

STATE OF THE FIELD

Nationalism and Religion in Comparative Perspective: A New Typology of National-Religious Configurations

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Abstract

Does religion motivate and intensify nationalism, or does religion moderate and even suppress nationalism? Six kinds of relationships between nationalism and religion are critically reviewed: nationalism as a modern religion in competition with traditional religions; religious origins of the “Chosen People” as the mythomoteur of nationalism; religious exclusion as nation-building; religious influences on national policies; influence of religious observance on national identification; and religiously based “civilizations” transcending nationalisms. Western Christian experience with nationalism is not generalizable due to the institutional autonomy and supranational organization of the Catholic Church. Western European nationalisms were premised on religious sectarian homogeneity, and the homogenous “confessional state” served as the template of European nation-states. Furthermore, I argue that the late medieval eradication of Muslims and Jews across Western Europe prefigured sectarian and ethnonational purges of the following centuries. Finally, I argue that different configurations of religion and nationalism depend on two critical conditions: the degree to which the dominant religious tradition is doctrinally supraethnic and institutionally transnational, and the religious identity of the main adversary in the constitutive conflict that culminated in national statehood. The crises of Marxism and liberalism provide the context for the resurgence of religion and nationalism at present.

Keywords: nationalism; religion; confessionalization; liberalism; Marxism; constitutive conflict; cosmology; Chosen People; nation-state; sectarianism

Introduction

What is the relationship between nationalism and religion? Is nationalism a “replacement” or “substitute” for religion in modern times? Does religion motivate and intensify nationalism, or on the contrary, does religion moderate and weaken nationalism? Does modern nationalism have a symbiotic or parasitic relationship with religiosity? How can one characterize the overall relationship between nationalism and religion: a zero-sum game or a win-win game? There have been surprisingly few systematic attempts to answer these critical questions of modern identity politics. This state of the field article will provide a few preliminary answers based on the extant scholarship, and offer a novel typology that explains nationalist-religious configurations in comparative perspective.

It is difficult to speak of a cumulative and integrated scholarship on religion and nationalism, thus making it rather challenging to provide a comprehensive let alone exhaustive review thereof. The most prominent scholars of the dominant modernist school of nationalism, “such as Ernest

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Gellner, Benedict Anderson, and Eric Hobsbawm, for example, have been largely silent on the interplay between religion and nationalism” (Rieffer 2003, 216). Moreover, the scholarship of earlier generations that focused on the relationship of nationalism and religion, such as the works of Carlton Hayes (1926, 1960), are mostly neglected, thus making knowledge accumulation more difficult. Furthermore, disciplinary and theoretical differences between scholars led to a fragmented and disjointed scholarship (Gorski and Türkmen-Derivoğlu 2013). There is a disappointing lack of communication across disciplines, subfields, and across generations of scholarship. Related to these problems is the scarcity of exhaustive and value neutral typologies of national-religious configurations. Instead, claims of “exceptionalisms” that often result from single case studies, usually of Western Christian-heritage polities, persist, “American exceptionalism” being the most prominent example. Similarly, the few comparative studies that articulate generalizable conclusions are often limited in their application to Christian-heritage polities.

These limitations are related to the marginality of both the study of nationalism and that of religion in political science. “Religion has long been peripheral to the concerns of most political scientists” (Bellin 2008, 315), and as a recent review critically confirmed, “nationalism failed to become a mainstream topic of research in political science until after 1983, when three influential studies of nationalism were simultaneously published” (Mylonas and Tudor 2021, 112). In top political science publications, research on nationalism and religion have been both underrepresented in relation to their far greater significance in politics and society, and consequently, publications on the interaction between nationalism and religion have been even more scarce in these top journals. Nonetheless, it is the growing significance of both topics for current politics and society that motivated and will most likely continue to propel the academic interest in nationalism, religion, and their intriguing interrelationships, as the next section explains.

Crisis of Marxism and Liberalism, Resurgence of Nationalism and Religion

As Wilfried Spohn observed in his seminal article, “Since the breakdown of Communism, we have been witnessing a worldwide and often parallel revival of nationalism and religion” (2003, 265). The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War provided the geopolitical and historical context for the crisis of Marxism first, and liberalism later, and the concomitant realization that neither nationalism nor religion were fading but instead experiencing a pronounced resurgence in politics. Benedict Anderson begins *Imagined Communities*, probably the most popular and widely translated book on nationalism, with a discussion of how the military conflict between the socialist regimes of Vietnam, Cambodia, and China demonstrates the triumph of nationalism over Marxism (1983, 1–2). For many critical scholars of nationalism, the collapse of “really existing socialism” with the dissolution of the Soviet Union resulted in great part from nationalism (Suny 1993). Resurgent and politicized religion, particularly transnational Catholicism and Islam as exemplified in the anticommunist efforts of the Polish Pope John Paul II and the Afghan mujahedeen, respectively, was considered another key factor in bringing about the fall of Communism. “‘How many divisions has the pope?’ Josef Stalin asked derisively, a few decades before a charismatic Polish leader of the Catholic Church pushed the Soviet Union into the dustbin of history,” as Peter Katzenstein (2010) quipped (2–3). Christian Joppke argues that the resurgence of religion puts “the secular state under siege” in Europe and the United States, as the controversies over the Christian crucifix and the Islamic veil demonstrate (2015). The current “crisis of the liberal order,” for which 2016 is often taken as a critical turning point with Britain’s exit from the European Union and Donald Trump’s election as the president of the United States, is similarly interpreted as the triumph of nationalism whenever it comes to conflict with liberalism (Mearsheimer 2018, 2019, 2021). The phenomenal rise of populism that accompanied the crisis of liberalism is likewise related to the nationalist and religious backlash against cosmopolitan liberalism (Stroschein 2019).

Previous Studies of the Religion-Nationalism Nexus and Six Distinct Bodies of Scholarship

Previous comparative reviews of the relationship between religion and nationalism approached it in terms of “degrees of influence which religion has on nationalism” both at the origin of nationalist movements and after nation-building (Rieffer 2003, 212; Soper and Fetzer 2018, 12); different cultural or civilizational regions reflecting multiple modernities (Eisenstadt 2000; Spohn 2003); “the ways of studying [this] relationship” (Brubaker 2012, 2); and in terms of macro-culturalist and micro-rationalist approaches that dominate in different disciplines (Gorski and Türkmen-Dervişoğlu 2013). Thus, different *kinds* and *degrees* of influence between religion and nationalism have been scrutinized from both *micro-foundational* and *macro-cultural* angles, and with attention to “multiple modernities” prevailing in different geocultural regions.

In this critical review, I first seek to chart the ways in which the relationship between nationalism and religion has been studied, somewhat similar to Brubaker’s (2012) approach, but I arrive at a different classification. I identify six distinct bodies of scholarship, with very little interaction or cross-fertilization across. Throughout my review of these six bodies of scholarship, I emphasize the main question posed at the outset: does religion motivate and intensify nationalism, or on the contrary, does religion moderate and weaken nationalism? The review of these six bodies of scholarship is followed by my more general critical observations aimed at correcting the main shortcomings of the extant literature on the relationship between religion and nationalism. I then propose a new typology of national-religious configurations based on doctrinal and institutional factors on the one hand, and the religious identity of the main adversary in the constitutive national conflict on the other.

1). Nationalism as a Modern Religion in Competition with Traditional Religions

First, there is a body of scholarship addressing the broadest question, namely, whether nationalism is a modern or secular religion (Hayes 1926, 1960; Kedourie 1960; Bellah 1967; Anderson 2006 [1983]; Gellner 2008 [1983]). The earliest articulations of the notion of nationalism as a modern secular religion are often attributed to Emile Durkheim (Santiago 2009) and to Jean Jacques Rousseau (Bellah 1967, 5). While many of these scholars argued that there is an explicit competition and conflict between nationalist and religious leaders for the primary identity of the people (Hayes 1926, 1960; Kedourie 1960; Hobsbawm 1990, 68), those who articulated the notion of an American “civil religion” (Bellah 1967) argued that nationalism-as-a-religion does not need to compete with traditional religions.

Carlton Hayes wrote, already in 1926, that nationalism is the religion of modernity, a thesis he maintained throughout his academic career, and restated in detail in his last book, *Nationalism: A Religion* (1926, 1960). More contemporary scholarship on the topic mostly does not engage with or even cite Hayes’ arguments on this relationship (Smith 1999, 2015; Soper and Fetzer 2018). This is particularly puzzling since Hayes was a faculty member at Columbia University from the 1900s until the 1950s, advised dozens of PhD students, and served as the president of the American Historical Association in 1945. In a notable exception, in his seminal study of secularism, Talal Asad quotes Hayes in approval: “Nationalism has a large number of particularly quarrelsome sects, but as a whole it is the latest and nearest approach to a world-religion” (Hayes 1926, quoted in Asad 2003, 187). Arnold Toynbee, one of the most influential public historians of the early 20th century, also argued that nationalism became the most prevalent religion worldwide: “I would say that in the Western world by far the most prevalent religion, the religion which is three-quarters of the religion even of those of us who profess one of the historic higher religions—Judaism, Catholicism, or Protestantism—is really nationalism” (1949, 89). In a similar vein, Gellner equated nationalist rallies with public worship: “In a nationalist age, societies worship themselves brazenly and openly, spurning the camouflage,” he argued. “At Nuremberg, Nazi Germany did not worship itself by pretending to worship God or even Wotan; it overtly worshipped itself” (2008 [1983], 55). Anderson emphasized the role of newspapers as a substitute for regular prayers in modern

nationalism with reference to the critical observation of a leading German philosopher: “Hegel observed that newspapers serve modern man as a substitute for morning prayers” (Anderson 2006 [1983], 35).

Hayes likened national flag and national anthem as “quasi-religious emblems,” and noted that in France, the “Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen was treated as a national catechism” (1960, 50). Since then, many national rituals, especially those related to warfare and remembrance of national martyrs, have been studied as quasi-religious rituals (Harvey 2000; Hutchinson 2009), and many other objects such as the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and Cenotaph have been treated as quasi-religious emblems of nationalism (Anderson 1983). Almost none of these nationalist rituals, however, are performed on a daily basis. They are rather sporadic rituals that recur annually such as in national holidays and commemorations, or in irregular intervals such as nationalist marches or “pilgrimages” to sites of nationalist significance, or once-in-a-lifetime rites of passage such as conscription.

A major lacuna in the study of nationalism as a secular modern religion is the lack of systematic research on the extent to which nationalist rituals of everyday life replace daily religious rituals in a zero-sum game. Following up on Hegel’s observation, do secular daily practices such as reading national newspapers actually replace and thus lead to a decline in daily religious practices such as “morning prayers”? Given the centrality of this dynamic to the claims regarding “nationalism as a modern secular religion,” it is surprising that we do not have systematic cross-national, subnational, and longitudinal studies measuring whether nationalist practices of everyday life (Goode and Stroup 2015; Bonikowski 2016; Goode 2020) replace religious practices of everyday life, such as daily prayers, or attendance in Friday Prayers, Sunday Mass, and observance of the Sabbath. In contrast, the extent to which religious rituals increase or decrease ethnonational or religious intolerance, has attracted more systematic attention recently, which will be reviewed further below.

2). *The Religious Origins of the “Chosen People” as the Mythomoteur of Nationalism*

Second, there is a body of scholarship arguing that some religious ideas, and more specifically the idea of a “Chosen People,” facilitated the birth of modern nationalism (O’Brien 1988; Smith 1992, 1999, 2015; Hastings 1997; Gorski 2000). Following the usage of Connor O’Brien (1988), Philip Gorski (2000, 1435) refers to this type of nationalism as “holy or Hebraic nationalism.” Traditional religious “myths of ethnic election” (Smith 1999) continue to justify, motivate, and reinforce modern nationalisms. These arguments suggest not conflict or competition, but a rather strong symbiotic relationship where religious belief strengthens ethno-nationalism. Yuri Slezkine pithily summarized the metaphorical connection between modern nationalism and the notion of Israelites as the Chosen People:

The principal religion of the Modern Age is nationalism ... Every land is promised, every language Adamic, every capital Jerusalem, and every people chosen (and ancient). The Age of Nationalism, in other words, is about every nation becoming Jewish. (Slezkine 2004, 1)

The pattern of religiously justified nationalism as being “God’s chosen people” is clearly observable in Protestant nationalist movements such as the English (Greenfeld 1992), the Dutch (Gorski 2000), and Protestant settlers overseas such as the American Puritans, the Afrikaners, and as a non-Protestant example, Zionists (Bellah 1967; Akenson 1992; Smith 1999), but not much elsewhere, raising doubts about its universalizability. In these Protestant polities, the new nation is typically described as the New Israel fighting against an oppressive empire that persecutes the Chosen People who adhere to the true religion, which is invariably a version of Protestantism (Anglican, Dutch Calvinist, Puritan, etc.). In a notable contrast, there is no convincing example of a religious myth of ethnic election of the people as the constitutive story of a Catholic or a Sunni Muslim ethnic group. Smith recognizes the exceptional fit between his argument and

Protestantism, when he states that, “a distinction needs to be made between the more ‘covenantal’ type of ethnic election, derived directly from ancient Israel and particularly marked among smaller, suffering Protestant communities, and the more ‘missionary’ kind of chosenness, which is found among rulers and elites of larger kingdoms” (Smith 2003, 27). However, the “missionary kind of chosenness... found among rulers and elites” of imperial polities with universalist religions (Catholic Christendom or Islam) is almost the antithesis of nationalism both because it aspires to achieve an unlimited realm potentially encompassing the entire humanity, the opposite of nations famously defined by Anderson as “inherently limited and sovereign” (1983, 6), and also because it relates to the chosenness of “rulers and elites,” not of the “people,” which again is a definitional criterion of nationalism. The conspicuous absence of a Catholic or Islamic “myth of ethnic election” is related to key doctrinal and institutional differences among main religious traditions, which is a key factor in the new typology of national-religious configurations that I propose further below. Beyond the religious myth of ethnic election, however, certain nations may be identified with one religion or denomination through processes of religious exclusion and violence, as the next section will elaborate.

3). *Religious Exclusion and Violence as Constitutive Acts of Nation-Building*

Third, there is a body of scholarship focusing on religious exclusions within specific nation-states (Aktürk 2009a; Katznelson 2010; Sehat 2011; Adida, Laitin, and Valfort 2016), and the relationship between religion, nationalism, and violence (Varshney 2002; Gorski and Türkmen-Derivoğlu 2013), especially in cases where the founding of the nation was based on a religious mobilization and exclusion (Marx 2004; Devji 2013; Aktürk 2015; Walzer 2015), or when the collapse of democracy or the disintegration of the polity was related to ethno-religious conflict (Sells 1996; Kopstein and Wittenberg 2010). Relatedly, some scholars discuss the links between present-day national categories and premodern religious communal categories, for example in debating whether post-Ottoman Balkan nation-states are secularized versions of religiously defined *millet*s of the Ottoman legal administrative system (Aktürk 2009a; Mylonas 2019; Evstatiev 2019).

Anthony Marx (2004) argued that the key Western European nation-states, namely, England, France, and Spain, were all founded on violent exclusions of their religious minorities, namely, English Catholics, French Protestants, Spanish Jews, and Muslims. I would critically note that these were also the Western polities that colonized and shaped much of the rest of the world. The identification of a specific sect of Christianity with each national identity was standard practice in much of Europe, summarized in the famous phrase, “*cuius regio, eius religio*” (whose realm, his/her religion) that captures the spirit of the Peace of Augsburg (1555) and the Peace of Westphalia (1648). Religious persecution in the early modern period produced millions of religious refugees, and fundamentally altered the demographic composition of most European polities (Kaplan 2007; Terpstra 2015). Religious exclusion, often through violent persecution, was not limited to Europe, however, and also took place in many African, American, and Asian polities.

If religious myths of ethno-national election elevate one ethno-national group among all others, thus serving as a “positive discrimination” for their members, the much more common religious exclusions serve as a negative demarcation line between the persecuted and the persecutor. Neither the persecuted nor the persecutor of a religious exclusion necessarily end up seeing themselves as a religiously exalted ethnic group, and this is why such an exclusionary dynamic is significantly different from a religious myth of ethnic election (“Chosen People”) that was discussed in the previous section. Religious exclusion, much more than religious myths of ethnic election, is how many nations were identified with a particular religious sectarian tradition. “Boundary making” is central to ethnic survival and national identity (Barth 1969), and “intrinsic and enduring superiority of religion as a primordial line of *national* demarcation” (Mavrogordatos 2003, 118) arguably continued from the late medieval period to the present-day with the exclusion of religious minorities under ethnic, national, racial, ideological, and quasi-rational justifications (Aktürk 2020).

4). Religious Influences on National Politics and Policy Making

Fourth, there is a body of scholarship on religious influences on national politics, mostly focusing on the study of religious organizations' influence on government policies, as these are often related to historical legacies of national-religious configurations, such as a national-religious fusion enabling religious organizations to have significant influence over policy-making (Rieffer 2003; Mavrogordatos 2003; Grzymala-Busse 2015, 2016; Grzymala-Busse and Slater 2018; Soper and Fetzer 2018). These studies are useful in illustrating the concrete manifestations of religious influences in politics and policy-making, such as in political decisions regarding abortion (Grzymala-Busse 2015), divorce, same-sex marriage, religious education (Grzymala-Busse and Slater 2018), and religious affiliation in official identity documents (Mavrogordatos 2003).

A major shortcoming observed in some studies of religious influence in national politics is the acceptance of "religious demography" as an exogenous cause, "[a]rguably, the most important variable," in determining whether a country adopts religious nationalism (Soper and Fetzer 2018, 14), whereas religious demography is often the outcome, rather than an exogenous cause, of the type of nationalist-religious configuration particular polities adopted (Marx 2004; Aktürk 2009a; 2015; Terpstra 2015). Relatedly, in their evaluation of three pairs of countries with different types of nationalisms (civil-religious, religious, and secular), Soper and Fetzer (2018) find the Christian-majority polity in each paired comparison (United States, Greece, and Uruguay) to be "stable," in contrast to the non-Christian polities in each of these paired comparisons (Israel, Malaysia, and India) that they find to be "unstable." Although their finding of stable Christian nation-states and unstable non-Christian nation-states in their paired comparisons may be coincidental, it may also be due to the overwhelming religious homogeneity (Christian-majority) of Greece, United States, and Uruguay compared to India, Israel, and Malaysia, which itself is an outcome, not a cause, of deliberate choices in their political history. Some nationalist movements included prominent leaders of religious minority background (e.g., Albanian, Syrian) and preserved the multireligious demography of the polity, whereas many other nationalist movements were monoreligious in their leadership (e.g., Greek, Turkish), which was accompanied by the eradication of religious minorities, thus suggesting that religious demography is often the result of the kind of nationalism that prevails in a particular polity.

5). Interaction of Religious Observance and Rituals with Ethnic and National Identities

Fifth, there is a body of scholarship looking at whether sacred festivals or rituals moderate or intensify ethnic, national, or religious intolerance. Several studies in economics and political science found that the annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca decreased not only ethnonational intolerance, but perhaps surprisingly, also decreased religious intolerance, instead strengthening what can be described as a more cosmopolitan worldview (Clingsmith, Khwaja, and Kremer 2009; Alexseev and Zhemukhov 2016, 2017). In contrast, other studies found that pilgrimages to sacred sites in territories that are contested by rival nationalist movements in interwar Poland, Kosovo, and Mandate Palestine might augment ethnonationalism (Sells 1996; Polak-Springer 2020). These studies are exceptional in teasing out the causal linkages between a specific religious ritual, pilgrimage, and relations between ethnic, national, and religious groups. However, in the life of most people who self-identify as religious, pilgrimage is a rare, and in the case of Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca, often once-in-a-lifetime experience for a minority of believers. There are far more regular, weekly (e.g., Friday Prayers, Sabbath, Sunday Mass) and even daily (e.g., prayers) religious practices, which have not been examined in any systematic way for their influence on nationalism. Are regular attendees of Catholic Sunday Mass or Islamic Friday Prayers more or less nationalistic, more or less ethnocentric, more or less racist, than those who do not? It is rather surprising that such central and common practices of the largest religious traditions worldwide have not been systematically examined for their influence in moderating or reinforcing nationalist sentiments. Religious

symbols, rituals, and myths have been central to another burgeoning field of scholarship at the intersection of religion and nationalism, namely, the debates around “civilizations,” which the next section will critically review.

6). *Religiously Based Supranational Civilizations Transcending Nationalism(s)*

Sixth, there is a body of scholarship focusing on “civilizations” as supranational identities, mostly following on Samuel Huntington’s (1993, 1996) widely cited argument that religiously based civilizational conflicts will be the primary fault lines of conflict in the post-Cold War world. Civilizational identities are often studied as being motivated or legitimated through religious appeals. Religious conservative (i.e., Catholic transnational) underpinnings of the European Union (Katzenstein 2006; Risse 2010, 199–213) and the conservative origins of the invention of the “Western” (Jackson 2006) and “Judeo-Christian” (Gaston 2019) civilization, and the more recent upsurge in civilizational discourse among American and European far right (Brubaker 2017; Pertwee 2020) and post-Soviet Russia (Hale and Laruelle 2020), also observable in the case of Eurasianism (Kotkin 2007; Katzenstein and Weygandt 2017), are among the most notable and globally significant examples of seeking to transcend national identities and the nation-state through supranational visions of “civilizational” identities and institutions, which rely heavily on religious discourse. Especially in the case of Northern and Western European populisms, references to Christian religious heritage facilitated a critical shift from nationalism to Western “civilizationism” defined by its opposition to Islam (Brubaker 2017). This last body of scholarship is also related to the popular discussions on “empires” replacing nation-states, because on closer inspection, every neo-imperial discourse legitimates itself with reference to a specific “civilizational” identity (e.g., Western Christian, Orthodox, Islamic).

Despite the phenomenal spike in popularity of civilizational discourse, there has been almost no systematic research measuring civilizational identification at the individual level, with the notable exception of “the first systematic survey-based study of individual-level civilizational identification” in Russia by Henry Hale and Marlene Laruelle (2020). This is in great part because “American political science has largely neglected civilizational analysis,” and also because of the conceptual and operational ambiguity of what a civilization is (Akturk 2009b; Katzenstein 2010, 3). Following on “multiple modernities” based on different “Axial Age civilizations,” each shaped by a different religious core (Eisenstadt 1982, 2000; Katzenstein 2010), I argue that a different configuration of religion and nationalism developed under the influence of each Axial Age civilization, conditioned by differences in religious doctrines and institutions, as well as the axis of constitutive conflict at the time of nation-building, as I discuss in the following sections.

Five Observations and a Comparative Typology of National-Religious Configurations

First, much of the scholarship implicitly builds on the Western European experience, which is not generalizable due to the exceptional institutional separation of secular and religious authority in the Western Christian (Catholic and Protestant) tradition. In other religious traditions, religious authority is either subordinate to the secular authority (e.g., Orthodox Christianity), or there is no hierarchical and distinct religious authority (e.g., Sunni Islam), and/or secular authority simultaneously claims religious leadership (e.g., Shintoism). Second, there is a very significant difference between Catholic and Protestant traditions due to the supranational and hierarchical institutionalization of the Catholic Church compared to the national and subnational institutionalization of Protestant denominations, which place these two traditions at opposite poles in terms of the national-religious configurations they generate. Third, Anglo-American scholarship on this subject, implicitly informed by the Protestant model of religious-national fusion, and perhaps reinforced by the study of a few other non-Christian cases such as Jewish nationalism of Israel and Shinto nationalism of Japan, does not fully appreciate the deep tension if not conflict between

religion and ethno-nationalism across Catholic and Sunni Islamic world, which constitute the two largest religious traditions in the world.

Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, Western European nationalisms, Catholic and Protestant alike, were originally premised on religious sectarian homogeneity: “Confessions were supposed to be statements of spirituality, but everywhere they became standards of citizenship,” and “public professions to ever more specific and dogmatic statements of religious faith became the norm across Christendom,” as Nicholas Terpstra (2015, 251) argued. According to Talal Asad, “post-Reformation doctrine that it was the state’s business to secure *religious uniformity within the polity*—or at least to exclude Dissenters from important rights—was crucial to the formation of the early modern state” (2003, 174). Western European nation-states were formed around a religious sectarian core, such as Anglican England, Calvinist Netherlands, Lutheran Sweden, and Catholic Portugal and Spain. While this is often rendered as “religious homogeneity” in English, viewed from a non-Christian perspective, what Western European nation-states aspired to achieve was much more than religious homogeneity; it was sectarian and denominational homogeneity of a kind that is difficult to observe in non-Western polities, with a few exceptions such as Iran, where an overwhelming majority nominally adheres to the official sectarian creed of Twelver Shiism. Even as late as in the postwar period, European debates over “religious toleration” and pluralism were mostly about tolerating Christians of other denominations, not about tolerating non-Christian religions (Greenberg 2019). Although the statement that “Frenchmen should not think of other Frenchmen as Turks” was interpreted “as an early statement of the virtues of transcending religious difference in the name of national unity” (Greenfeld 1992, 106, quoted in Calhoun 1997, 84), it also demonstrated that even in its most secularist example (i.e., French), Western European nationalisms excluded non-Christians, as the emphasis on the “Turk” (i.e., Muslim) indicates.

Fifth, while some scholars focus on the Protestant Reformation and the consequent confessionalization as prefiguring national homogenization (Terpstra 2015), I suggest that the late medieval mass purges of Muslims and Jews across Western Europe, particularly through internal crusades that peaked in the 13th century, prefigured both sectarian and ethnonational purges of the following centuries. Relatedly, “the institutionally orchestrated stigmatization of Jews and Muslims goes further back to the Fourth Lateran Council under the leadership of Pope Innocent III in 1215, when all Jews and Muslims across Western Christendom were obligated to wear distinctive clothing and live segregated lives” (Aktürk 2020, 697). There is a burgeoning social science scholarship on the critical role of Holy Land crusades for European state formation and Western political order (Mastnak 2002; Blaydes and Paik 2016), and yet crusades in general and the internal crusades in particular have not been studied for their role in nation-building.

A New Typology of National-Religious Configurations: Doctrine, Institutionalization, and Constitutive Conflict

I argue that different configurations of religion and nationalism depend on two major conditions: the degree to which the dominant religious sectarian tradition is supraethnic in doctrine and transnational in its institutionalization on the one hand, and the religious identity of the main adversary in the constitutive conflict that culminated in national statehood on the other. These two factors can be considered variables in a continuum rather than binaries, since religious sectarian tradition may be more or less ethnic rather than either fully ethnic or entirely supraethnic.

The ethnonational dimensions of religious doctrines are surprisingly understudied. For example, Judaism includes a well-known religious myth of ethnic election (“Chosen People”), and Hinduism includes a religiously sanctioned hereditary social order, the caste system, making it arguably the largest “ethnic” religion in the world. In contrast, neither Christianity nor Islam have a religious myth of ethnic election encompassing all of their adherents. Nonetheless, several Christian and Islamic sects have been “ethnicized” insofar as ethnic and religious sectarian identity have become *de facto* coterminous, as in the cases of Alawites, Alevis, Armenians, Assyrians, and Copts, with

many adherents entertaining a “subjective belief in common descent,” which is the Weberian definition of ethnic identity. Hereditary priesthood, such as the Brahmins in Hinduism, *kohanim* in Judaism, and the *dedes* in Alevism, may be considered another indicator of an ethnicized religion. On the other hand, Catholic Christianity and Sunni Islam are located at the other end of the spectrum for not being coterminous with any ethnic group, and not entertaining a subjective belief in common descent as part of their religious identity, which parallels their status as the two largest religious traditions in terms of the number of adherents worldwide.

There is no deterministic relationship between having a religious myth of ethnic election and the variation in the ethno-national institutionalization of a religion. However, the appropriation of the religious myth of ethnic election found in the Old Testament by specific Protestant ethno-national groups (e.g., Dutch as the new Israelites), along with translation of the Bible to vernacular languages and the rejection of supranational papal authority as critical elements of the Reformation, brought about a very strong association between early modern nationalism and Protestantism. As George Mavrogordatos (2003) has maintained, “Arising in rejection of the supranational authority of the Pope, Protestantism and especially Lutheranism was not merely compatible with, but actually inseparable from incipient nationalism from the very beginning” (119). Anglican England, Calvinist Netherlands, and Lutheran Sweden are among the examples of this pattern in Protestant northwestern Europe. The relationship between Shintoism and the Japanese nation-state resembles the Protestant national pattern (Fukase-Indergaard and Indergaard 2008). In contrast, the Catholic Church maintained a supranational organizational structure with a Latin liturgy well into the 20th century. As Mavrogordatos (2003) has argued, “If Catholicism and Protestantism constitute two opposite poles in this respect, the Greek case serves to illustrate the intermediate position of the Eastern Orthodox faith, which has moved over the centuries from one extreme to the other” (120). With classical Arabic as the only language of the daily prayers, call to the prayers, Friday Prayers, and other mandatory religious services even at present, as well as a mosque institution that is strikingly similar across the world, Sunni Islam in particular resembles Catholic Christianity in its supraethnic and supranational structure. Varieties of Shiite Islam, as in the case of the institutionalization and fusion of Twelver Shiism with Iranian national identity, occupy a more intermediate position (Table 1).

Classifying Protestantism as being more compatible with ethnonationalism than most other religious traditions may be challenged due to the global missionary impulse of Protestantism, which explains why there are currently more Anglicans in Nigeria than in England, and more Lutherans in Tanzania than in Sweden. However, in the absence of a supranational authority such as the Papacy that could weigh in to rein in any doctrinal or institutional attempts at ethnicization or nationalization, new Protestant communities in Nigeria, Tanzania, and elsewhere have more opportunity to develop their local ethnonational doctrines, institutions, and even religious myths of ethnic election than Catholics, just as the Dutch Protestant Afrikaners did in South Africa (Smith 1999). Moreover, Protestantism is an umbrella term for numerous smaller denominations (Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, etc.), and these demographically smaller denominations might be more suitable for nationalization and even ethnicization. The interplay of religion and nationalism, most importantly in the case of covenantal, Hebraic, or holy nationalism across Western Christian polities, has been critically examined by many scholars previously (O’Brien 1988; Gorski 2000). In relation to the Catholic-Protestant comparison outlined in this article, it has been argued that Catholic churches

Table 1. National-Religious Configurations based on Doctrine and Institutionalization

Supraethnic doctrine and/or transnational institutionalization	Intermediate position	Ethnic doctrine and/or national institutionalization
Catholicism; Sunni Islam	Eastern Orthodoxy; Shiite Islam	Judaism; Hinduism; Shintoism; Protestantism

historically have more ethnic-racial diversity and integration compared to the Protestant denominations that include de facto segregated black and white churches in the United States, with the notable exception of Pentecostals (Dougherty 2003, 68–69).

More than a dozen autocephalous Orthodox churches that mostly correspond to present-day nation-states may suggest that Orthodoxy should be placed at the ethnic-national end of the spectrum along with Protestantism in Table 1. However, the Ecumenical Patriarchate functions as a centripetal force, and the Patriarchate's more than symbolic significance was observable in the recent struggle between the Russian and Ukrainian Orthodox Church over the granting of autocephalous status to the latter. It is indisputable, however, that Orthodoxy moved from the supraethnic towards the ethnonational end of the spectrum following the independence of numerous Orthodox majority nation-states with the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, the Soviet Union, and Yugoslavia. In short, compared to Islam, Catholicism, and even Orthodox Christianity, Protestantism lacks a supranational centripetal focal point (e.g., pilgrimage to Mecca) or supranational hierarchy (e.g., Papacy), which could weigh in against tendencies to ethnicize or nationalize religious identity.

Constitutive conflicts interact with the doctrinal and institutional affinities of religious traditions in shaping the national-religious configuration of each polity. Thus, a polity in which a doctrinally supraethnic and institutionally transnational religion (e.g., Catholicism or Sunni Islam) dominates might witness a fusion of its national and religious identity if the main adversaries in the constitutive conflicts that led to the establishment of the nation-state were of a different religion. This is arguably what happened in the fusion of Catholicism with the Irish and Polish national identities. Irish nationalists confronted Protestant England, and Polish nationalists confronted Orthodox Russia and Protestant Prussia in their struggles for independent nationhood, thus transforming the religious sectarian fault line into a national demarcation. Similarly, coming out of a supraethnic and transnational religious tradition, Turkish and Pakistani nationalists struggled against non-Muslim adversaries (e.g., Protestant British, Hindu-majority India, or Orthodox Greece), thus transforming the religious fault line into a national demarcation. In contrast, most nationalisms in the Americas (e.g., American, Colombian, Mexican) and in the settler colonies elsewhere (e.g., Australian), as well as Levantine Arab nationalisms, struggled against adversaries of the same religion (Catholic Spanish, Protestant British, Islamic Ottoman) for national independence. Based on these two dimensions, one can talk about Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox Christian; Shiite and Sunni Islamic; Hindu, Jewish, and Shinto configurations of religion and nationalism that are shaped by the religious identity of the main adversary in their constitutive conflicts (Table 2).

Based on these two dimensions, religion would be expected to reinforce and intensify nationalism the most in cases where a religion with an ethnic doctrine and national institutionalization was accompanied by a constitutive conflict against an adversary of a different religion, as in Dutch, English, Israeli, and Japanese nationalisms. On the opposite end, religion would be expected to compete against and moderate or weaken nationalism the most in cases where a religion with a supraethnic doctrine and transnational institutionalization was accompanied by a constitutive conflict against an adversary having the same religious identity, as in Colombian, Mexican, Levantine Arab, or Ukrainian nationalism. The other two combinations occupy an intermediary

Table 2. Four Types of National-Religious Configurations

Doctrine-Institutionalization/ Axis of Constitutive Conflict	Supraethnic doctrine and/or transnational institutionalization	Ethnic doctrine and/or national institutionalization
Main Adversary: different religious sectarian identity	Irish; Pakistani; Polish; Turkish	Dutch; English; Israeli; Japanese (most reinforcing/ intensifying)
Main Adversary: same religious sectarian identity	Colombian; Mexican; Levantine Arab; Ukrainian (most moderating/weakening)	American; Australian

position where the two dimensions of the nationalist-religious relationship exert opposite (reinforcing vs. moderating) influences. In a dyadic confrontation, however, supraethnic and transnational religions would be expected to moderate nationalism against other nations of the same faith, but not necessarily against adherents of other religions. For example, Catholicism may moderate Polish nationalism against Catholic Lithuanians, Slovaks, or Austrians, but may not moderate and might even reinforce nationalism against Orthodox Russians, Lutheran Germans, or Jews.

This is not merely a descriptive typology examining the nexus between religion and nationalism at the time of nation-state formation alone, but it is also a typological theory that seeks to explain the enduring relationships between religion and national identity long after nation-state formation, because the initial stages of nation-state formation often create path dependent institutional, legal, and demographic legacies that are extremely resilient and very difficult to change afterwards (Aktürk 2009a, 2012, 2015). The two variables underpinning the national-religious configurations may change, although such changes are not very common: the transnational institutional structure of a religion might be fundamentally altered (e.g., various “schisms”), and a newer episode of mass violence might overshadow the original constitutive conflict such that it may create deeper fault lines in national identity politics, which was arguably the case in the American Civil War (Marx 1997).

Missing Links and Unaddressed Questions

There are a few studies of the relationship between religious persecution and nation-building, but the birth of religious toleration is rarely examined in the context of nation-building. How, when, and where did European nationalisms overcome their deepest constitutive wound, namely, the sectarian divide that underpinned the most violent wars that most European states experienced following the Reformation (Kaplan 2007; Terpstra 2015; Aktürk 2020)? Udi Greenberg demonstrates that “Nazism aimed to mobilize all Christians in a new and ‘positive Christianity,’ a racialized conception of religion that would unite all non-Jews and non-communists” and “[m]ore than anywhere else, Germany was the launching pad for systematic ecumenical writing and organization” (2019, 520). Greenberg argues that in postwar Europe, too, it was decolonization and the fear of Islam among the missionaries that motivated and enabled Christian ecumenism. Such a dynamic of channeling violence or hatred to an outgroup (i.e., Jews, Muslims) as the price of making peace within a divided ingroup (i.e., Christians) resembles Tomaz Mastnak’s (2002) argument that the “Peace of God” movement aimed at ending violence among Christians in medieval Europe culminated in the crusades against Muslims.

There are many other unanswered questions regarding the relationship between nationalism and religion only briefly touched upon in this article. Is nationalist fervor a compensation for declining religiosity? Is there a covariance between secularization of everyday life and intensification of nationalist feeling, especially among the first post-religious generations? In what sense do secular nationalist practices of everyday life resemble daily practices of religious piety? Does nationalism offer a “cosmology” that is comparable to the comprehensive cosmologies of traditional religions? How does nationalism compare with or relate to Marxist socialism as a secular “cosmology” or “political religion” (Riegel 2005; Maier 2007; Stedman Jones 2010; Slezkine 2017; Smolkin 2018)? Is there an elective affinity between certain religious traditions and the choice of particular ethnicity regimes in nation-building, such as the monoethnic, multiethnic, and anti-ethnic regimes (Aktürk 2012)? One may also pose many historical questions: where and when was the first act of collective violence in which participants killed and died for the nation alone, without any reference to religious notions of sacrifice, reward, or afterlife?

In the opening pages of his magnum opus, Anderson (1983) suggested that Marxism lost to nationalism as the developments in Southeast Asia indicated already in the late 1970s. John Mearsheimer (2018) more recently argued that whenever liberalism and nationalism come into conflict, nationalism invariably wins. Perhaps the biggest unanswered question concerns the

earliest major contest nationalism had, well before its confrontation with Marxism and liberalism, and continues to have in a post-Marxist and post-liberal world: When nationalism and religion come into conflict, which one emerges triumphant? Based on the experience of the last half millennium, the answer to this question may vary depending on the specific nationalist-religious configuration. In a post-socialist and post-liberal world, religions and nationalisms are likely to remain as the two most powerful contenders in the marketplace of identities.

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