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**It has become increasingly important to study the social force of both religion and nationalism in many contemporary movements all over the world in an analytical framework cutting across conventional dichotomies. Until now, social theory as well as Western common sense have been often content to assume an ideological a priori distinction between the nationalist and the religious imagination.**

### Nation and Religion

*A Comparative Study of  
 Colonizers and Colonized*

As the argument goes, nationalism belongs to the realm of legitimate modern politics, and is assumed to be 'secular', since it is thought to develop in a process of secularization and modernization. Religion, in this view, assumes political significance only in the 'underdeveloped' parts of the world – much as it did in the past of 'the West'. When religion manifests itself politically in the contemporary world, it is thus conceptualized as 'fundamentalism'. This term, which derived from early twentieth-century American evangelicalism, is now taken by both scholars and media as an analytical term to describe collective political action by religious movements.<sup>1</sup> It is almost always interpreted as a negative social force directed against science, rationality and secularism; in short, modernity.<sup>2</sup>

The dichotomy between religion and nationalism is an ideological element in the Western discourse of modernity.<sup>3</sup> The research programme is therefore devised as a comparative one. It examines religion and nationalism in three sets of societies: India and Great Britain; Ghana/Tanzania and Great Britain; and Indonesia and Holland. It focuses on the modern period, between 1850 and the present, which is the period of both high colonialism and high nationalism as well as their aftermath. The project is based on the idea that a combination of metropolitan and colonial perspectives should lead to very different kinds of conversations and insights than have previously been possible among scholars who tend to work along the divide of colonizing and colonized nations.<sup>4</sup> It also suggests that comparative work on these issues on both sides of the divide might show that what seemed entirely separate is, in fact, related.<sup>5</sup> This project aims at revitalizing the discussion of the place of religion in modern society which theories of secularization have brought to a dead end.

The project examines the following sets of questions:

#### 1) The 'secular' nature of British society in comparison with the 'religious' nature of Indian, African and Indonesian societies.

Britain and the Netherlands are examples of modern nation-states in Western Europe. The understanding of nationalism in the social sciences depends largely on a conceptualization of historical developments in this area and should therefore fit these two exemplary cases.

It is a fundamental assumption of the discourse of modernity that religion in modern societies loses its social creativity and is forced to choose between either a sterile conservation of its pre-modern characteristics or a self-effacing assimilation to the secularized world. In fact, new and highly original religious organizations proliferated in Britain and the Netherlands in the 19th century, resulting in unprecedented levels of personal involvement of the laity. Ideological pluralization, resulting in ecclesiastical and theological strife, only served to reinforce these mobilizations.

Both in the Netherlands and in Britain, the second half of the 19th century was a period of

theological and ecclesiastical strife, and marked a turning-point in the development of organized Christianity. The mechanisms which were developed to pacify tensions between religious groups merit attention. For instance, both in the Netherlands and in Britain the formal re-establishment of a Roman Catholic hierarchy in the 1850s called into question the traditional identification of national identity with an undenominational Protestantism. In the second half of the 19th century this religious nationalism came under attack from different directions. Right-wing Protestant movements rejected its enlightened base. Catholics strove to prove their own adherence to the nation. More modern forms of political discourse endeavoured to found the nation on race or history.

Revival movements of indigenous religion in India, Africa and Indonesia have arisen, at least partly, as a reaction to Christian missionary activity. While much work has been done on their nineteenth-century history, too little is known about the development of these movements in the twentieth century, and it is one of the aims of the programme to write this history. The religious revival in India and Indonesia occurred in a period of great religious activity in Britain and Holland. These socio-religious developments in both the colonized areas and in the metropolises have never been studied in a comparative framework.

#### 2) The Discourse of 'Community' and 'Nation'

The impact of the colonial state and its various institutions on African, Indian and Indonesian societies grew significantly in the second half of the nineteenth century, which saw a massive state project enumerate, classify and thereby control huge native populations of Indians and Indonesians by small groups of British and Dutch officials. In this project, categories such as caste, religious community, gender and race were applied with a great deal of variation.<sup>6</sup> One crucial element of this project was the division of populations into religious communities. When the British sought to apply indigenous law in India, they made a clear-cut division between Hindu and 'Muhammedan' law. This conceptual division was further institutionalized in the census operations which established a Hindu 'majority' and a Muslim 'minority' which became the basis of electoral representative politics. The 'establishment' of the 'Hindu majority' as well as that of the 'Muslim minority' was largely the result of the manner of classification, not of pre-existing facts. In Indonesia the Dutch created a distinction between Islamic and *adat* law, and in Africa, the creation of 'tribes' (as both linguistic, political and religious communities) made for similar divisions.<sup>7</sup> To some extent one may say that the project of the colonial state created these facts.

The division of Hindu and Muslim communities in pre-colonial India is not a colonial invention as such. What was a colonial novelty, however, was to count these communities and to have leaders represent them. This was fundamental to the emergence of religious nationalism. It is this colonial politics of 'community' and 'representation' which have to be examined in relation to notions of 'citizenship', 'democracy' and 'the public sphere' which are often said to characterize politics in the modern West.<sup>8</sup> While nation and state seem to belong together, as

expressed in the hyphenated term 'nation-state', 'community' is often used to mean a form of identity which is in direct contestation of the State.

The discourse of 'community' versus 'nation' is also of great importance in the politics of ethnicity which characterize the post-colonial nation-states of Europe. Immigrants have to organize as communities to gain access to the resources of the State. There are a number of questions here, centring on the issues of recognition and entitlement, which are being addressed. For example, what is the relation between the colonial politics of 'community' and the contemporary 'minority' politics? What is the relation between 'ethnicity' and 'religious identity' in the imagination of immigrant communities?<sup>9</sup> The programme also examines the expectations of immigrants from ex-colonial societies about the place of religion in the political systems of the ex-colonizing receiving societies.

#### 3) Missionization and Conversion

In the historical and anthropological study of the missionary project, there has been an almost exclusive interest in the effects of missionization on the target peoples. It is, however, important to look also at the other end of the missionizing process.

The effect of organizing for missionary endeavours on the religious history of the Western countries needs to be studied. In early modern times, Protestant churches had always been closely tied to a particular political regime, with neither the opportunity nor the will to organize missions. The great Protestant missionary societies, founded at the end of the eighteenth century, were not controlled or run by churches. They were the first real mass-organizations and played a crucial role in the transformation of the Protestant churches from the spiritual part of the social order to organizations within society. Yet their effects have hardly been studied at all, and are ignored in modern studies of enlightened sociability.<sup>10</sup> Their 19th-century history – most of them ended up under ecclesiastical control – can serve as an important indication of the fundamental changes which took place in the ways the churches conceived of themselves. The sheer scale of the advertising undertaken by the missionary societies to raise funds served to introduce new notions of religion and conversion in the West.

It is important to look at the ways in which Christian concepts of religion and conversion have been adopted in Hindu, Muslim, and 'pagan' understandings of 'nation', 'religion' and 'conversion'. In India and Indonesia this should be studied in the context of the Islamic *da'wa* movements as well as in those of the Hindu nationalist *shuddhi* movements, in Africa, among new regional cults and independent Christian churches. Like the European Christian missionary project, these Asian missions also have a strong transnationalist, globalizing component. Special attention is to be given to the rise of so-called 'fundamentalist' movements and their contribution to the globalization of religion.<sup>14</sup> The impact of the mission is definitely not confined to the 'success' or 'failure' of conversion, but should be studied as an aspect of religious transformation in both the colonizing and colonized areas. ◆

#### Notes:

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