle and practice of *jihad* came into sharp scrutiny for lending itself to public expressions of xenophobia and intolerance in various public contexts. Arguably, in light of the events of September 11, 2001, and other instances of violence committed by Muslims, the Islamic notion of *jihad* has received disproportional attention, vindicating provocative statements such as "Islam has bloody borders," made by the late Harvard's political scientist Samuel Huntington in his famous thesis of "The Clash of Civilizations."¹⁵

Some critics, such as Christopher Hitchens, who identify themselves as anti-religion

militants, draw a direct link between religion and violence and are eager to cite the destructive role of religion in various conflict zones around the globe.¹⁶ Apologists of religion react to such accusations by insisting that manifestations of religious violence are in fact inauthentic and constitute aberrations of the true practice and teachings of the religion. Consequently, the crusades and suicide bombings are classified as distortions rather than expressions of the correct, authentic, and “real” religious orientation. “Real religion,” it is stressed, is good and peaceful. For instance, in the aftermath of the al-Qaeda instigated attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in 2001, King Abdullah II of Jordan said: “What these people stand for is completely against all the principles that Arab Muslims believe in.”¹⁷ Sheikh Mohammed Sayed Tantawi of the Al-Azhar mosque of Cairo similarly condemned the appropriation of Islam by extremist Islamists. Addressing a large gathering in 2003, Sheikh Tantawi argued along the same lines: “Extremism is the enemy of Islam. Whereas, jihad is allowed in Islam to defend one’s land, to help the oppressed. The difference between jihad in Islam and extremism is like the earth and the sky.”¹⁸

The Complex Role of Religion in Conflict: A Non-Reductionist Approach

William Cavanaugh offers a poignant response to those who wish to single out religion as a cause of violence: “The myth of religious violence promotes a dichotomy between *us* in the secular West who are rational and peacemaking, and *them*, the hordes of violent religious fanatics in the Muslim world. *Their* violence is religious, and therefore irrational and divisive. *Our* violence, on the other hand, is rational, peacemaking, and necessary.”¹⁹ This conceptual confusion is the reason why religion has often

come to be associated with conflict and intolerance and interpreted as an obstacle to peace and justice. This interpretation, Cavanaugh underscores, is incoherent because it depends on a confused and unrevised understanding of religion as absolutist, divisive, and irrational, precluding the possibility that “secular” institutions or ideologies may carry the same attributes and embody similar intensity. Such an oversight betrays an unproblematized view of the “religious” and the “secular” as binaries, a view that has been shown by such theorists as Talal Asad, Russell McCutcheon, Timothy Fitzgerald, and others as incoherent. Recognition of the imperative to problematize the unrevised interpretation of religion and secular as antinomies and appreciation of the interrelatedness of what social theorist Max Weber identified as the “elective affinity” between markers of identity—such as nationality, religion, culture, and ethnicity—constitute key elements in any attempt to analyze the role of religion and religious acts and individuals in conflict and peacebuilding. To begin investigating what religion has to do with conflict and peacebuilding, it is important to challenge dominant interpretations of religion as a matter confined to the domains of private belief and choice. Instead, it is imperative to recognize the complex interconnections among identity markers, such as religion, culture, nationality, and ethnicity, and how they play out in the daily life of individuals and groups.

Such analyses, which identify religion or culture as either a cause or a primary obstacle for conflict resolution and transformation, are reductionist, because they overlook the complexity and multidimensionality of social phenomena. Another example of such a reductionist approach to the question of the role of religion in conflict is the critically influential “Clash of Civilizations” thesis previously alluded to, in which Huntington explains the eruption of conflicts in

the aftermath of the Cold War as a function of essential incompatibility between what he classifies as Western and non-Western values and worldviews. Similarly, Mark Juergensmeyer, who distinguished himself as a scholar of religious nationalism and terrorism, views religious nationalism as an ideology or worldview competing with the underlying worldview of the secular nation-state. For Juergensmeyer, religious and secular nationalisms constitute two incompatible “ideologies of order.” Other theorists, such as the economist Paul Collier, identify economic motives and greed as the propelling forces of conflict, thereby rendering religion as an irrelevant variable for the analysis of conflict.²⁰ Yet other analysts of conflict view religion instrumentally, as a vehicle for mobilization on a mass level. Of course, viewing religion as a mobilizing and manipulative force still does not explain *why* the “religious” is so often capable of inciting people into action.

Religion and Nationalism

In his discussion of the conflict in the Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H) region from 1992 to 1995, Michael Sells offers a poignant critique of the instrumental view of religion as a manipulator used by political elites.²¹ He analyzes the use of religious symbols “to create, define, deny, and eliminate a religious other.” He underscores that the “use of religious symbols is not necessarily a function of religious observance or commitment.” But, he adds, “at some point the manipulator of the symbol becomes manipulated by the symbol. Those who start out using religious symbols instrumentally to gain power or other benefits end up becoming servants of those symbols psychologically.”²² What Sells means is that political campaigns that are based on the manipulation of religious symbols depend *socially* on perpetuating divisiveness (that derives from

rigid religious distinctions) in order to vindicate themselves. Such political campaigns also result in economic systems founded on acts of religiously framed ethnic cleansing and are designed to perpetuate a system that privileges one particular ethnoreligious group. Legally, the ethnoreligious campaign needs to continue selectively unleashing religious and cultural symbols that enable a legal defense and justification of gross violations of human rights and its engagement in illegal acts and war crimes. Hence, in the interest of furthering a political agenda, the manipulators of religious symbols become captive to such symbols.²³

Sells explains that religious militant ideologies do not erupt onto the scene spontaneously, nor do they generate themselves. In fact, they reflect prolonged processes of intentional cultivation. In the case of B&H, he contends, “It took several years of instrumentalization by people like Franjo Tudjman in Croatia, Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia, and militants within B&H. These leaders instigated violence, used the media to create an atmosphere of fear, recalled past atrocities, and made blanket accusations about their imminent reoccurrence in order to generate the symbolic paradigms of conflict-identity.”²⁴ Sells tells how Serb militants retrieved an ideology of “Christoslavism” that was born of Serb revolutionary engagement with Ottoman rule during the nineteenth century. This ideology of Serb Christoslavism is grounded in the narrative of the Serb Prince Lazar, who gained the status of a martyr as a result of his death at the Battle of Kosovo in 1389 against the Turks. In an effort to articulate Serb opposition to the Ottomans in the nineteenth century, the Battle of Kosovo came to be known as the “Serb Golgotha,” making an obvious and emotive allusion to the supposed biblical site of the crucifixion of Jesus near Jerusalem. “Lazar,” according to Sells’s account, “was explicitly portrayed as a Christ figure in the

art and literature, often surrounded by twelve knight disciples (one of whom gave the battle plans to the Turks), ministered by a Mary Magdalena figure.”²⁵ These portrayals of the Battle of Kosovo were revived in the 1980s, upon the crumbling of Yugoslavia. Sells tells the story of the official six hundredth anniversary of the death of Prince Lazar, celebrated in a passion play in 1989 at the actual site of the fateful Battle of Kosovo. Since the construal of Christoslavism in the nineteenth century, the commemoration of the martyrdom of Lazar has become the focal point of St. Vitus Day. In the following excerpt, Sells contends that the commemorative event of 1989 culminated a process of reconceptualizing Serb nationalism and provided a framework for militancy:

Various elements then flowed together at the 1989 Vidovdan commemoration. Primordial time (the Serb Golgotha), sacred place (the Serb Jerusalem), historical memory (the horrors of World War II), and contemporary fear (the alleged Albanian genocide against Serbs in Kosovo) merged to create a discourse of fear and anger more powerful than any of its parts. Through that period and after it, the Serb Orthodox Church has been united in supporting the religious national project.²⁶

One can identify similar dynamics on the Croatian front. The International Criminal Tribunal explained the Croatian policy of “ethnic cleansing” of non-Catholic communities in Herzegovina as a function of a criminal conspiracy instigated by Tudjman (the president of Croatia), Gojko Susak (his defense minister), and Mate Boban (a leader of what is now B&H). Sells argues that the criminal indictment needs to be supplemented with an account of how religious leaders and symbols contributed to generating divisiveness and ethnoreligious conflicts. This amounted to distinguishing among three

different groups and construing them as ancient and inevitable enemies. It was also translated into practice: killings, expulsions, and demolition of the others’ cultural heritage, including sacred spaces.²⁷

Sells concludes that “religious symbols were used not only to define and deny the religious other but also to homogenize the religious self. Croat Catholics who refused to participate in the militia were persecuted or marginalized. Croat Catholic identity was purified by the myth of stable Catholic identity over the centuries (as opposed to historical reality of continual conversions back and forth throughout the history of B&H), by the construction and purification of a Croatian language (as opposed to the common language in the area that had been known as Serbo-Croatian), and by the destruction of evidence of Catholic Croat participation with Islam, Judaism, and Serb Orthodox in the construction of a common civilization.”²⁸

The case of B&H is by no means unique. Other zones of conflict have exhibited similar patterns and dynamics that resulted in intentional policies that promote ethnoreligious supremacy. This is the case in Sudan’s systematic Islamicization and Arabization campaigns, instigated by the Khartoum government. Likewise, in Sri Lanka, the *Mahavamsa*—a Pali text that articulates the vocation of the Sinhala people as the torchbearers of Buddhist teaching—is likewise interpreted to reify the contemporary Sinhala-Tamil dispute. Eva Neumaier explains that such texts as the *Mahavamsa* show “an interdependency between the continuation of the Buddhist teaching, a certain ethnic group, and the land this group occupies whereby they also erase the existence of other ethnic and religiocultural communities within the same spatial-historical continuum. Thus, these texts provide a rhetoric that offers itself as a voice of ethnoreligious fundamentalism.”²⁹

Exclusivist interpretations of the nation and perceptions of an existential threat to the group may lead to acts of spontaneous violence, such as the bombing of such religious spaces as mosques, or structural violence, such as the systemic discrimination of minority groups. Although the root causes of ethnoreligious national conflicts are not generally theological or religious, religious spaces tend to transform into highly charged zones that are easily ignited. It is no accident that conflicts often erupt in religious spaces and on religious occasions (such as the previously described commemorations of the death of Prince Lazar). For example, Ariel Sharon's provocative visit to the Dome of the Rock, on the eve of the Jewish New Year in 2000, ignited the emergence of the Second Intifada, or Palestinian uprising, against Israeli military occupation of the Palestinian territories. Sharon legitimized

his visit on the ground that the disputed space occupied a crucial location in the narrative of Jewish national self-determination, and thus he claimed, despite protests, to have a natural right to undertake his symbolic visit. Although Sharon's visit did not cause the eruption of the Second Intifada, it provided an explosive occasion that ignited a cycle of devastating violence; and although the sacredness of the Dome of the Rock is relevant to both Palestinian and Israeli conceptions of nationhood, it would be misleading to reduce the various complexities of the conflict to a discussion over theological divergences. Palestinian youths who went to the streets in response to Sharon's provocative visit would not be pacified, nor would subsequent Palestinian struggles be alleviated, through a theological settlement.

However, the fact that such spaces as the Dome of the Rock, or such occasions as St.



The Dome of the Rock atop Temple Mount in Old Jerusalem. Holy to Jews as the site of two ancient temples, the structure atop the Temple Mount (known as Dome of the Rock) has also been a religious site for Islam since the seventh century. (Credit: Wikimedia Commons: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/34/Template_Mount_and_Dome_of_the_Rock.jpg)

Vitus Day, can generate explosive acts of violence suggests their relevance to the dynamics of conflict. In some instances, national (secular) spaces, such as the site of the Battle of Kosovo, transform into spaces of sacred significance because of their location in a sacred narrative of belonging. Such sacred national spaces may be as explosive as explicit religious spaces such as the Dome of the Rock. Helpful for this discussion is John Paul Lederach's productive distinction between what he calls an *episode* of conflict and its *epicenter*. The transformation of conflict, Lederach argues, necessitates addressing both the conflictual "episode" and the underlying patterns of relationships that generated it.³⁰

Another pertinent example of the intricate relation between religious symbols and chauvinistic interpretations of nationhood is the cultivation by Hindu nationalists of the ideology of Hindutva ("Hinduness"). Hindutva conflates Indian and Hindi identities and thus treats them as synonymous. The implication of this ideological stance is a discriminatory and bellicose approach toward non-Hindi Indians. The concept of Hindutva was first developed by the poet Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883–1957), as a rhetorical counter to British colonialism. Subsequent Hindutva formulations came to view India as both a homeland and a holy land, where Christian and Muslim inhabitants are antagonistically categorized as foreigners or invaders.³¹ This exclusivist and chauvinistic ideological position, which has been reflected to a certain degree in the platforms of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), carries profound implications for the practice of Indian Hindu nationalists. In 1992 such rhetoric and socialization onto a notion of Hindi supremacy undergirded the tragic demolition, by Hindutva-inspired activists, of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya in the state of Uttar Pradesh. Hindu nationalists legitimated this act of demolition by arguing that the mosque had

been built on and thus violated the site of the birth of the Hindu god Rama. Hindutva draws legitimization for the engagement in violent acts from the *Bhagavad-Gita's* stories of revenge and killing.

Likewise, Jewish settlers in the West Bank legitimize their occupation of Palestinian land and the displacement of Palestinians from their homes through an appeal to the biblical promise of the land to Abraham and the Israelites. To a certain degree, secular Zionism has drawn its legitimacy—as a national project and as a movement of colonization—from the biblical past, as it had reverberated for millennia in the memories, prayers, histories, and cultures of Jews in the diasporas. The words "next year in Jerusalem," recited by the religious Jew, resonate powerfully in the popular Jewish imagination, and the possibility of fulfilling this aspiration of return is nothing less than the fulfillment of a messianic moment. Accordingly, the settlement of the land of Palestine was described as a "return" to the land, and, as such, in the eyes of secular Zionists, it was a redemptive return—one that redeemed the passive character of the diasporic Jew through a process of political self-determination.

Even though the dominant Zionist paradigm has explained this act of return and ingathering of the exiles in the land and the establishment of the modern Israeli nation-state in secular terms—as amounting to the normalization of the Jewish people (making it into a nation like any other nation)—it has nonetheless (not forgetting Smith, Anderson, and Marx's analyses of the role of religion in nationalism)—remained intricately linked to the religious imagination, as a resource for both legitimization and mobilization. When the possibility of settling the Jews in alternative territories, such as Uganda, was dismissed by the Zionist Congress, it was because, for the Zionist movement to reach a mass

momentum and popular support, the territory of destination had to be Palestine, a place that has resonated so powerfully in the Jewish popular imagination. This process of normalization is reflective of the internalization of the prevalent anti-Semitic treatment of Jews as a problem and Jewish life as “sickly” in the Europe from which Zionism had emerged as a movement for a national self-actualization. The normalization entailed reinterpreting the theological concepts of return and the ingathering of the exiles in the land of Palestine as events to occur in historical rather than meta-historical time and as human rather than as messianic enterprise.

Israeli secularism reinterprets the theologically laden concepts of return and redemption in the land to mean a physical redemption from an existential threat and a history of recurrent persecutions, as well as a reasserting of full Jewish personhood through a political self-determination. And it reads its Jewish identity as a “cultural” or “ethnic” one. Nevertheless, religious Zionism has reclaimed what it has interpreted as the full theological implications of the Zionist doctrine. Following the events of the War of 1967, in particular, which brought about the occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as well as the eventual annexation of East Jerusalem to the Israeli state, religious Zionism has gained saliency. The biblical commandment to settle the land, especially the sacred spaces of Judea and Samaria, has overridden all the other commandments of Judaism. Religious Zionists have perceived of their reality as constituting an extraordinary and messianic time, and thus acts of violence, including the displacement of the indigenous Palestinian population, may be vindicated. The cases of Serb and Croat nationalism, the religious Zionist settlement movement, and that of Hindu nationalism illustrate how perceptions of nationalism influence the behavior of nationalists and how the selective interpretation

of the resources of religion and tradition may lead to militant violent acts. Most pertinently, we may identify how the framing and perception of territory as a holy land—to which one has birth rights—legitimizes one’s attempt at reclaiming that land (regardless of the facts on the ground or others’ possibly contradictory claims). Such a profound sense of ownership inspires and validates acts of violence. Notably, the sacralization of territory and its positing as a unique, cherished, and worthy of sacrifice are integral features of any form of nationalism—be it French, American, or Zionist. The difference among those instances of nationalism is merely a matter of gradation.

The view of the land as a sacred territory, with unambiguous conceptions of ownership, is closely related to ethno-religiocentric interpretations of citizenship and membership in the polity. It implies a partial treatment of one group on all levels of sociopolitical and economic life. This inequity entails policies that also privilege the symbols and narratives of one group over and against the collective identities of other inhabitants of the land. Even though the religious dimensions of national identity may be sublimated and secularized, particular interpretations of the resources of religion clearly may provide impetus for engagement in ultra-nationalist activities, such as the settlement of the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967 and the deadly and violent attacks in India.

The observation earlier of the persistent role of religion in the formation and reformation of conceptions of the nation suggests, however, that there is nothing qualitatively different about explicit religious interpretations of nationalism. Instead, religious and secular forms of nationalism ought to be viewed and analyzed along a continuum. In the case of Israel, religious concepts, such as return and redemption, and religious narratives, such as the ingathering

of the exiles in the land, underscore the idea that, rather than labeling religion as a cause of violence, clashing with the secular liberal worldview of benign nationalism, it is of great importance to articulate first of all how religion and/or group-specific narratives interrelate with nationalist agenda and, second, to determine the possibility of reframing or reconceptualizing this interrelation in the interest of greater peace and justice. One way of stressing this point is to analyze why critiques of an existing regime often draw on religious currency, as in the cases of the Israeli Shas party and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. The argument is that the more chauvinistic the perception of one's claims and narratives is, the greater is the potential for violent acts and the greater is the likelihood that such acts will be legitimized through appeals to religious symbols, vocabularies, and narratives.

This point is relevant to our discussion because it indicates, first, a complex understanding of the role of religion in conflict. The view of nationalism and religion as intricately connected lends itself to a non-reductionist framework of analysis: religion is not dismissed simply as epiphenomenal or rendered as a cause of conflict in its rejection of the secular state and secular values. But, rather, religion bears directly and immediately on the daily practice of members of the nation, as illustrated in our brief exposition of Hindutva and the theology of Jewish settlers and, to lesser but still important degrees, in the so-called secular interpretation of the *nation*. This is especially the case when national identity is defined primarily in terms of a specific ethnicity or religion, as in Serbia, Croatia, Israel, Sri Lanka, or Sudan.

Even though, in the case of the Israeli settlers, religion is explicitly cited as a resource for the justification of violent acts—that may be understood as an extraordinary necessity to respond to perceptions of an extra-ordinary time

(messianic time)—nationalism also inspires and necessitates elaborate ritual practices that generate a sense of social cohesiveness in ordinary time. Michael Billig, for instance, coined the notion of “banal nationalism,” which denotes the indispensable role of sublimated everyday practices and images, such as that of the national flag. Benedict Anderson discusses the role of museums and war memorials as sacred national places of pilgrimage. Homi Bhabha discusses the ritualistic reenactment of heroic moments in the nation's history—all these venues provide modes of socializing and instilling certain attitudes and perceptions in the very sense of selfhood of individual members of the society.

Often such attitudes and overarching conceptions of membership are analyzed as “civil religion.” Next, we explore how and why the networks of groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Shas, may challenge how cultural and religious resources are utilized in the construction of civil religion and may offer alternative formulations.

Religion and Social Protest

The preceding discussion of the interrelationship between conceptions of nationhood and religious markers of identification exemplifies the role of religion in the construction of modern nationalisms. Because religion has constituted an instrumental aspect of nation-making it might, unsurprisingly, also play an important role in challenging the premises of an existing nation-state and in affecting its practices. The language of protest against the structures and authorities of the secular modern nation-state thus often assumes and draws on religious vocabularies. This is true in the case of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. The Brotherhood has articulated a clear critique of Egyptian secularism, by confronting the selective and

instrumental use of Islam in the construction of Egyptian nationalism by the secularist elites and by providing social services and a network of support for impoverished strata that had frequently been overlooked by the authorities. Islam therefore has provided resources for articulating grievances and a language of protest and critique of the excesses and injustices identified as endemic to a regime that nominally claims an Islamic identity. Furthermore, the network of mosques and community centers has enabled institutional organizing and the building of a support system, providing services to sectors of the society that secular governments have overlooked. This model has been replicated in other contexts, where the resources of religion provide the main currency for counterhegemonic critique and where the institutional infrastructure and spaces of religious communities lend themselves for organizing and mobilization of protest, as well as for the implementation of social services.

Frequently, the charitable networks of religious institutions provide social services when governmental infrastructures fail to deliver. In Israel, the case of the educational network of the Shas political party mirrors the model of the Egyptian Brotherhood. Although it is financed by the Israeli government, the party runs its distinct and a separate educational system, where it incubates loyalties to a particular sectoral identity and cultivates a potentially subversive social force. Shas is a rabbinically led mass movement that runs on an ethnic ticket, promoting the interests and grievances of Mizrahi Israeli Jews (Israelis who can trace their ancestry, prior to the establishment of the modern state of Israel, to Arab and Islamic countries). The two cases of the Brotherhood in Egypt and of the Shas network in Israel illustrate the processes of what may be called counter-socialization, which may result in the eventual transformation of the status quo in

their respective societies. This process of counter-socialization involves the centralization of the religious life over and against the secularist values of the mainstream. In both instances, the movements challenge their respective regimes' ambiguous commitment to a secular nationalism that draws selectively on religious and cultural allegiances and affects a change in social attitudes toward religion and politics.

This process of counter-socialization occurs in a space that the Israeli historian Emmanuel Sivan calls "the enclave culture." Sivan explains that the ubiquity of secular political systems and societal values generates, in certain religious communities, a sense of being exiled in one's own lands. He cites, for instance, a verse from a popular American Protestant revival hymn—"stranger[s] here, within a foreign land"—the notion of being in "a new Babylonian exile" (the words of the reconstructionist thinker Gary North); and the declaration by an Indian Muslim, Maulana Maududi, and of the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb, of secular Islamic nationalisms and societies as constituting a state of *jahiliyya*, referring to the state of ignorance in pre-Islamic pagan Arabia.³² In the 1980s, the notion of being exiled in one's own home also comes to the fore in Islamic contexts: Islam is declared to be "in exile (*ghurba*) in its own lands, much like it was in Arabia when Muhammad had to flee pagan and hostile Mecca for Medina."³³ Then, just as in the case of Muhammed's *hijra*, or exile, to Medina, the contemporary Muslim also needed to withdraw into the social enclave. This space also distinguishes itself from the broader society linguistically and often exhibits a particular dress code, such as the one observed in Jewish Haredi (orthodox) communities, for instance.

Although the Brotherhood and the Shas party may be classified as domestic agents for domestic transformation of the society and the role of religion therein, religious movements,

individuals, and ideas may affect the dynamics of international conflict as well. Often, intra-national configurations and questions of social justice correspond with the patterns of international conflict. In a study of the cases of Sudan/Nigeria, Israel/Palestine, Lebanon, Tibet, and Sri Lanka that were undertaken under the auspices of the U.S. Institute of Peace, ethicist and scholar of international conflict David Little identified a correlation between an ethnocentric or religio-centric definition of citizenship and nationality and a proclivity to engage in violent conflicts. In other words, the more state practices are exclusivist and illiberal, the more the likelihood for violent conflict increases. One way to measure the degree of exclusivity of a nation-state is to study its treatment of religious and cultural minorities. Hence, despite the essential illiberality of the institution of the modern nationstate, some instances of nationalism exhibit greater illiberality than others. Often, as in the case of Serbia and Croatia, national exclusivity is articulated through a chauvinistic interpretation of religious and cultural memories and traditions.

The point stressed in our previous discussion of the social phenomenon of nationalism is that nationalism—even in its secularist variety—does not only constitute an analogue to religion (a civil religion) but is also continuously (yet to varying degrees of intensity) interconnected with the religious, with the ethnic and cultural imagination, and with identity indices and memories. This is especially the case in contexts where national identity is defined primarily through ethnoreligious claims, such as those underscored in the ideologies of Zionism, Christoslavism, and Hindutva. So far, the focus of this chapter has not been the benign, conservative, and banal practices designed to socialize the members of a nation-state into a general conception of the good, but rather the violent and militant interpretations of nationalism and

the types of action that they may entail. Because the complex role of religion in conflict is now underscored, let us turn to a discussion of the role of religion in peacebuilding and conflict transformation.

RELIGION AND PEACEBUILDING

The Ambivalence of the Sacred

Indeed, religious vocabularies, narratives, and claims have been associated with violent conflicts around the world. Yet, religious teachings and religious authorities and individuals have constituted a central, although overlooked aspect of the practice of peacebuilding and conflict transformation. This observation that religion may be not only a factor in conflict, but also a possible source for conflict transformation and peacebuilding, is clearly articulated in Scott Appleby's work *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*.³⁴ According to Appleby, religion can inspire militant violence and nonviolence to similar degrees of intensity. A developing field of works on the role of religion in peacebuilding agrees with this thesis of the ambivalence of the sacred, and this study undertakes efforts to retrieve resources within various traditions that could inspire peaceful actions and provide an impetus for peacebuilding and reconciliation. The field of religious peacebuilding focuses on the retrieval of such resources from within particular traditions that may affect societal change and conflict transformation. For example, some analysts, such as Mohammed Abu Nimer, articulate a tradition of nonviolent problem-solving in Islam as well as study the efficacy of the practice of interfaith dialogue as a venue for conflict transformation, especially in the Middle East.³⁵ The practice of interfaith dialogue has entailed the creation of spaces that are conducive for different religious individuals to express how their various interpretations of religion relate to ethnoreligious

national conflicts. Scholars such as Lisa Schirch focus on the transformative potential of rituals involved in efforts to mediate conflicts. Schirch underscores the importance of ritual and symbol in the practice of peacebuilding itself. She argues that “ritual both marks and assists in the process of change. It confirms and transforms people’s worldviews, identities, and relationships with others.”³⁶ She adds that “Both socializing and transforming rituals are needed for peacebuilding. All cultures have existing, traditional rituals for building relationships, limiting violence, and solving problems. While these traditional rituals often are socializing and preserve the status quo, sometimes peacebuilders can help revive or draw on existing rituals within a culture that can help set the stage for transformational peacebuilding activities and processes.”³⁷ Ritual in peacebuilding can accordingly facilitate the reframing of problems, transform of worldview, identity, relationships, and social structures; generate joint identities that bridge divisiveness at the heart of conflicts; and rehumanize people.³⁸ Religious people and traditions can play a significant role in such processes. This insight also undergirds the vision and practice of the Interfaith Youth Core, founded by Ebo Patel. This movement focuses on cooperation among people of different faiths and traditions in working toward the common good, and on the capacity of young people to lead the way in a multicultural context such as the North American one. Patel, as suggested in an article in the *New York Times*, views his project of interfaith cooperation as an antidote to the divisiveness and radicalism that may also be attributed to the ethos and realities of multiculturalism, with its often characteristic ghettos and segregated communities.³⁹ A more global outlook on the question of religion, conflict, and peacebuilding is attempted in an important work by Monica Duffy Toft, Daniel Philpott, and Timothy Shah.

In their *God’s Century: Resurgent Religion and Global Politics*, the authors empirically study the role of religious actors in conflict and peacebuilding. They conclude that religious actors are “back” and are indeed crucial for setting political agendas worldwide. The authors further underscore that the degree of institutional separation from political structures correlates with the ability of religious actors and institutions to facilitate processes of peacebuilding and conflict transformation (especially in moments of post mass-atrocity).

Religion may be viewed as an important factor in peacebuilding and conflict transformation on three critical levels. First, it motivates and inspires people to act in a certain way that promotes peace and nonviolence. Second, its institutional infrastructures can lend themselves to grass-roots organizing and to cooperation with other nongovernmental networks. Likewise, the prestige of religious leaderships and lay actors may bestow a certain aura of legitimacy on political and institutional processes of post-conflict reconciliation and healing. Third, religion and tradition provide ample resources for reinterpreting ethno-religious definitions of nationhood that result in exclusionary and discriminatory state practices and non-state aggressions as well.

Religion and the Reinterpretation of Resources: Specific Examples

HINDUISM

Rajmohan Gandhi discusses the resources for peacebuilding found within Hinduism. He explains that the Hindu teachings in the *Bhagavad Gita* may be interpreted in a bellicose manner, emphasizing the rigid boundaries between antagonistic identities, but also in a manner that enables transcending those boundaries. The Hindu teachings tell the story of the warrior Arjuna, who is convinced by the Krishna

to deemphasize the self and personal gains and subsequently engage in fighting out of a selfless duty. Although the *Gita* has provided grounds for the legitimization of the caste system in India and of the ideology of Hindutva, along with the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*, it has also supplied resources—such as the notions of *ahimsa* (nonviolence), *kshama* (forgiveness), and *shanti* (peace)—for nonviolent struggles aimed at the transformation of underlying injustices. For example, the *Atharva Veda* recites the devastation of wars and an aspiration for reconciling with the stranger.

Another source of reconciliatory inspiration is found in the person of Asoka, who ruled India in the third century BCE and who struggled with the consequences of warfare. Suanada Y. Shastri and Yajneshwar S. Shastri explain that “the concept of *ahimsa* in Hindu tradition, includes two ethical ideals: one is the pursuit of the good of humanity (*lokahita*) and the other is devotion to the good of all living beings and the environment (*sarvabhutahita*).”⁴⁰ *The Aitereya Upanishad* stresses the unity of all existence and underscores the importance of overcoming the “sense of duality or separateness” that is at the root of “hatred and violence.” “The essence of the Vedantic notion is that the Brahman, the “pure-consciousness,” is inseparable from its manifestations. To hurt or violate any creature or object in nature is to hurt or violate Brahman itself. This notion of fundamental sameness is the basis for nonviolent action towards all.”⁴¹ Likewise, the Hindu epic of the *Mahabharata* explains the principle of *ahimsa*: “Action which is against one’s own desires should also not be done to others. One should never do that to another which one regards as injurious to one’s own self. Therefore, one should treat all others as one’s own self.”⁴² Efforts for reconciliation and conflict transformation also draw on Indian Bhakti poetry, which emerged in the fifteenth

century. This genre of Indian poetry, according to Rajmohan Gandhi, emboldens “Hinduism’s reconciling, egalitarian, and practical strands. Announcing that Hindus and Muslims worshipped the same God, who valued character more than caste and conduct more than ritual, this poetry fosters Hindu-Muslim accommodation at the grass roots. Loved to this day . . . Bhakti poetry continues to describe the Other as a soul of equal value. Activists for pluralism and peace tap regularly into it.”⁴³

One celebrated case is exemplified by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi’s nonviolent resistance to British colonialism and proactive encouragement and respect of India’s pluralistic landscape. Gandhi’s interpretations of the resources of the tradition are antithetical to those central to Hindutva and to the resultant claims for Hindi supremacy. To this effect, Rajmohan Gandhi exclaims: “Gandhi may also be said to have helped liberate Hinduism from the Indian earth. Offering the exact opposite of the ‘homeland-holy land’ thesis, he helped make Hinduism a matter of the soul rather than of soil, something from India but not chained to India.”⁴⁴ Gandhi’s interpretation of the resources of Hinduism underpinned the basic commitment of the Indian Constitution to equality, regardless of religion or caste. Shastri and Shastri explain that, “For Gandhi, *ahimsa* meant a transformation of the heart that would result in the freedom of his country and the creation of a casteless society.”⁴⁵

The peace scholar and activist David Cortright discusses the immense transnational impact that Gandhi had exerted on the U.S. peace movement. He writes in *Gandhi and Beyond: Nonviolence for an Age of Terrorism*: “The unique approach of Gandhi was his emphasis on mass action . . . It was Gandhi who discovered in South Africa and India that masses of people could engage in organized nonviolence.

By demonstrating the power of collective disobedience as a force for political change, he turned mass noncooperation into an instrument of political struggle against oppression.⁴⁶ Gandhi's legacy has also exerted profound influence on the religious pacifist community: the Quakers, Mennonites, and Brethren. "These pacifist churches," Cortright comments, "were naturally attracted to Gandhi and his use of nonviolence as a means of social change for justice."⁴⁷ The transferability of Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence to different political and religious contexts points to the internal diversity of religious traditions, as well as to the inspiring and motivating force that one's religious orientation can play in generating a mass movement of change.

BUDDHISM

Buddhist teachings also lend themselves to the practice of nonviolent resistance and to an engagement in the processes of conflict transformation and peacebuilding. Christopher Queen notes that among the many resources that Buddhism offers for nonviolent forms of peacemaking are the Four Noble Truths (Pali, *ariya sacca*), which underscore the demand to refrain from inflicting pain on other living beings (the principle of *ahimsa*); *brahmaviharas*, or the practice of compassion; *anatta*, or the doctrines of selflessness; *paticcasamuppada* (interdependence); and *sunyata* (non-dualism); as well as the *bodhisattvas*, or the paradigm of enlightened beings who also liberate others from sufferings; the *cakravartin*, or "wheel-turners"; and the *dhammaraja*, or moral leaders who conquer minds and hearts by their virtues rather than physical force.⁴⁸ The *Sutta Nipata*—one of the earliest records of Buddhist literature—tells the story of how the Buddha transformed the bellicose meaning of the "wheelturner," as a symbol associated with Indra (lord of the gods who is purported to had

conquered the universe with his war chariot), to a "metaphor of nonviolence—a Peace Wheel."⁴⁹

Like other Indian religions, Buddhism emphasizes the individual dimension of peace. The social ramifications are rendered secondary and dependent upon the process of individual transformation. Eva Neumaier contends that the karmic logic in classical Buddhism may inhibit social and political activism and constitute an obstacle for the role of Buddhism in conflict transformation. Neumaier expresses this problem with urgency: "The tendency to see social problems only as the result of karma, and, thus, to be addressed exclusively within the realm of individual responsibility, seems to have been one important obstacle for Buddhist societies in recognizing inequality, poverty, social strife, and war as moral obligations awaiting concrete solutions."⁵⁰ Furthermore, the Buddhist understanding of peace as primarily a "mental quality to be cultivated through meditation and not as a social and ethical responsibility is one of the obstacles that prevented traditional Buddhist institutions and their members from recognizing the potential of Buddhist ethics for building harmony and peace between different social groups and nations."⁵¹

Although the teachings of the Buddha have viewed *karma* as profoundly individual and have focused on the attainment of personal enlightenment through a process that entailed an act of withdrawal from society, a thread within Buddhism, called "engaged Buddhism," has underscored the social importance of these teachings. Queen relates that "[m]any engaged Buddhists have come to believe that much suffering in the world, particularly of the kind related to poverty, injustice, and war, is caused by the ignorance, cravings, and cruelty of persons other than the sufferer." He also underscores that engaged Buddhists practice nonviolence, generosity, lovingkindness, and selflessness—not in order to

attain individual nirvana, but “out of the sense that their deep relatedness to others . . . obligates them to try to relieve that suffering, and that the net effect of such efforts will be a better world for all beings, human, animal, and vegetable.”⁵² Engaged Buddhism therefore focuses on the transformation of structural and cultural violence through public acts of protest and efforts of mass mobilization. Two celebrated Nobel Peace Prize laureates exemplify this form of engaged Buddhism and the reinterpretation or transformation of the ancient Indian tradition of sacred warfare: His Holiness the Dalai Lama of Tibet and Aung San Suu Kyi of Burma.

The cultivation of the nonviolent orientation in Buddhism requires rigorous self-training that enables overcoming hatred, greed, and delusion. The underlying assumption is that the attainment of inner peace also affects outer peace. This process entails traversing through the Eightfold Path—from the cultivation of *right views*, to the establishment and internalization of foundational *ethical practice* that indicate an ability to apply the right attitude to daily situations. This is what the Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh means when he discusses the notion of “performing peace.” Thich Nhat Hanh, one of the most celebrated representatives of “engaged Buddhism,” explains in the following excerpt why he and other young Buddhists were compelled to risk and sometimes sacrifice their lives during the war in Vietnam:

We tried to tell people our perception of the situation: that we wanted to stop the fighting, but the bombs were so loud. Sometimes we had to burn ourselves alive to get the message across, but even then the world could not hear us . . . We wanted reconciliation, we did not want a victory . . . Reconciliation is to understand both sides, to go to one side and describe the suffering being endured by the other side,

and then to go to the other side and describe the suffering being endured by the first side.⁵³

Thich Nhat Hanh’s form of Buddhism is rooted in an understanding of the danger of accepting any doctrine or ideology as absolute. The teachings of his order of Interbeing, or the Tiep Hien, stresses the infallibility of any truth claim, including Buddhist ones: “Do not think the knowledge you presently possess is changeless, absolute truth. Avoid being narrow-minded and bound to present views. Learn and practice nonattachment from views in order to be open to receive others’ viewpoints.”⁵⁴ Integral to Thich Nhat Hanh’s notion of “engaged Buddhism” is the impulse to confront and transform social ills and conditions of injustice. Eva Neumaier explains that this approach suggests an alternative and a challenge to classical interpretations of the Buddhist imperative—to be liberated from all forms of attachment, in order to attain enlightenment or *nirvana*—this is the ideal of *arhant*, which may lead to social and/or political quietism and to a general acquiescence with forms of social injustice. In contrast, the ideal of *bodhisattva* underscores empathy and compassion with the other. A general commitment to transform the suffering of the other may subsequently imply a delay of individual *nirvana* and social activism.

Religion, Religious Institutions, and the Religious Peacemaker

JUDAISM

A Jewish rabbi and practitioner/scholar of conflict resolution, Marc Gopin identifies the imperative to confront and therapeutically engage with the experiences of “loss” in the contexts of violent conflicts as one that is central to the practice of peacebuilding. He subsequently suggests integrating Jewish mourning practices

into a theory of conflict resolution. Specifically, he introduces the Jewish ritual of *aveilus* as an integral dimension of the practice of conflict transformation. *Aveilus* is the word referring to the Jewish mourning ritual practice, which includes the reciting of special prayers and periodic active individual and collective/communal remembering of the loss. *Aveilus*, according to Gopin, may be applied as a framework for post-trauma healing. In his attempt to develop a distinctly Jewish approach to the role of religion in peacebuilding, Gopin cites the Golden Rule, as articulated in Leviticus 19:18: “Do not take vengeance, or a bear a grudge. And you must love your neighbor as yourself, I am the eternal God.” Gopin interprets this verse to mean that self-love antecedes respect and love to the enemy, or the “other.” Hence, the practice of conflict transformation may imply a profound introspective work on oneself. Such introspection, Gopin adds, is especially pertinent to process a history of being a minority that has been discriminated against and persecuted.

Gopin’s active role as a religious voice of reconciliation in Palestine/Israel also underscored the imperative to honor the human being, regardless of the predicament in which one is entangled. This enabled him to engage in conversations with individuals labeled as the “enemy” and to recognize the other’s sentiment of humiliation and loss.⁵⁵ In his attempt to devise a distinctly Jewish approach to peacemaking, Gopin extrapolates what he views as central rabbinic values: “involvement in the suffering of others,” “taking responsibility to heal that suffering,” a commitment to “social justice” as a religious commandment or *mitsvah*, “constructive social criticism,” an awareness of “customs of civility,” “discourage excessive wealth,” and an internalization of a rabbinic understanding of conflict resolution as “a social *mitsvah*” (the *mitsvah* spelled out in Psalms 34:15: *bakesh*

shalom ve’radfehu, or “seeking peace and pursuing it”).⁵⁶

Another peacemaker in the Jewish-Israeli scene, Yehezkel Landau has internalized this explicitly Jewish orientation to the resolution or transformation of the conflict. He explains his maturation as a peacemaker as a consequence of his particular experience of Judaism: “I felt that, as a Jew who identified with the Zionist homecoming, as an interfaith educator, and as someone committed to seeking inclusive justice and the reconciliation of wounded, angry embittered hearts, I might be able to contribute something to the alleviation of people’s suffering.”⁵⁷ Judaism provides a motivating force and an inspiration for Landau’s work as a peacemaker in Israel-Palestine. He examines his humanistic approach to Judaism against the realities on the ground, and this examination has compelled him to act in a certain way to promote peace—in an active manner through interfaith engagements and by opening a Jewish-Arab educational center.

For Gopin, Judaism provides this basic framework and motivation, but also, in devising his theory of conflict resolution, he draws on specific Jewish practices and traditions as concrete references for a contemporary adaptation for modern peacebuilding and conflict transformation. He contends that the rabbinic commitment to peacemaking draws on the figure of Aaron, the High Priest and the brother of Moses. Aaron has come to symbolize the paradigmatic peacemaker in midrashic literature. For example, in *Avot of Rabbi Nathan* it reads:

And thus when two men were in a conflict, Aaron would go and sit with one of them. He would say to him: My son, look at your friend . . . he is tearing at his heart and ripping his clothing. He says, “Woe is me, how can I lift my eyes and see my friend. I am ashamed before him, for it is I who wronged him. And he [Aaron] would stay with him until he

removed all of the jealous rage from his heart. And Aaron would then go to the other man, and say [the same thing]. And when the two would finally meet, they would hug and kiss each other.⁵⁸

Gopin underscores the utmost importance of the mediating role played by Aaron to the process of conflict transformation and reconciliation. He writes: “[a] key element here is the humility and even self-abnegation of the intermediary . . . Aaron prepares the parties for a crucial and difficult stage of conflict resolution or, more specifically, reconciliation, which usually involves swallowing a little pride . . . This . . . is a crucial psychological juncture for conflict resolution.”⁵⁹ Gopin consequently models the profile of the Jewish peacemaker after Aaron’s paradigmatic example of empathetic active listening, patience, humility, and sacrifice.⁶⁰

Yehezkel Landau has indeed internalized this Jewish orientation to peacemaking in Israel-Palestine, and, to this extent, his activities there may be classified as Jewish peacemaking. Jewish peacemaking is also guided by the challenge posed by the rabbinic sages in the midrashic literature: “Who is the strongest of the warriors? He who turns one who hates him into one who loves him.”⁶¹ Jewish peacemaking accordingly also centralizes the concept of *teshuva* (repentance, return) as a framework for thinking and engaging in the process of reconciliation. Engaging in *teshuva*, in this context of conflict transformation, entails “a confession of wrongdoing” in addition to restitution.⁶² The *teshuva* also involves “an expression of deep remorse (*harata*), a detailed confession, privately or publicly, of what one has done (*vidui*), and there is finally a commitment to change in the future, to the point of changing one’s identity (*kabbalah le-haba*).”⁶³ The place of forgiveness in the Jewish context is intricately and

necessarily linked to this process of repentance, or *teshuvah*.⁶⁴

CATHOLICISM

Although the history of the Catholic Church is entangled with the interrelated histories of forced conversion, persecution of minorities, crusades, colonialism, and discrimination against homosexuals, Catholicism has provided ample resources for both lay and priestly confrontation against situations of injustice. For instance, Catholic social teachings translate to highly motivated religious activism and community and worldwide service by an organization such as the Catholic Peacebuilding Network (CPN). Catholic social teaching promotes “[t]he pursuit of policies that serve the larger public community not just the Church . . . solidarity, the commitment to achieve justice for all people . . . subsidiarity, the dictum that central government should not decide what locally based bodies can determine for themselves . . . the preferential option for the poor, to lift up the condition of ‘the least of these’ . . . the priority and inviolability of human rights . . . a preferential option for the family as the basic social unit.”⁶⁵

David Cortright contends that this form of social Christianity—born out of Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, issued in 1891 and, as an outcome of the second Vatican Council (1962–1963), most pronouncedly spelled out in Pope John XXIII’s encyclical *Pacem in Terris*—enabled framing active commitment to questions of social justice and war prevention as a central component of Catholic life. Vatican II gave an impetus for the emergence of liberation theology, especially prominent in Latin America, which calls for nonviolent action in defense of the poor.⁶⁶

Another example of religion as a motivating force in the practice of peacebuilding is

provided by José Inocencio Alas. This El Salvadoran Catholic priest was inspired by the Bible to preach and fight for agrarian reform to benefit the disenfranchised *campesinos* (the mass population of farm laborers). During the 1970s, Alas used the Bible as a main source for extrapolating a social justice activism that he referred to as the “theology of community organization.” A critical influence on Alas was the meeting, in 1968, of the Latin American Catholic bishops at Medellín in Colombia. There, they attempted to reflect on the implications of Vatican II to their region. Alas’s activism and strong passionate commitment to better the predicament of the poor in El Salvador resulted in his abduction and torture (most likely by the military) and in a life in exile.⁶⁷ Alas views his theology of peace as “the constant recreation of the harmony between God and humans, among human beings, and between human beings and the earth.”⁶⁸

Appleby cites the Community of Sant’Egidio as another example of a religiously inspired peacemaking network. The Italian community of Sant’Egidio was established in the late 1960s by Andre Riccardi, in part as a response to the Second Vatican Council. For the founders of the community, “Vatican II’s identification of the church’s mission with the ‘joys and hopes, grief and suffering’ of all the people of the world, coupled with its exhortation to seek peace and justice as a Christian vocation, meant that the global (‘universal’) character of the Roman Catholic Church was not merely a historical contingency but a providential gift, enabling new faith communities to find allies, both Catholic and non-Catholic, in virtually every conflict setting imaginable.”⁶⁹ Hence, the members of Sant’Egidio focused on social services for the poor and marginalized. The community’s turn to international humanitarian work developed naturally as an integral part of the its mission and interpretation of Vatican II. Sant’Egidio became

an important and recognized player in peacebuilding as a result of its involvement in the case of Mozambique, where, because its credibility was established, the community’s members were trustworthy and respected mediators during the peace talks.⁷⁰

Appleby explains that “Sant’Egidio practices nonpartisan social action that underscores its equanimity and commitment to the common good. The community does not seek political or economic power for itself. Heeding Pope John Paul II’s call for Catholics to build up civil society, however, the members of Sant’Egidio reject any model of the church that legitimates Catholic withdrawal from public life.”⁷¹ Sant’Egidio’s commitment to peacebuilding is grounded in the gospel injunction to “Love thy enemy.” It does not argue against the jurisdiction of the state and its punitive rights, but, Appleby adds, the community believes that “the religious community operates from a radically different perspective in which all people are sinners and judgment belongs to God.” “As Christians, we believe we are obliged to respect the human dignity of a Slobodan Milosevic no less than that of people far less culpable for bloodshed,” Sant’Egidio’s vice president, Andrea Bartoli, explains. “‘Our goal is to understand his point of view—not approve or condemn—but also to search out the grain of reason and goodness we believe persists in even the hardest criminal.’”⁷²

Religious Leadership and the Transformation of Conflict

So far we looked at a few examples that demonstrate the role of religion as a motivating force in the practice of peacebuilding and conflict transformation. Another important dimension for our discussion is the role of religious institutions, as well as the prestige of religious leadership in post-conflict healing processes. Appleby

argues that, for the capacity of local religious leaders to affect the transformation of conflicts, they need to develop a strategy of peacebuilding that involves forging transnational partnerships and connections with other human rights and nongovernmental organizations as well as global religious networks. One example of a local-transnational partnership is that of Buddhist peacebuilding in Cambodia. In 1993, Samdech Preah Ghosananda led monks, nuns, and laity in a month-long march (known as the Dhammayietra or the Pilgrimage of Truth) from Siam Reap to the capital, Phnom Penh. At this time, the Dhammayietra took place at a critical turning point in Cambodian history, prior to the U.N.-sponsored elections of a new national assembly and government. The march proceeded through dangerous areas of mines and fighting. In this instance, the prestige of Ghosananda and the ability of the Dhammayietra to generate a sizable crowd bestowed added legitimacy to a political recovery process that was already in motion. The following year, participants in Ghosananda's march were caught in a firefight but persisted. Appleby comments that "The Buddhist peace marches were Ghosananda's response to nearly two decades of Cambodians slaughtering Cambodians, despite their shared religious and cultural heritage."⁷³ Future peacebuilding in Cambodia has built upon the legacy of the Dhammayietra: "For millions of Cambodians the Buddhist community, galvanized by Ghosananda's charismatic leadership, was a powerful source of hope that Cambodia might recover from a quarter century of violence and chaos, dating from the U.S. obliteration bombing during the Vietnam War."⁷⁴ A global Buddhist networking and Buddhist-nongovernmental organization (NGO) partnership, however, transformed the Dhammayietra: "First, it evolved, according to the anthropologist Monique Skidmore, into 'a new cultural ritual

of remembering,' which, 'through the creation of new collective memories is allowing some Cambodians to emerge from the culture of violence.' Second . . . the annual marches had become a force that 'generates solidarity actions by grassroots activists in other parts of the world.'⁷⁵ The Dhammayietra has thus become a cornerstone for the emergence and cultivation of novel interpretations of membership in the community.

Another notable example of how the prestige of religious leadership affected the dynamics of peacebuilding is the case of South Africa. Partly as a result of the inspiring and charismatic figure of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the concept of forgiveness became a central motif in the processes involved in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa. In the context of the TRC, religion has distinguished its role in peacebuilding. Archbishop Tutu underscored the theme of forgiveness, which he has grounded in Christian scriptures as constituting a crucial dimension in healing the society. Importantly, however, Donald Shriver clarifies a significant distinction between a theological and a social/political notion of reconciliation. He argues that, theologically, reconciliation refers to the reconciliation of humankind and creation with God's self. In contrast, national and social reconciliation constitute a social process that may have some religious and theological tones but should not necessitate interpersonal forgiveness between victims and perpetrators.⁷⁶

Tutu views the TRC venue as offering a "third way," or a compromise between a retributive approach to justice, as envisioned in the International Criminal Court (ICC), and the granting of total amnesty to war criminals and crimes against humanity. Audrey Chapman explains that "This 'third way' is significant for several reasons. Reconciliation usually requires coming to terms with the past, but doing so in

a manner that will promote a new political culture and commitment to a shared future.⁷⁷ The South African TRC distinguished itself from other TRCs in that it underscored a concept of restorative justice over and against the notion of retribution. “The Christian atmosphere and discourse of the TRC, and particularly archbishop Tutu’s frequent framing of issues in terms of repentance and forgiveness, was applauded by some South Africans, for whom Christian ideals had served as an ethical critique of apartheid, but it was distasteful for others.” The latter category included commissioners and staff of the TRC, as well as some academics, victims, and victim advocates, who complained about “the imposition of a Christian morality of forgiveness.” Regardless of the identified disclaimers, the TRC as structured and orchestrated by Archbishop Tutu exemplifies how religious ideas and individuals can participate in and influence the processes of peacebuilding and social healing and reconciliation.

As the examples of the role of the community of Sant’Egidio in Mozambique and Desmond Tutu in South Africa clearly demonstrate, religious leaders are potentially critical players in peacebuilding—not only because of the often prestigious position that they occupy in a society and their established trustworthiness within the community, which is often reinforced by decades of commitment for social services (as practiced by the Muslim Brothers in Egypt for instance)—but also because of the frequently intricate interrelation between the religious imagination and popular conceptions of membership in a nation or a society. Hence religious leaders can centrally participate in and contribute to the building of civil society and social institutions that foster cooperation and healing across social, ethnic, and religious divides. Indeed, the political scientist Ashutosh Varshney has concluded, in his study of Indian communal relations, that

the formation of multireligious and multiethnic civic associations is crucial for conflict management.⁷⁸ Hence, Appleby asserts that “No truly effective methods of conflict resolution can ignore the locally rooted markers of identity over which religions hold sway. Culture, history, memory, authenticity . . . these are the currency of the local peacebuilder.”⁷⁹

In summary, this chapter has illustrated that religion plays important and complex roles in the dynamics of conflict and conflict transformation. The first part considers the relation between religion and violence by demonstrating the role of religion in the formation and reformation of collective identities, such as nationalism, and by identifying the place that religion occupies in national conflicts, as defined by ethno-religious claims. The second part explores the potential role of religion and religious people in the transformation of conflicts and peacebuilding. It is argued that religion is a relevant factor for the analysis of conflict and peacebuilding because it provides motivation to act in a certain way (from leading nonviolent peace marches to murdering innocent worshippers in the Cave in Hebron), institutional frameworks for mobilization (churches, mosques), legitimacy (textual warrants justifying the occupation of a certain territory, the displacement of the “other”), and resources for reinterpreting chauvinistic nationalist claims.

GLOSSARY

Clash of Civilizations: An influential thesis articulated most famously by the political scientist Samuel Huntington, who envisions that, in the post-Cold-War era, conflicts will be defined along civilizational lines. Huntington explains the eruption of conflicts in the aftermath of the

Cold War as a function of essential incompatibility between what he classifies as Western and non-Western values and worldviews.

Ethnoreligious Nationalism: National identities that are defined through the invocation of exclusive interpretations of religion and ethnicity.

Hindutva: The Hindutva ideology, cultivated by Hindu nationalists in India, conflates Indian and Hindi identities and thus treats them as synonymous. The implication of this ideological stance is a discriminatory and bellicose approach toward non-Hindi Indians.

Religious Peacebuilding: Religious peacebuilding involves the engagement in interfaith dialogue, where religious individuals across national and ethnic divides discuss the roles of religion in conflict. Also applied to describe the work of peacemakers whose motivation to act on behalf of victims and for the implementation of peace and justice derives from their particular understanding of a religious tradition.

Serb Christoslavism: An ideology cultivated and retrieved by Slobodan Milosevic and grounded in the narrative of the Serb Prince Lazar, who has gained the status of a martyr as a result of his death at the Battle of Kosovo in 1389 against the Turks.

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