

I

A Theory of Religion and Nationalism

INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to imagine forces in the modern world as potent as nationalism and religion. Both provide people with a source of meaning, each has motivated people to extraordinary acts of heroism and unimaginable deeds of cruelty, and both serve as the foundation for communal and individual identity. Religion and nationalism are equally imagined communities that can both unite and divide people across space and time. Not only are the concepts politically and morally compelling; they are also intimately related to one another. In much of the world, one cannot analyze the topic of national identity without also scrutinizing religion. There is, however, no simple or straightforward pattern in how religion and nationalism interact. The relationship between religious and political institutions, or religious and national loyalties, has been a vexing one, and has historically run the gamut from deep contestation between religious and national allegiances to a fusion of them. The French and Russian revolutions are notable examples of conflicting religious and national identities, while the religious nationalism in postcommunist Poland, the rise of the Hindu-based Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India, and even the state-sponsored Confucianism in China mark the opposite extreme. Religious nationalism has also been the source of a host of humanitarian catastrophes in regimes such as Hirohito's Japan and Milošević's Yugoslavia. The reemergence of religious nationalism in places as diverse as Hungary, Turkey, Myanmar, and even the United States suggests that the interplay between these two ideological systems remains as significant as ever.

Religion and nationalism are closely associated historically, theoretically, and empirically. Religion has historically been one of the strongest pillars of, and reasons for, nationalism and nation-state formation. Theoretically, nationalisms frequently appropriate religious language and concepts in forging a new, national identity. Even secular nationalism makes religious or quasi-religious claims about the land, the people, and the nation. Empirically, religious actors assume some position vis-à-vis the nation state and its nationalism. They can support, oppose, or be indifferent to the nationalism that is being promoted. The multiple lenses through which one can analyze the religion–nationalism nexus suggest both the complexity of the topic and that no single model can adequately explain the religion–nationalism link. Instead, we argue that religion can influence nationalism in varying degrees and that three models predominate: religious nationalism, secular nationalism, and civil-religious nationalism. The purpose of this chapter is to offer a theory that explains the emergence and continuing relevance of these three models.

While scholars vigorously debate and have offered important insights into the role of religion in the origin of nation states and of their nationalisms, what is largely missing from the literature is a theoretical framework to explain what are the differing models of religion and nationalism, how those models are defined and measured, why they emerge, and what explains the continuing nexus between civic and spiritual identities within states. Despite the prolific literature on both religion and nationalism, there is very little scholarship that systematically examines their interaction. As one analyst has aptly noted, “scholarship on the interplay between religion and nationalism is a relative novelty” (Abulof 2014:515).

The chapter opens with a review of the literature on religion and nationalism. Much of the seminal nationalism scholarship focused on the origins of the concept, and had less to say about contemporary manifestations of nationalism. Nonetheless, these works implicitly offer valuable insights on three models that will dominate our discussion: religious nationalism, secular nationalism, and civil-religious nationalism. A number of scholars have begun to tease out the theoretical implications of those different models, but have offered few insights on how they emerge and remain viable over time. We conclude the chapter by offering a framework for understanding the key variables that explain the emergence of one of the three models, and the factors that explain the stability or instability of each model over time.

NATIONALISM AND RELIGION IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The literature on nationalism is vast and continues to expand. These disparate works touch on the nexus between religion and nationalism in two respects. First, the literature considers what role, if any, religion plays in the origins of nationalism, and second, scholars have analyzed the role of religion in contemporary nationalisms. The seminal work on the origins of nationalism by theorists such as Eric Hobsbawm (1990), Ernest Gellner (1983), and Ben Anderson (1983) sees nationalism as historically constructed and as a product of modernization. Nationalism provided the unifying myth necessary to support the needs of sovereign states that emerged in the aftermath of the French and American revolutions. These modernists focus their attention on the role of language, the print media, and the educational system in creating this new national identity, and by their relative silence they implied that religion played little or no part in forming national consciousness. Gellner did note that it was a “curious fact” that nation-states were smaller than “pre-existing faith civilizations” (quoted in Hutchinson and Smith 1994:59), suggesting perhaps a point of possible contention between transnational religious or ethnic claims and national loyalties. For Gellner and most of these early scholars, however, nationalism was “invented,” it jettisoned religion as a binding force among people, and it was thus understood as a secular phenomenon. In assessing modernist theories of nationalism, Anthony Smith (2003:21) rightly concludes that they “relegate religion and the sacred to the premodern past.”

The rise of secular nationalism in the West provides some evidence for the value of a modernist approaches to nationalism (Kramer 1997). The states that emerged in Western Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries expanded concurrently with modernization and industrialization. Religion was politically important in the premodern, pre-sovereign state world, but as modernist theories argued, the appearance and rapid development of states based on territorial units and the political sovereignty of groups living within those places implicitly undermined the role of religion. The Westphalian political system subordinated religion to the state. What had been a “friendly merger” between religious and political authorities in the pre-state age, gravitated to what Toft, Philpott, and Shah (2011:58) describe as a “friendly takeover” of religious functions and authority by the state. In some cases, the takeover was anything but friendly, as in the case of the French Revolution’s overt attack on the political powers of the Roman Catholic Church, or Bismarck’s

Kulturkampf in the second German Empire a century later, which similarly tried to suppress Catholic political influence. Even the more benign forms of expanded state power nonetheless reduced the political salience of religion throughout the West.

Not only did the nation-state challenge the political power of religious groups, but the secular nationalism that emerged also posed an ideological threat to religion. Secular nationalism replaced ethnic and religious identity for national identity based on civic and secular norms (Spohn 2003:269). Instead of defining a community in terms of its ethnicity, common culture, or religion, civic identity was to be understood primarily in political terms. Secular nationalism also introduced the idea that loyalty to and identification with the nation superseded all other preexisting commitments (Marsh 2007; Dingley 2011:399). The implication of modernist theories of nationalism, and of the secular nationalism that they defined, was that nationalism replaced the influence of religion on political institutions and civic identities (Rieffer 2003:223). As Roger Friedland aptly put it, “the first European republic was understood as a usurpation of God’s sovereignty” (Friedland 2001:127).

There is thus both an institutional and ideological component to the idea of secular nationalism. Institutionally it leads to the separation of church and state and the diminishment of the direct political power of religious organizations. The secular nationalism of the French Revolution led eventually to the diminishment of the political power of the Catholic Church. Much the same could be said for the attempt of political leaders in newly formed, postcolonial states who aggressively forged a secular national ideology. Leaders like Nehru in India and Atatürk in Turkey specifically attempted to limit the role of religion in national consciousness as they created a secular national ideology. Religious groups retained some formal role in politics, but it was a considerably diminished one by the standards of what Hindu nationalists in India or Muslim nationalists in Turkey advocated for their new state. For these modernizing state actors, secularism was seen as a necessary condition for political development (Hibbard 2010:44). Ideologically, secular nationalism presupposes that secular concepts of nation, rather than religious ones, provide meaning and shape souls (Joppke 2015:47). It is a form of nationalism that has no connection with any particular religious tradition or with religion more generally. The historical experience of Europe, where most modernist theories emerged, lent some credence to the idea that secular nationalism was historically inevitable.

The secular assumptions of modernist theories came under attack on several fronts. Ethno-symbolic theorists of nationalism like Anthony Smith and Adrian Hastings challenged the idea that the roots of modern nationalism were non-religious. Hastings (1997) argued that nationhood owed its existence to preexisting religious ties, while Smith asserted that political elites rediscovered “the myths, memories, traditions, and symbols of ethnic heritage” (Smith 1999a:9); as they forged new national identities (see also Smith 1986; O’Brien 1988). Rather than having their roots in religious decline, as modernist theorists presumed, Anthony Marx argued convincingly that Western European nationalisms were constructed “on the back of fanatical religious passion and conflict” (Marx 2003:193). In his account, the religious cleavages brought on by the Protestant Reformation made possible the confessional, exclusionary nationalisms that emerged in Western Europe. Others rejected the claim that nationalism was a modern construct. Philip Gorski (2000) demonstrated the key role played by Hebraic religious ideas in the premodern national consciousness in the Netherlands and England. Ariel Roshwald (2006) noted the ancient religious and ethnic foundation of contemporary political Zionism.

The different views of religion and nationalism were on full display as nationalism was transported to developing countries via colonialism. Postcolonial leaders such as Atatürk in Turkey, Nehru in India, the Shah in Iran, Azikiwe in Nigeria, and Kenyatta in Kenya made national appeals largely shorn of religion. Often western-educated, these rulers developed nationalist ideologies heavily inspired by European thinking and political models (Özdalga 2009), ideas which seemed to reflect the collective *Zeitgeist* of the time about religion and political modernization. Moreover, in many instances these political leaders feared the destabilizing effects of religious conflict in the emerging nation state (India and Nigeria) or they saw religious groups as a potential challenge to their political power (Iran and Turkey). The newly formed states, thus, were secular and political leaders made concerted efforts to minimize the political and moral appeal of a religiously based national identity. At least initially, historical developments around the globe seemed to be proving the point that secular nationalism was the norm in the modern world. However, in most of those places secularization did not exile religion from the state to the society. In the intervening decades, religion remained the popular basis for self-definition and political legitimation (Altunaş 2010; Omer and Springs 2013:4–9). The reemergence of religion in nationalist discourse was also a helpful reminder that the idea of

secular nationalism is a fairly recent invention and might therefore not be historically inevitable (Juergensmeyer 2010:262).

Not only did these theories diverge on the issue of what role religion assumed in the origins of nationalism, but by implication they also parted company on the continuing relevance of religion for contemporary nationalism. Modernist theories presupposed the triumph of secular nationalism and the privatization and depoliticization of religion. In highlighting the vital role of religion in the origins of nationalism and the ideological basis for secular nationalism, however, ethno-symbolic theories implicitly raised the question of the continuing role of religion for national identity.

The final and arguably most decisive test to modernist theories, however, came from the political resurgence of religion in the past several decades. Contrary to the confident predictions of secularization theory that religion would disappear as a political force, religion's influence on politics has increased on every continent and within every major world religion over the past several decades. The politics of nationalism have been very much affected by this renaissance. Michael Walzer (2015) notes that the revival of religion as a political force in Algeria, India, and Israel represents the rejection of secular nationalism and the ascendancy of religiously based alternatives to it. The nationalism of most postcolonial leaders was secular, but their subordination of religion would prove to be short-lived in many places. Religious groups and leaders such as the Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran, the early Anwar Sadat in Egypt, and more recently Recep Erdoğan in Turkey presented secular nationalism as a legacy of colonial rule and a foreign political model imposed by the West (Tamadonfar and Jelen 2014). Not only did political Islam provide a basis for opposing "foreign" influence, but it also offered a foundation for a newly formed nationalism. For many people in those countries, the modernizing, secular state which privatized religion had little purchase because religion provided a stronger basis for self-identification than did secular, nationalist values. The result was the rise of a religious nationalism in much of the developing world that hewed much more closely to the spiritual, cultural, and historical allegiances of the masses (Juergensmeyer 2008).

A similar dynamic occurred in Eastern Europe with the demise of the Soviet Union, the discrediting of communism as a unifying ideology, and the reemergence of religious nationalism to fill the political and ideological void. The political revolution in Poland owed much to that country's long and deep identification with the Roman Catholic Church, much

as post-Soviet Bulgaria reinvigorated the strong links between national identity and the Eastern Orthodox Church (Zubrzycki 2006; Stan and Turcescu 2011). As different as they were in their political agendas, the Iranian Revolution, the Solidarity Movement in Poland, and postcommunist Bulgaria all used religion as a mobilizing force against secular states.

The spread of democracy also abetted the rise of religious nationalism in various parts of the world (Toft, Philpott, and Shah 2011:77). Democratization opened space for political activism; freed from the constraints of authoritarian regimes, religious actors were suddenly able to form political movements on the basis of religion. The political success of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, for example, came partly as a result of their growing ability to participate in relatively free and fair elections. Their political success demonstrated that an electoral market existed for a more religiously focused political party. By the same token, democratization encouraged more secular political parties and their leaders to appeal to religious voters, thereby stimulating the rise of religious nationalism. These developments and many others were a helpful reminder that in many ways religion is “a natural competitor to the nationalism of the secular state” (Friedland 2001:128). Or to put it in the terms of this chapter, religious nationalism is a second model for the relationship between religious and national identities.

As with its secular counterpart, there are both institutional and ideological ramifications to religious nationalism. Institutionally, religious nationalism leads to formal links between politics and a particular religious group. Far from a separation of religion from the state as is presumed in secular nationalism, in this model religion and the state are formally intertwined in various ways. In Saudi Arabia, as an example, the version of Sunni Islam inspired by Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab is the state religion and the law requires that all citizens be Muslim. Religious nationalism need not, however, lead to autocratic politics. The Republic of Ireland is a political democracy which has for decades granted the Roman Catholic Church a political monopoly over education and public morality issues, although church control over these issues is currently being challenged. Religious nationalism legitimates policy programs using religious values. Religious nationalists in India seek to redefine the Indian state as Hindu, and they justify their policy views in terms of the supposedly shared values of the state’s Hindu majority. Ideologically, this form of nationalism “makes religion the basis for the nation’s collective identity and the source of its ultimate value and purpose on this earth” (Friedland 2001:139). Instead of uniting people on the basis of secular

political values, religious nationalism adopts sacred language to explain the nation's role in history (Marsh 2007:3). Religion is so important to this form of nationalism that it “adopts religious language and modes of religious communication” (Rieffer 2003:225).

As much as they differ in their orientations, theories of secular and religious nationalism share the assumption that there is an essential difference between civic and spiritual identities and that there is a potential for a competition between them. Secular nationalism presumes the triumph of national over religious identity, and religious nationalism counters with a model where religious identity supersedes or competes with secular national identity. However, scholars have offered a third prototype where nationalism is itself seen as a secularized form of religion. This theory borrows heavily from the sociological insights of Émile Durkheim (2001[1912]). In his sociological work, Durkheim argued that secularization was historically inevitable, but that something was needed to fulfill the socially integrative role performed by religion in a pre-secular society. The disappearance of religion left unmet needs for meaning and purpose, needs that had to be fulfilled in some other fashion. Given the myths and symbols associated with it, and the passions that it evokes, nationalism filled that void (Santiago 2009). Traditional religion might well disappear, Durkheim argued, but it would be replaced by an equally compelling commitment to nationalism and nationalist values. Or as Mark Juergensmeyer ironically notes about the contemporary context, “at the same time that religion in the West was becoming less political, its secular nationalism was becoming more religious” (Juergensmeyer 2010:263).

Scholars have also called into question the idea that secular nationalism was somehow non-religious, claiming instead that nationalism is itself essentially a form of religion. Smith (2000:811) argues that the rituals and symbols of secular nationalism are a “political religion” that fulfills many of the functions of traditional religion. Noting that secular nationalisms often legitimate themselves in such religious terms as “holy nation” and “chosen people,” Gorski and Türkmen-Dervişoğlu (2013a:139) conclude that even “secular forms of nationalism are almost always parasitic on religious sources of identity.” Others perceptively noted that the neglect of religion in modernist accounts of nationalism said more about the secular presuppositions of modernist theories than it did about the historical inevitability of secular nationalism (Gorski 2000:1459; Rieffer 2003:222; Brubaker 2012:15).

Robert Bellah offered a variation of this theory in his work on civil religion in America (Bellah 1967, 1975). Civil religion was “a collection

of beliefs, symbols, and rituals with respect to sacred things” (Bellah 1967:3). Unlike secular nationalism, civil religion was not an attempt to usurp religion, but neither was it simply the marrying of nationalism with a particular religious tradition. Instead, American civil religion promoted the idea of a sacred link between God’s purposes and the American nation. Moreover, religious and political ideas mutually reinforced each other and came together to form this new civil religion (Kurth 2007:121). What made these religious ideas unique, however, is that they were unifying rather than dividing, they stressed the points of spiritual commonality among the religious population as a whole, and they promoted national solidarity rather than division (Chapp 2012:30–8). The concept of civil religion is Durkheimian in the sense that this form of nationalism is providing some overarching sense of meaning and purpose. Like modernization theory, civil religion presumes that the modern state is in some respects replacing the role traditionally played by the church, but it challenges the secular presumption of modernist accounts in recognizing that the state retains a need for moral legitimacy, something that civil religion can provide.

The relationship between particular religions and national self-understanding is complex in civil-religious regimes. Civil-religious nationalism is rooted in the country’s religious experience, but it nevertheless develops separately from it. It does not identify the majority religious tradition with the state, as in religious nationalism, but it also does not jettison any religious values from the national story, as in secular nationalism. Civil religion is, instead, a form of nationalism that creates a sense of solidarity and collective identity among the people based on shared religious and political values (Williams and Fuist 2014:931). As a concept, civil religion has proven to be quite popular and has been applied by scholars to countries as disparate as South Korea (Cha 2000), Chile (Cristi and Dawson 1996), and Israel (Liebman and Don-Yehiya 1983; see also Hvithamar, Warburg, and Jacobsen 2009). In their account of the Israeli case, as an example, Charles Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya argue that Israel’s civil religion borrows from ideas within traditional Judaism, but is not synonymous with it (Liebman and Don-Yehiya 1983:162).

What civil-religious theories get right, in our view, is that they implicitly reject the dichotomous framework offered in accounts of secular and religious nationalism, where a religious tradition is presented either as implacably irrelevant or absolutely central to a country’s nationalism. Following the argument of Gorski and Türkmen-Dervişoğlu (2013b), we contend that it is better to think of religion’s role in nationalism

along a continuum. A religion can be more or less central as an ideological resource for nationalism, and the corresponding institutional links between religion and the state can be more or less strong. If secular and religious nationalisms represent opposing ends of the spectrum, civil-religious nationalism recognizes that there might be some middle ground between these opposing poles.

Civil-religious theory falls short, however, in its overarching claim that every regime fits this typology. In this reading, there is little theoretical difference between a French nationalism that canonizes the revolutionary values of liberty, equality, and fraternity, on the one hand, and modern Jewish Orthodoxy in Israel that advocates a religious nationalism based on its particular reading of the Torah and of Jewish history. Seen from the civil-religious standpoint, both are secularized forms of nationalism. We contend, however, that this generalization is overly inclusive. Broadly to classify the two forms of nationalism together misses important differences between them. Moreover, the role of specific religious traditions often disappears from the political scene in civil-religious theories. While the United States might be a case where civil-religious nationalism erases some of the distinctions among religious traditions, this situation is less evident in countries where religious actors and institutions have differing relationships with the state and its nationalism.

Civil religion offers a nationalist model that stands somewhere between secular and religious nationalism. Particular religious groups and traditions play a less central ideological and institutional role in civil-religious states compared to in religious-nationalist ones, but those same religious actors assume a more supporting role than in secular nationalism. Institutionally, the formal links between religion and the state are weaker in civil-religious regimes when contrasted with those with religious nationalism. Religious nationalism leads to a formal recognition of a religious tradition and multiple connections between that dominant tradition and the state. Secular nationalism, on the other hand, separates religion from the state and minimizes formal contacts between them. Civil-religious states, finally, manifest themselves as regimes of benign separation or of pluralistic accommodation where the state recognizes multiple religious traditions.

Table 1.1 offers an overview for the divergent religion–nationalism models reviewed. As is indicated in the table, secular, religious, and civil-religious nationalisms can be compared both ideologically and institutionally. The ideology variable indicates how closely the nationalism hews toward a religious tradition, while the institutional variable notes