THE POLITICS OF RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE IN SOUTH ASIA

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Introduction:

Much has been made of the organizing force of religion in the contemporary world. There are those that argue that in the post-Cold War era, religion has replaced the certainties of the past and has become the predominant active force in organizing people in opposition to each other. Indeed, in some cases, the clash of civilizations thesis has replaced ideas about grand conflict in that empires no longer compete, but rather civilizations, in the guise of religions, operate to draw lines of opposition and as such demarcate conflicts around the world. Thus Islam and the 'Islamic world' becomes the main opposition to 'the West' and Judeo-Christian values secularized in the contemporary world. But this is a gross over-simplification of conflicts that have their roots in historical grievances, instrumental politics, and deeply ingrained social inequalities. We argue here that at least two things are present that demonstrate the false assumptions about the relationships between civil society and religion: first, that civil society as it develops historically in any part of the world is not anathema to violence and violent expression in the so-called 'east', 'west', or any other distinction we choose to divide the world; second, that religion and religious beliefs, ideas and practices, may or may not act in conjunction with civil society's development, regression, or acceptance. As a result, we argue that it is a false claim to suggest that civil society and religion are in opposition, just as it is a false claim to suggest that there are 'Western' and 'Asian' dichotomies of dealing with the prevalence of religion as a social force operating with/against civil society. Religion can become an intimate part of national identity, such as Poland and Malaysia, or it can form a part of a shared religious and sometimes conflictual national identity as in India and the United States.

Mixing the Terms: Battling for Symbols

When we talk about civil society, we can also use a number of revolutions to demonstrate the development and change of how a variety of societies around the world have brought about the construction of a particular form of civil society. If we discuss the Russian Revolution of 1917, we can see that there is a case in which the notion of positing civil society against religion and/or a combination of those against the 'bourgeoisie', is a simplification of the complex reality. As Figes and Kolonitskii demonstrate in their work *Interpreting the Russian Revolution: the language and Symbols of 1917*, we see that the ideological shifts are predicated on the use of a particular set of symbols, and that these symbols can operate to replace each other quite neatly. It is not difficult to 'supersede' an Orthodox Russian cross with a hammer and sickle, nor is it difficult to demonstrate that the move to attempt to incorporate the peasantry as against the landowners and the bourgeoisie was done through the use of symbols that began with the iconography of Russian Orthodoxy and then moved in to the hagiography of the Russian communists.

The Soviets subsumed into their march of history earlier revolutions, most particularly the French Revolution. Unlike the Soviets, who implicitly created a new Soviet religion that was a partial 'transubstantiation' of Russian Orthodoxism, the Jacobins explicitly created a new religion in their attempt to replace Catholicism in France. Although both groups attempted to purge their revolutionary civil societies of the old religion the French Revolutionary and Soviet models were not secular even when they argued they were. If anything the French model is a schizophrenic one where religion is thought to lie outside of schools and public institutions but where a civic and nationalist religion inhabits the place of Old Catholicism. The concept of civil society as cut off from religion, then, has serious limitations, even when the most extreme models are considered.

Another so-called secular state is the United States of America. Like France, the separation of church and state is meant to be present at the inception of the modern state. And yet the religiosity of American political culture is often remarked upon by commentators and critics from inside the US political system as well as those outside of its participatory sphere. The American Revolution, like the French and Russian Revolutions was as much a religious dispute as a political one and religion has been a key factor in American politics to this day. Scholars influenced by Marxist secularism in the twentieth

century wrote religion out of these events (or contained it in discussions on the confiscation of church property in the case of France). What these western secular models do is pretend that religion is not a force in their institutions and political culture even when it has been historically a shaping force and continues to exist as such. One example of this flaw is found in the most extreme interpretation of the western secular model - as interpreted in France - and the dispute over hijab wearing by Muslim girls in French schools. Because it is seen as an overtly religious expression, French officials claim to be personally ‘offended’ by those who choose to don the hijab. Further, the claim is that this is a direst threat to French civil society, when Catholic nuns and Catholic and Buddhist monks are not required to adhere to the same rules. There are many more issues here but we are not looking at the hijab specifically and a comparative paper on the reception of a resurgence of Islam in ‘western’ and/or ‘secular’ society might shed more light on this.

There are a number of other considerations when discussing the issue of the relationship between civil society and religion. For example, we could discuss liberation theologists in Latin America who were decidedly ‘religious’ and in many cases quite doctrinaire, Catholics, who sought to promote a kind of ‘civil democracy’ by advocating the overthrow of military dictatorships and bringing peasants out of their dire poverty. Many were assassinated, the most famous being Bishop Romero, nuns were abducted and raped, and all in very Catholic and quite religious countries. We could argue here that a semi-orthodox religion was operating to develop civil society and to reject the control by dictatorships. It is a good contrast to questions about the rise of Islam and it allows us to ask the question: what is the problem with Islam? Is it the Imams, is it Islam as a religion, is it Islam as a social force? Further, does it make a difference if it is a ‘right and good’ challenge to civil society? For example, the challenge of American Islam in the 1960s led mainly by African Americans who lived their lives as second-class citizens, or the liberation theologist activists, or anti-Soviet Muslims, or Albanian Muslims challenging the Yugoslav civil order and so on. Once we begin to peel back the layers we see that in the modern period we have a series of conflicting examples of civil society and religious forces.

South Asia:

There is no denying that religion is a powerful organizing force in the societies of South Asia. Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism have all managed to promote violence and operate against the development of civil society. However, there is also good evidence to suggest the contrary: that religion has worked peacefully to bring people together and to foster both informal cooperation in these countries as well as to promote democracy and democratic institutions. It is also the case that religion has not been a successful unifying force in many instances as Islam has not served to unify Pakistanis to work for or against the nation-state, and neither does Islam operate to unify Bangladeshis. When religion becomes a cultural force and operates outside of the boundaries of religious officials, then religion can access a kind of social power that does not necessarily have to adhere to the wishes of a religious elite. And it can also do the opposite, that is, religion as a socio-political force can be run by a group interested in secularizing itself and thus creating greater and greater relevance in the society in which they live such as the United Church and the Methodists in North America.

In Bangladesh, it has been a clear case of cultural nationalism, that is Bengali culture, regardless of religion, that presents itself as a unifying force in the nation-state. Bangladesh is mono-lingual compared to India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. It has some dialectical differences in Bangla (Bengali) but it is still one language understood and spoken by most people. Bangladesh has a weak western border with the Indian province of West Bengal sharing the same language and culture but being more strongly Hindu but still with a sizeable Muslim population. Bangladesh was itself a product of regionalism in the 1970s when it ceased to become East Pakistan. Although at its inception the concept of a 'Muslim nation' meant that religion played a crucial role in transforming East Bengal into East Pakistan this eroded post-1947 and ended completely in 1971 with the formation of Bangladesh. Islam was unable to act as a stabilizing force when Pakistan was threatened with an emergent nationalism based on regional and cultural Bengali identity. The *raison d'etre* for Pakistan's formation – that the Muslim nation in South Asia (as imagined by members of the Muslim League) - needed a Muslim state to protect it – was completely undermined and repudiated by the formation of Bangladesh in 1971. Given there was already regional and ethnic antagonism in the British Raj against the formation of Pakistan

(seen in the supporters of the concept of an independent Pashtunistan and their concept of Pashtunwali), any secession from the Pakistani nation-state has acted to strengthen anti-Punjabi and anti-central government forces in post-1971 Pakistan.

When Pakistan became independent in 1947 it had none of the potential strengths of India and all the weaknesses. It inherited the poorest parts of the British Raj with the least skilled workforces. The three main commercial centres of the Raj – Calcutta, Bombay and Madras – all went to India. India received the prosperous cities and provinces of the Raj with their areas of trade, industry and manufacturing. Pakistan, on the other hand, inherited a western frontier that was barely under the control of the Raj – the Northwest Frontier Province – inhabited by Pashtun tribesmen who were part of an ethnic group which stretched into southern Afghanistan and did not accept the concept of modern borders (or indeed a modern state and its laws). The unworkability of East Pakistan was twofold: 1i) it shared a porous border with West Bengal, a province of India inhabited by an ethnic group who had a shared language, identity and history with East Pakistanis so that coreligionist West Pakistanis appeared as foreigners in comparison to fellow Bengalis over the border in India. Once the abstract concept of Islamic brotherhood between East Pakistanis and West Pakistanis was transformed into a shared political system and nation state the ability of Islam to play the role of a strengthening force was severely undermined. Before 1947 Muslim Bengalis were able to view Muslim Sindhis, Punjabis, Baluchis and Pashtuns as fellow Muslims who happen to speak different languages. By 1971 and the imposition of Urdu as the national language of Pakistan, Muslim Bengalis had instead decided that West Pakistanis were foreigners who happened to be Muslims. 2) the two wings of Pakistan were divided by a hostile India.

The remaining half of Pakistan is often thought to be threatened in the first instance by militant Islam but this is a distorted view of the contemporary situation. Jihadi radicalism is only one threat among many in Pakistan and is secondary to the centrifugal forces of regional separatism emanating out of Baluchistan, NWFP (particularly Waziristan) and the sectarianism that continues to plague the major port of Karachi. Although jihadi radicalism has triggered the tribal-state violence in Waziristan, it would not exist at all if Pakistan's regions felt more allegiance to the concept of Pakistan itself. Instead regionalists are deeply sceptical of Punjabis and want to disengage as much as they

can from Islamabad. Ironically, while Pakistan has more religious homogeneity than India (with its sizeable Muslim, Sikh and Christian minorities), it is Pakistan that it is the failed state because of intense regionalism. The mono-religious model has failed Pakistan because Islam was not able to act as a strengthening force for the state. Religious purity, the Pak of Pakistan, has meant little in the face of *stan*s in Pakistan, Baluchistan being one of the most prominent at the moment.

Although much international focus centred on the communalism of the Bharatiya Janata Party when they rose to power and their links to the destruction of the Ayodhya Masjid, far less attention has been paid to the series of anti-Hindu (and in the case of Pakistan anti-Sikh as well) pogroms that have occurred in Pakistan and Bangladesh since independence. By purging these majority Muslim countries of non-Muslims the body politic has used religious violence to strengthen the state. Hindus in Pakistan and Bangladesh are effectively designated foreigners because of their religion. Although Pakistan and Bangladesh have been more successful in this process than India they have not ended up with strong state systems but weak ones. The process of the Islamification of the state – in opposition to the claims of India to be secular and to have a sizeable Muslim minority – has been seriously hampered by regional identities. It is ironic that the BJP during the 1990s sought to 'Hinduize' the Indian body politic so as to strengthen it when the long-term result would be a weaker state and a damaged international reputation. Manmohan Singh has recently stated that Pakistan actually wants a resurgence of communal violence in India and is sponsoring terrorism in India so as to provoke an extreme Hindu backlash against the Muslim minority. Whether there is evidence to support this statement is unclear. But what it does reveal is Singh's view of the negative result of communalism.

While Hindu extremists wish to ethnically cleanse the Indian body politic as part of a fascistic project to create a greater India, they may end up weakening India by attacking the one thing that has proven its success when compared to Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka: the inclusive secular model. A major difference between the model India has historically pursued and Pakistan is that India has attempted to allow space in its body politic for a large population of Indian Muslims. In the wake of Partition there were many internal pressures from communal forces and the Hindu Right to marginalize and victimize

Muslims and these forces have now a mainstream party to support them. However, comparing the record of Pakistan and Bangladesh to India, the Indian secular model has proven to be stronger in facilitating a workable democratic state which can absorb both regional forces and minority religions. The Indian state has historically attempted to protect the rights of minority groups and had a form of affirmative action with scheduled castes and places reserved for Muslims much before western countries began to implement such schemes in the 1970s. For most of the last fifty-eight years India has chosen to follow a different model of national development than Pakistan, Bangladesh or Sri Lanka. As Amartya Sen has recently argued in *The Argumentative Indian* (2005) the Indian model, when it works, can be used for those seeking to intellectually challenge the theory of secularism emanating out of France with its exclusive discourse towards religious minorities. The Indian model has encountered numerous communal challenges since 1947, including from the current opposition party when it was in power. But Indian secularism is still a strong political force in India. Once the BJP gained power even Hindu Right politicians had to bend their will to this aspect of Indian political and religious thought.

It seems counterintuitive, and against the experience of European nation-states in the nineteenth century, that the South Asian countries that have pursued a mono-religious (read here for nineteenth-century Europe mono-national) model in order to strengthen their respective exclusive "nations" have largely failed. In India the religious violence that was part of the rise of the BJP in the 1990s had the potential of driving India down the path of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka through their rejection of the Indian model. Instead, a combination of factors meant that this force has been transformed into its current form as an opposition party in a two party political system. The BJP's communalism was tempered by the practicalities of ruling a country and governmental system which is the result of the Indian model. This transformation would not have been possible in the political systems of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

All South Asian nations have partaken in forms of (religious) ethnic cleansing. Sometimes this has been the physical removal of minority groups or their attempted destruction. At other times it has been their marginalisation from any say over the political system or political discourse. There is a type of (religious) ethnic cleansing which is cultural and stems from the physical forms of ethnic cleansing. Part of any political

discourse is national memory and a shared culture. Where ethnic cleansing takes an insidious cultural form in South Asia is in the use of language and the conceptualisation of Indian history. Both India and Pakistan have attempted to purge their language of what hardliners have perceived as alien elements. In the case of Pakistan this has taken the form of removing from the national language Urdu, particularly the literary language, anything which is perceived as too Hindu. Where in the shared *lingua franca* of the British Raj – Hindustani – there was a natural mingling of Persian and Sanskritic elements, in Pakistani Urdu post-1947 a more heavily Persianised and Arabicised literary language came into being. Likewise in India contemporary Hindi has been heavily Sanskritised to the point where much vocabulary would be strange for a pre-1947 speaker of Hindustani. These attempts to ethnically cleanse, or "purify", Urdu and Hindi is an attempt to also obliterate part of a shared history because of the scarring process of Partition. History is part of this ongoing ethnic cleansing because Pakistan does not fully recognise the Hindu and Buddhist background to their country and Indian Hindu nationalists perceive Muslim rule in India not as a syncretic adventure but only as a series of invasions and conquests by foreigners who happened to stay on. The view of India as Hindutva negates the Muslim history of India.

In Sri Lanka, it has become increasingly more obvious that Buddhism as a religion, and Sri Lankan Singhalese Buddhism as a cultural force, are operating to [re]create Sri Lanka as a mono-faith, mono-cultural nation-state. In this case, religion freed from the constraints of the doctrine, freed from the constraints of the doctrinaire Buddhists, have placed the faithful in a position in which they must choose between their faith and civil society as defined by multi-lingual, multicultural, multi-theistic contemporary society. The Bhikku doctrine has shifted from the rest of Buddhism's teachings in order to involve themselves directly in the politics of the day in Sri Lanka. In the Sri Lankan case, we see that religion as a cultural force is in fact operating as a complex social force. That is, unlike liberation theology, Singhalese Buddhism seeks to provide a doctrine for those who hold the reins of power and develop a spiritual justification for that hold on power.

K. M. de Silva (1981) completed his work, *A History of Sri Lanka* just before the main parts of the ethnic conflict began. We consider this book as an important publication because it demonstrates the understanding of the development of Sri Lankan history as

understood by the intellectual elite during the 1970s and 1980s. The work provides a foreground to the ethnic conflicts which erupted in 1983. After de Silva's work, a number of books were published which questioned the development of the modern nation-state in the region. For example, Homi Bhaba (1990) has contributed a number of works including his classic *The Nation and Narration*. Bhaba provides a framework to understand the way in which histories of nations, coupled with various myths of peoples, combine to point to a particular view that can be contested. Further, Partha Chatterjee (1993) in *The Nation and its Fragments* provides a critique of the attempt at simplistic unities of peoples under one religion and/or one ethnic group. Chatterjee's claim is that a de-centering of the idea of the nation-state can begin by looking at some specific regional histories. This de-centering can possibly lead to alternate ways of looking at the nation-state; one that need not be the homogenizing world view offered by the 19th Century understanding of the nation-state. So if we are examining the current role of religion in this process, we see that Sri Lanka is attempting to create this homogeneity.

The roots of the current ethnic violence can be easily traced back to the Bandaranaike regime in the late 1950s. Bandaranaike's socialist policies as well as National Language Act of 1956 can be described as the first attempt to consolidate power and bring the newly formed Sri Lanka together under the umbrella of a 'modern' nation-state. It was here, in the years between 1956 and 1959, that Bandaranaike sought to make manifest the notion that is so basic in Sinhalese, that the words for 'nation', 'race' and 'people' were synonymous. However, this is not unique to Sinhalese, neither in terms of the problem of original definitions nor in the problems of the unwillingness or incapacity of political leaders to take this argument further. There are examples of political leaders stuck in similar problems around the world in which differing political groups, sometimes emerging political groups, have significantly different concepts of what it means to have a political idea of group belonging. In our opinion, the most remarkable failure of Bandaranaike's regime is his inability to promote a set of culturally responsive policies to address the idea of ethnic cohesiveness of Sri Lanka. Yugoslavia provides a similar case. Here, we are referring to the concept of the unity of a people and how that is brought together or separated by notions of linguistic nationalism or by notions of separated or unified cultural continuity. For example, during particular time periods in the South Balkans, Croatian

political leaders saw the Bosnian Muslims as de facto Croatians. The argument was that since most Bosnian Muslims were people who had voluntary chosen Islam as a religion under more 'liberal' policies during the Ottoman period, they were ethnically Croatian, certainly Slav, and probably not Serb. This history can be written a number of different ways and if we choose to emphasise periods of conflict, then the contemporary manifestation of national culture can thus be one of conflict, and vice versa. Homi Bhaba's also touches upon on this issue in his *The Nation and Narration* but he does so from a slightly different perspective. Bhabha's view is that the old nation-states of the West have now found themselves reliant upon some version of 'Othering' and this has been reproduced the world over. In Sri Lanka's case, we see this in the development of the 'other' in what Bhaba would call the foundationalist fiction that all modern nation-states must perform and reproduce. In performing this, religion may or may not play a role as a social force. Religion might operate as a useful force for creating this homogeneity, or it might resist the domination of elites, or any number of things.

As such, we can claim that without the inception of the Sinhala-only Act, we would not have seen the cohesion of the Tamil minority concerns that erupted as a particular form of ethnic violence. Bandaranaike seemingly did not realise that post-colonial Sri Lanka was a plural society, in the classical sense, and that to impose a 'single identity' would entrench conflict, regardless of historical claims by various groups. In all cases where pluralism was recognised in some manner during the development of the modern nation-state, we see the mitigation of conflict, including violent conflict. We can also claim that non-recognition of self-identified minority groups within a pluralist society will lead to a number of possibly quite serious problems such as disgruntled intellectuals and elites who might eventually lay claim to the legitimacy of violence such as the case in Yugoslavia in the 1980s, the masses riding a wave of cultural renaissance engaging in protest that eventually legitimates the use of violence such as was the case in Quebec in Canada, a contracting labour market such as was the case in Australia in which a hostile environment in the 1950s and 1960s led to migrants from Southern Europe returning to the European continent during post-World War II reconstructions and causing labour shortages in Australia.

The political problem here is one that modern nation-states have grappled with all over the world. The argument goes something like this: we have an 'other' among us. This

group of people has representatives of their larger community externally, that is external to the borders of our nation-state, and they are in contact with this larger group to the detriment of the local group. So it was not simply the case that Tamil and Sinhalese were now self-defining along linguistic lines that were meant to separate people in the modern version of Sri Lanka, nor was it simply the case that there was a minority and majority. It was also factored in that the Tamils had greater numbers in India, who by definition, not necessarily political reality, were meant to be members of the same group. We also see this in the Hungarian case in Romania for example, as well as in Turkey with both Kurds and Armenians. In the Hungarian case, this has been a problem throughout the modern period, at least since the mid-1800s, and in the recent referendum, Hungarians have voted to deny special rights to Romanian citizens of ethnic Hungarian origin, dispelling the idea that ethnic ties are always stronger than civic ties. In the Armenian case, Ataturk, and the brigade of Young Turks before him, successfully used the Armenian history as a case of manufactured political dissent. False collaborations with the Russians, and various enemies of the state, coupled with a special version of 'secular' Islam, brought about a genocide in which several hundreds of thousands of innocent Armenian villagers were slaughtered and attempts at erasing their presence from the modern Turkey were acted upon.

The problems encountered by the Bandaranaike regime is similar to the classic problem encountered by the decolonising and postcolonial regimes of number of nation-states in the post World War II period. Power, interests, competing political parties and individuals were wrapped up in the necessity to join the new world order in a situation in which the Westphalian nation-state was the only perceived way in which to successfully do so. As Matossian (1962) points out in the classic examination of the problem in that the intellectuals and political leaders of these nation states were faced with three questions: "(1) What is to be borrowed from the west? (2) What is to be retained from the nation's past? (3) What characteristics, habits, and products of the masses are to be encouraged?" In this context, we are left with all of the classical dilemmas of the modern nation-state. For example, who are the 'true' people? Are they the peasants as so many European nation-states have self-defined? Are they the great men, the achievers who are the epitomes of the people? Are they the partially Westernised intellectuals? And how do we organise all of

these people through the development of the foundational myth and common understanding of what the nation-state means in the modern terms of the concept?

In the case of Sri Lanka, the idea that Tamils as a people have a separate history or the converse idea that the Sinhalese have some form of separate history, directly implying, from both parties, that there is an ancient development of this separation, is not a pre-modern concept. In fact, we see very similar things in the attempts to develop singular identities in a number of nation-states in the modern period both in South Asia as well as outside of the region. Just as Partha Chatterjee claims in *The Nation and Its Fragments,* "the idea that 'Indian nationalism' is synonymous with 'Hindu nationalism' is not the vestige of some pre-modern religious conception. It is an entirely modern, rationalist, and historicist idea. Like other modern ideologies, it allows for the central role of state in the modernisation of society and strongly defends the state's unity and sovereignty". And like Chatterjee's claims about India, Sri Lanka has similar problems in terms of its development of linguistic nationalism supported by the Buddhist Sinhala revival and the overall renaissance of Sri Lankan culture in the 1950s and 1960s. As such, the religious force is not only an afterthought, but becomes a force that seeks to disentangle a group of people that have been entangled for centuries, again, much like Yugoslavia, and so this is neither a clash of civilisations nor a situation in which religion is operating against civil society. Sinhalese Buddism, led by the Bhikku's, is a social force that is looking to reorganise civil society, not rejecting democracy, but instead creating a French style 'secularised' state with a mono-faith view, which is ultimately a failure.

Transnationalism and Diaspora

Finally, we discuss here the effects of transnational forces and diasporic communities on religion and changing religious social forces. An interesting South Asian diaspora is the Sikh diaspora, especially the one in Canada. We suggest here that it is interesting because Sikhs are a very visible minority with cultural and religious practices that must necessarily set them apart from the majority of Canadians. Sikhs will have all of the classical 'problematic' features of a migrant community in that they will seek to maintain a separate language, in some cases schools for their children, a separate and closed religion, a number of exceptions to their diet and dress, and being visibly South Asian with long beards on

many of the men, will immediately identify them as a minority group. We argue here that despite all of this, Sikhs in Canada represent a successful non-integrationalist, non-assimilationist, diaspora community capable of self-sustaining its religion and language while not opposing or being detrimental to civil society in Canada.

Sikhs have followed Khalsa in various parts of the world and have done so in opposition to, as well as in conjunction with, the prevailing ideology, disposition, and/or religious orientation of the nation-state in which they find themselves. The question for us is whether or not transnationalism and the current state of diaspora and diaspora politics will posit religion as a social force that operates against civil society, bolsters the development of civil society, or perhaps something else. The Sikh case, particularly in Canada, and to some extent the UK and the USA, demonstrates that religion and civil society can work in conjunction to produce free and inclusive public polities.

In India in particular, and in South Asia in general, there have been problems with Sikh militants, especially those making the claim that the Sikh homeland in the Punjab, Khalistan, should be regarded as a goal for true Sikhs. We know about the assassination of Indira Ghandi by her Sikh bodyguards as well as the role that Sikh militants played in the Air India bombing that took place in Canada in June of 1985. All 329 people on board the plane were killed and the usual sorts of bungling was uncovered by investigative journalists well after the tragedy. Aside from the particulars of the actual investigation of the terrorist activities, we claim here that the reaction by the Canadian public, by policy-makers, and by the Sikh community itself, demonstrates that there is a capacity for ‘Western’ secular [civil] societies to accommodate orthodoxy in religion and vice versa. Orthodoxy, it seems, can still be orthodox in the middle of a multi-religious, multi-ethnic, and multi-cultural society. In the context of Canadian multiculturalism, the quest is to make cultures visible. In contrast to French responses to the hijab in school for example, Ontario had students and teachers demonstrating for the right to enjoy diversity and policy makers and administrators stating clearly that religion could also be a public celebration. Further, after the Air India bombing, there had been some internecine strife in the Sikh community throughout Canada. An editor of a Sikh newspaper was murdered and there had been links to militants who were smuggling arms in to Canada and making various threats about terrorist activity. The

responses of civil society, that is the public response and the response of policy makers included, making exceptions for the wearing of the turban in all sorts of functions, increasing Sikh police presence in areas where Sikhs had migrated, opening up political organisations to include South Asians and make South Asians visible in prominent political positions, demonstrate to the Canadian public that Sikhs were not a threat to society, and even to ensure that the RCMP had Sikh candidates. The Sikh community responded by engaging in school exchange programs, opening up religious holidays and various activities to the public, and ensuring that life was made difficult for extremists threatening peace and prosperity in Canada.

In the case of the Sikh diaspora, and the position of Sikh individuals and communities within India itself, offers us a clear demonstration of the capacity for contemporary nation-states of all kinds to adapt to demands of particular groups as well as the capacity for these groups to work in cooperation with the nation-state in which they find themselves. In this case we see that the Canadian government at various levels has managed to make exceptions for Sikh communities and individuals and has provided a flexibility unseen in many other liberal democracies. This has operated to bolster civil society in the Canadian case in that diversity is made public, diversity is shown to be possible even when citizens need to be given special rights according to their religion, and civil society is even bolstered in the face of terrorist attacks.

Conclusion

The relationship between religion and civil society is a complex one. Religious violence may be a manifestation of a conflict between social forces that oppose each other, religious leaders and political leaders for example, or religious violence may be supported by nation-states with the purpose of re-ordering civil society as in the case of Sri Lanka. Civil society in its broadest definition may benefit from religion and even from religious violence in a number of ways and there need not be an antagonistic relationship, as is the case in India. Further, it is clear that the notion of a 'western' civil society opposed to an 'Asian' religious force is not very helpful in explaining how these social forces act upon or in conjunction with each other. Religious violence is not confined to a particular part of the world nor is it confined to a particular type of operation within nation-states. The

assumption that the ‘secularisation’ of religion, that is the move from doctrine to culture, will somehow benefit civil society may or may not be the case depending on where an individual or a group may situate themselves politically. We have seen in Sri Lanka that the global religion of Buddhism has become a version of cultural chauvinism and as such the move from the ‘doctrine’ to society at large [or a proto-civil society] in Sri Lanka has in fact provided the majority with the ability to extract and/or reject a minority.

The assumption that maintaining the doctrine, keeping religious and cultural practices separate, must necessarily lead to a kind of civil disorder is clearly not the case as we have seen with Sikhs in Canada. Here we see that even in the case of extreme violence there is still the capacity for contemporary multicultural nation-states to be flexible enough to accommodate difference and allow for exceptions of all sorts. It must be said that the Sikh communities have also worked hard to accommodate themselves to a new environment and that this is not in this case, nor can it be in general, a one-way relationship of singular accommodation. The general conclusion here is that the South Asian region demonstrates that there is a great diversity in this relationship between civil society and religion and that the complexities must be drawn out in order for us to come to a better understanding of them. We also claim that in examining the globalizing world, it is clear that a retreat in to some version of singular, uniform, identity in a nation-state is not helpful to cooperation and religion and religious cultural forces as well as individuals can choose to cooperate with those around them or choose to engage in conflictual relationships. It is here that multiculturalism still has great relevance as a general approach to the development of civil society.

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