

Towards a De-secularised Transnational Civil Society? Transnational Religious

Actors and International Relations

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This paper focuses on the role which transnational religious actors play in international politics. Conventionally, international politics has been organized around the principle of state sovereignty since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. The Peace of Westphalia ‘secularized international relations by undermining religion as a mode of legitimacy’ (Teschke 2003) and enshrined the territorially bounded sovereign state as the basic unit of international relations. Recently, however, globalization has called into question the claims of the state to unconditional sovereignty thereby creating space for the (re) emergence of transnational religious actors in global politics.

¹ Paper prepared for panel on ‘Religion, soft power and international relations’, SGIR Conference, Torino, September, 12-15 2007. The author wishes to thank Jeff Haynes for the invitation to contribute to this panel. An earlier version of the paper will be published in Jeffrey Haynes (ed.) *The Routledge Handbook of Religion and Politics* (Routledge 2007).

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In this paper, the activities of transnational actors working from within two different religious traditions will be examined: Roman Catholicism and Sikhism. Using the case studies of the Roman Catholic Church, the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) and UNITED SIKHS, it will be argued that, despite differences in size, scale and objectives, actors operating from within these two religious traditions have attempted to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by globalization to articulate a transnational identity which, in potentially challenging the international order of territorialized nation-states dating back to the Peace of Westphalia, may be considered 'counter-hegemonic' (Gramsci [1971]1998).

It is, furthermore, hoped that the choice of these actors will serve to refocus the debate from an excessive attention to Islam to the relationship between transnational religious actors and international relations in general. For, while it is undeniable that some transnational Islamic organizations, such as *al-Qaeda*, pose a direct and often violent challenge to the international order, others, such as the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), work to further 'Islamic' interests or goals *within* it (Haynes 2001, 2007). In contrast to the post- September 11 (hereafter 9/11) conventional wisdom in western policy circles, it is argued that there is nothing particularly subversive about

Islam *per se* but that there is a fundamental contradiction between the cosmopolitan, universal ideals espoused by some monotheistic transnational religious actors and the *realpolitik* of the Westphalian order.

Transnational Religious Actors, Soft Power and Hegemony

A transnational religious actor may be defined as any non-governmental actor which claims to represent a specific religious tradition which has relations with an actor in another state or with an international organization. According to Jeffrey Haynes (2007), transnational religious actors seek to influence international politics through the exercise of what Joseph Nye Jr. terms ‘soft power’ (Nye 2003, 2004a&b). The concept of ‘soft power’ refers to the capability of an actor, often but not necessarily a state, to influence other entities through ‘direct, often cultural or ideological influence or encouragement.’ (Haynes 2007: 40). According to Nye, ‘soft power is the ability to get what you want by attracting and persuading others to adopt your goals’ (Nye 2003). In other words, soft power rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others (Nye 2004b). It differs from hard power which Nye defines as ‘the ability to use the carrots and sticks of economic and military might to make others follow your will’ (Nye 2003). Nye considers ‘hard’

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and ‘soft’ power to be interrelated since they are both aspects of the ability to achieve one’s purpose by affecting the behaviour of others. The distinction between them is one of degree:

Command power—the ability to change what others do—can rest on coercion or inducement. Co-optive power—the ability to shape what others want—can rest on the attractiveness of one’s culture and values or the ability to manipulate the agenda of political choices in a manner that makes others fail to express some preferences because they seem to be too unrealistic (Nye 2004b)

The relationship between ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ power echoes the much earlier (and in my view theoretically richer work) of a former student of *L’Università di Torino*, Antonio Gramsci. Like Nye, Gramsci believed that power encompassed both ‘coercion’ and ‘consent’ and that the successful exercise of power rested on the acceptance of the ideas of hegemonic actors as legitimate. Gramsci distinguished between ‘civil society’ which he defined as the ‘ensemble of organisms commonly known as “private”, and that of ‘political society’ or ‘the State’. Civil society corresponds to the ‘function of hegemony which the dominant group exercises throughout society’ and the State to that of “direct

domination” or command’. For Gramsci, *egemonia*, or ‘hegemony’, refers to ‘the “spontaneous” consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group’. This could be contrasted with the ‘apparatus of state coercive power which “legally” enforces discipline on those groups who do not “consent” either actively or passively’ (Gramsci [1971] 1998: 12)

Thus, control is maintained not only through political or economic coercion (or ‘hard power’ to use Nye’s terminology) but ideologically through what Nye would term ‘soft power’ and in particular through the acceptance of the values of ‘dominant fundamental groups’ as ‘common sense’. It is here where religion assumes importance to the maintenance of social cohesion and political order. For Gramsci, the ‘strength of religions... lies in the fact that they feel very strongly the need for doctrinal unity of the whole mass of the faithful and strive to ensure that the higher intellectual stratum does not get separated from the lower’ (Gramsci [1971] 1998: 328). Gramsci stated that, in Western Europe the cultural values of the bourgeoisie were reinforced through Christianity, and in Italy where the bourgeoisie was relatively weak, through Roman Catholicism. The Roman Catholic Church, for Gramsci, had always been ‘the most

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vigorous in the struggle to prevent the “official” formation of two religions, one for the “intellectuals” and the other for the “simple souls”. However, Roman Catholicism was by no means uniformly reactionary and a ‘progressive forward movement’ associated with the Jesuits could be identified (Gramsci [1971] 1998: 328).

Using a neo-Gramscian framework, we can distinguish between ‘hegemonic’ religious transnational actors which reproduce existing power relationships and socio-economic inequalities through the articulation of values which (unintentionally) serve the interests of ‘dominant fundamental groups’ and ‘counter-hegemonic’ or ‘subaltern’ ones which challenge and/or disturb the prevailing institutional architecture of power by contesting the ‘hegemonic’ ideas of ‘dominant fundamental groups’. At the international level, power is institutionalized through the Westphalian system of territorialized sovereign states and is legitimized through the realist paradigm which may still be considered hegemonic in that it continues to inform the ontological and epistemological assumptions of International Relations (IR).

This paper will first outline the foundational principles of the Westphalian order before accounting for the ‘global religious resurgence’ (Thomas 2000, 2005). Contemporary

processes of globalization, it is argued, are central to the ‘return of religion’ to IR theory (Petito and Hatzopoulos 2003). Their impact on transnational religious communities in general will be analyzed before examining how they have transformed the role of the Roman Catholic Church and the Papacy in particular. The subsequent section will look at how globalization - and its forerunner, colonial modernity – have transformed Sikh identity by facilitating its institutionalization both in India and the ‘diaspora’. This has led transnational religious actors representing Sikhism into conflict with territorialized nation-states committed to secularizing civil society.

Finally, it will be argued in the conclusion that transnational religious actors have the potential to collectively constitute a *globalized* transnational civil society. According to Lipschultz, a transnational civil society is a result of the ‘self-conscious constructions of networks of knowledge and action, by decentred, local actors, that cross the reified boundaries of space as though they were not there’ (Lipshultz 1992: 390). Transnational civil society comprises groups and organizations in different states that work together to create cross-border communities that pursue common goals. Following Haynes, it is argued that transnational religious communities, such as Christendom or the *Umma* may be seen as transnational civil societies (Haynes 2007: 45-6, 150). Consequently, a

globalized transnational civil society refers to a network or coalition of non-state actors representing different transnational religious communities, sharing a common interest in working together to overcome the forces of militant secularism. This globalized transnational civil society may be seen as *counter-hegemonic* in a Gramscian sense in that it constitutes an alternative both to the Westphalian international order and the secularized liberal model of global civil society (Kaldor 2003).

Beyond Westphalia? Globalization, Transnational Religious Communities and International Relations

The Peace of Westphalia has been described as a ‘constitutive foundational myth’ of modern international relations (Teschke 2003: 3). Conventionally, the contemporary international order is understood to have its origins in the 1648 agreements which brought the Thirty Years War (1618-48) to an end and gave rise to a European system or society of sovereign states, which subsequently ‘expanded’, through imperialism and decolonization, to encompass the non-western world and therefore form an embryonic ‘international society’ (Bull 1984) The Westphalian settlement ‘*secularized* international relations by undermining religion as a mode of legitimacy’ (Teschke 2003, 3—italics

mine). It achieved this through institutionalising the principles of firstly, *rex est imperator in regno suo* (that ‘the King rules in his own realm’), and *cujus regio, ejus religio* (‘the ruler determines the religion of his realm’). This had the effect of dividing the political from the religious community, temporal from spiritual authority.

According to Haynes, there are ‘four pillars’ of the Westphalian system of international relations. Firstly, states are considered the sole legitimate actors in the international system. Secondly, governments do not seek to change relations between religion and politics in foreign countries. Third, religious authorities legitimately exercise few, if any, domestic temporal functions, and even fewer transnationally. Finally, religious and political power, or church and state, are separated (Haynes 1997: 32). The Westphalian world order has been ‘legitimized’ or ‘naturalized’ within the discipline of IR by the emergence of first ‘realism’ and later ‘neo-realism’ as the dominant perspective in international political theory after World War II. Although the hegemony of realism has recently been eroded by the perceived triumph of liberal values following the collapse of the Soviet Union (Fukuyama 1992), most conventional theories of international relations are anchored in the same ‘realist’ assumptions. First, conventional theories view the state as both the key actor in international relations and as the legitimate

representative of the collective will of a community/nation. Second, state leaders' primary responsibility is to ensure the survival of their state in an international system characterized by *anarchy*: defined by Wendt as 'the absence of authority' (Wendt 1996:52). Third, conventional theories of international relations share the neo-realist assumption that a strict separation of domestic (intra-state) and international (inter-state) relations is possible.

Recent events show that the Westphalian international order, predicated on the territorialization of political communities and the privatization of religion, has come 'under siege' from deterritorialized faith based communities. In much of the Islamic world, political Islam or 'Islamism', has replaced the discredited forces of secular nationalism as the main oppositional ideology to Western cultural, political and economic hegemony (Sayyid 1997, Esposito and Voll 2001, Mandaville 2001).

Although some- primarily French scholars – consider political Islam to be a declining force in global and regional politics since the onset of contemporary processes of globalization (Kepel 2004, Roy 2004), the influence of Islamism on political movements in Islamic cultural zones (Pasha 2005) from the time of the Iranian revolution to the present day is undeniable and can be seen in recent regional conflicts

in Afghanistan, Algeria, Bosnia, Chechnya, Indonesia, Iraq, Kashmir, Kosovo, Lebanon, Nigeria, Pakistan, Palestine, Philippines, Somalia, Sudan and Thailand. Indeed, the violent manifestation of Islamic radicalism as exemplified by the events of September 11, 2001 (hereafter 9/11) in the US have been seen by many as a vindication of Samuel Huntington's 'clash of civilizations' thesis which depicts Islam as a largely homogenous, violence-prone 'civilization' with 'bloody borders' (Huntington 1993, 34). In India, the emergence of the 'Hindu right' under the leadership of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), largely accomplished through strategic regional alliances, has challenged the previously hegemonic ideology of Nehruvian secular nationalism as espoused by the Indian National Congress (INC). India's democratic structures, rather than resulting in the demise of religious identities as predicted by India's post-colonial leaders, led instead to the emergence of a pan-Indian Hindu cultural nationalism, albeit with local variations (Hansen and Jaffrelot 1998, Jaffrelot 1996, Bhatt 2001). Despite its loss in the 2004 elections, it has been argued elsewhere that the BJP has successfully 're-branded' India as a Hindu polity (Shani 2004).

The global religious revival is not, however, confined to the global South. In the wake of the events of September 11 2001, Christianity has once again become an important

component of Western identity. In the US, Samuel P. Huntington famously argued that American identity has founded upon a common 'Anglo-Protestant' cultural heritage which (non-Protestant) immigrants were expected to adopt as their own and defend against an increasingly radicalised Islam (Huntington 2004). Social issues featured prominently in the 2004 elections which saw the incumbent, George W. Bush, re-elected for a second term with a conservative agenda including opposition to stem-cell research, same-sex marriages and the further extension of abortion rights. These proved popular not only with the religious right or 'moral majority' which since the 1980s has enthusiastically supported conservative candidates in the Republican party but also with many Catholics who favoured Bush's stance on social issues over that of the 'catholic' but more liberal Kerry. In an increasingly culturally diverse Europe, religion has become a faultline along which contemporary conflicts over national security and multiculturalism have been fought (Modood 2005). The presence of an increasingly assertive Muslim 'diaspora' (Modood 2005) in Europe has provided opportunities for a re-politicization of Christianity, in opposition to both the secularization and perceived 'Islamization' of Europe. The result has been a rediscovery of the continent's Christian roots, even among those who have long disregarded it, and a renewed sense of European *cultural* Christianity (Jenkins 2007).

The ‘global religious resurgence’ (Thomas 2000, 2005) has been sustained by the processes associated with the contemporary phase of globalization. As a result of globalization, faith has ‘obtained greater significance as a non-territorial touchstone of identity in today’s more global world’ (Scholte 2005: 245). Three developments in particular have provided a context for a religious resurgence on a global scale. In the first place, globalization – through economic restructuring programmes which necessitate reduced public expenditure – has impacted upon the relative power of the secular state, decreasing its capacity to impose its secular vision of the nation to the exclusion of other identities. Increasingly national identities coexist and compete with other forms of collective identities on an individual level. As a result, assertion of a national identity no longer necessitates a rejection of pre-national, *communal* identities, particularly those based on ethnicity and religion. Thus it is now possible to articulate a ‘hybrid’ identity (Pieterse 2004).

Secondly, globalization has decreased the salience of *territory* in the construction of individual and collective identities. Identity is no longer exclusively defined in terms of place: where one is from no longer allows us to define who one is. As Scholte points out,

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‘territorialism as the previously prevailing structure of social space was closely interlinked with nationalism as the previously prevailing structure of collective identity’ (Scholte 2005: 225). However one of the significant consequences of contemporary globalization has been to sever the connections between the state – a coercive apparatus of governance defined in terms of its monopoly of organised violence- and the nation- an ‘imagined political community’ (Anderson 1991), to the point where ‘many national projects today no longer involve an aspiration to acquire their own sovereign state’ (Scholte 2005: 228). The *deterritorialization* of nationalism has created space for the reassertion of transnational religious identities. Indeed, religious identities seems particularly suited to the needs of a rapidly globalizing world since, despite the attachment to a territorially defined ‘holy land’ which is often the site of pilgrimage, the core tenets of most religions are in principle universal and can be embraced and practised anywhere on earth.

Finally, globalization has, through the ICT revolution in particular, facilitated the dissemination of these universal core beliefs and tenets on a global scale. Most religious organizations maintain websites to introduce non-believers to the faith and to provide spiritual guidance to the faithful. Information Technology has provided followers of

transnational religious communities with the opportunity to communicate across the boundaries and transcend the limitations of the territorially defined national community.

Whilst for Benedict Anderson (1991), it was the development of what he termed 'print capitalism' that made the imagination of the nation possible, it can be argued that ICTs have facilitated the (re)imagination of transnational religious communities. Print capitalism, for Anderson, refers to the creation of mechanically reproduced secular, 'print languages' capable of dissemination through the market. These 'print languages' laid the basis for national consciousness first in Europe then elsewhere by creating fixed, unified fields of communication below sacred language and above the spoken regional vernaculars. Books and newspapers, written in these 'print languages' were the first mass market commodities in capitalism, designed for consumption in the new 'domestic' market. Speakers of regional dialects within a particular territory became capable of understanding one another through articles in newspapers, journals and books, even though they might find it difficult or even impossible to comprehend each other in conversation. In the process, they became aware of the hundreds or thousands, or even millions of people, who could read their language. These fellow readers formed, for Anderson, 'the embryo of the nationally imagined community' (Anderson 1991:44).

Thus, for Anderson, ‘the convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of the human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community’: the nation (Anderson 1991:46).

As print capitalism helped produce the ‘imagined community’ of the nation, digital or ‘informational’ capitalism (Castells 1996: 13-21) has encouraged the formation of *transnational* networks involving individuals and groups sharing background and/or interests. ICTs ‘offer new resources and new disciplines for the construction of imagined selves and imagined worlds’ (Appadurai 1996:3). Information Technology has provided the ability to communicate across the boundaries and transcend the limitations of the territorially defined national community, blurring the distinctions between inside and outside, the virtual (or ‘imaginary’) and the real. ICTs also provide transnational religious actors with an opportunity to articulate narratives which both simultaneously reinforce *and* challenge hegemonic power structures within their traditions.

In this section, it has been argued, following Scott Thomas, that we have experienced a ‘global religious resurgence’ in recent years. Globalization has facilitated the re-emergence of transnational religious actors in international relations by, firstly,

eroding the capacity of the state to impose its secular vision on society; secondly, by decreasing the salience of territory in the construction of identities; and, finally, by facilitating the dissemination of these central beliefs and tenets of religions on a global scale. In the next section, we will examine how contemporary globalization has *empowered* both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic transnational religious actors representing two transnational religious civil societies: Catholicism and Sikhism.

The Roman Catholic Church

According to Jose Casanova, 'ongoing processes of globalization offer a transnational religious regime like Catholicism, which never felt fully at home in a system of sovereign territorial nation-states, unique opportunities to expand, to adapt rapidly to the newly emerging global system, and perhaps even assume a proactive role in shaping some aspects of the new system' (Casanova 1997:121). Indeed, as its very name suggests, *Catholicism* posits an alternative, more universal or even *global* vision of international society, than that represented by the Westphalian system.

The Roman Catholic Church traces its origins to Peter, the ‘rock’ upon which –according to Matthew – Jesus first built his Church, and to Paul, without whom Küng asserts there would have been ‘no Catholic Church’ (Küng 2001: 27). However, its historical roots lie in the ‘Imperial Catholic Church’ of the fourth century AD. The recognition of Christianity by the Emperor Constantine in 313 AD, paved the way for the eventual conversion of the transnational Roman Empire to the message of Christ and, significantly, the hierarchicalization of the early Church of Peter and Paul along the lines of the Roman Empire. The *ecclesia catholica* incorporated many of the features of the old Roman Empire, notably its central command structure with the Bishop of Rome at the apex, its mystification of authority, its legalism, its bureaucracy and intolerance of dissent. Biblical injunctions – most notably expressed in the Ten Commandments and the New Testament- prohibiting the use of force were quickly forgotten as in ‘less than a century the persecuted Church had become a persecuting Church’ (Küng 2001: 45). The ‘Roman’ Catholic Church, however, outlived the Empire and was able to survive the various ‘barbarian’ invasions, the changing constellations of power in European politics, and the transition to ‘modernity’. In so doing, it asserted, through its rigid, monotheistic universalism, the superiority of the spiritual over the temporal, Church over State and was able to provide the religious,

political, social and cultural framework through which Europe, and subsequently, the 'West' could be imagined.

The ideology of papal absolutism, however, was only completed with the doctrine of papal infallibility at the First Vatican Council (hereafter Vatican I) in 1870. Described as the 'Council of the Counter-Enlightenment' (Küng 2001: 168), the Council confirmed the Church's opposition to 'rationalism, liberalism and materialism' and asserted that when the Roman pontiff speaks *ex cathedra*, he possesses, 'by the divine assistance promised to him in blessed Peter, that infallibility which the divine Redeemer willed His Church to enjoy in defining doctrine concerning faith or morals.' Therefore, Vatican I declared the 'definitions' of the pontiff to be 'irreformable' (The Holy See 1870).

The Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) convened almost a century after Vatican I between 1961 and 1965 did much to reconcile the Catholic Church with modernity. In *Nostra Aetate*, the declaration on the relation of the Church to non-Christian religions passed by an overwhelming majority of Bishops at the Council and proclaimed by Pope Paul VI on October 28 1965, the Church condemned 'as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against men or harassment of them because of their race, colour, condition of life, or religion' (The Holy See 1965a). This seemed to (belatedly) affirm a

commitment to universal human rights which the Papacy had steadfastly opposed since the French Revolution. Furthermore, in *Dignitatis Humanae* (December 7 1965), the right of individuals and communities to religious freedom was affirmed (The Holy See 1965b). It was recognized that, although the Vatican Council believed that Roman Catholicism remained the ‘one true religion’, there were, in principle at least, other paths to salvation.

After Vatican II , the Church could claim to be global in at least two different ways.

In the first place, it was no longer an exclusively Roman or European institution.

Whereas only one-tenth of the assembled Bishops who attended Vatican I were from outside Europe, Europeans no longer formed a majority at Vatican II. This may explain their unwillingness to rubber stamp the recommendation of the *curia* and redefine the Church as the ‘light of nations’. Furthermore, the use of the vernacular in the liturgy facilitated the ‘indigenization’ of the Church and allowed it to reach a younger and wider audience outside of its traditional European heartland. This has been reflected in the sharp increase in the number of Catholics globally- from 600 million to one billion by the mid-1990s – with a clear shift from North to South (Casanova 1997: 120; Haynes 2001:150). Although we still wait the election of a

non-European Pope, the fact that the last two Popes have not been Italian clearly illustrates the extent to which the Church is internationalizing (albeit without obviously accepting the shift of focus to the South!).

Furthermore, the Church's centralized hierarchy, centred on the pontiff in Rome, allows it to articulate a coherent and consistent 'ideology' or vision of God, Man and the World, affirmed in its Constitution, *transnationally*. Since Vatican II, there has been, as both Jose Casanova and Jeff Haynes have pointed out, a 'homogenization and globalization of Catholic culture at elite level throughout the Catholic world (Casanova 1997: 120; Haynes 2001:150). This process of globalization and homogenization finds expression in three directions. Firstly, it finds expression in the ever widening publication of papal encyclicals dealing not only with doctrinal matters but also with secular issues affecting all of humanity. According to Jose Casanova, these pronouncements have:

consistently presented the protection of the human rights of every person as the moral foundation of a just social and political order, the substitution of dialogue and peaceful negotiation for violent confrontation as the means of resolving

conflicts and just grievances between people and states, and universal human solidarity as the foundation for the construction of a just and fair national as well as international division of labour and a just and legitimate world order. (Casanova 1997: 112).

The second direction in which it finds expression is in the increasingly active role of the papacy in issues dealing with international relations, as can be seen in the opposition of Pope John Paul II to communism and the Iraq War and his championing of democracy in Poland and elsewhere in Eastern Europe in the 1980s. The Pope's encyclical of January 1991 (*Redemptoris Missio*) which stressed the Church's duty to 'relieve poverty, counter political oppression and defend human rights' may in particular be seen as a statement of the transnational *political* aspirations of the Church and its effects were felt throughout the developing world, particularly in Africa where senior Roman Catholic figures became centrally involved in the transition to democracy (Haynes 2007; 139). Finally, globalization has generally increased the public visibility of the person of the pope 'as the high priest of a new universal civil religion of humanity as the first citizen of a global civil society' (Casanova 1997: 116).

This global civil society, however, cannot be understood as a 'liberal' global civil society. Global civil society, in a liberal sense, refers to the 'space of uncoerced human association' (Walzer 1995:7), existing in opposition to the state and a states-system representing the interests of *particular* national communities. The liberal conception of global civil society is secular in nature and assumes the existence of the 'unencumbered individual' that is, individuals unfettered by religious or cultural social norms and values. However, this vision of global civil society is at odds with the 'post-secular' vision espoused by the present pontiff.

Although Pope Benedict XVI sparked a furore in the Islamic world when, during a lecture at Regensburg, he quoted a Byzantine emperor who described some of the Prophet Muhammad's teachings as 'evil and inhuman,' (The Holy See 2006), he shares an opposition to secularism with many Islamists. Benedict opposes secularism because it is both absolute and arbitrary: in the name of 'neutrality' with regard to values, secularism eliminates all rival world views from the public sphere and denies the existence of objective moral truths. Far from being anti-Muslim, the Pope views Islam as a potential ally against the enlightenment secular liberalism that for him corrodes the moral core of society. Indeed, it has been suggested that his visit to Turkey in November

2006 was not only motivated by a desire to repair the damage made by his remarks at Regensburg but also to unite with Islam, and other monotheistic faiths, in order to ‘inaugurate a new religious renaissance in Europe’ (Blond and Pabst 2006). The pontiff, therefore, sees the Church as a participant in an alternative global civil society composed of transnational religious actors opposed to a militant and self-consciously destructive secular culture centred on the individual.

The hegemony of the papal orthodoxy within Roman Catholicism has, however, not gone uncontested and other counter-hegemonic transnational theologies have evolved within the Church since Vatican II. Perhaps the most influential has been liberation theology which the present pontiff had earlier claimed to constitute a ‘fundamental threat to the faith of the Church’ (Ratzinger 1984). Liberation theology developed in Latin America in the 1970s and aimed to use a politicized reading of Christianity to further the emancipation of the Third World peoples from authoritarian governments and neo-imperialism. It was profoundly influenced by certain forms of neo-Marxism and by dependency theory in particular (Frank 1969). Although liberation theology is not as influential as it once was, it played a key role in facilitating the transition to democracy in many developing societies and it lives on through the Ecumenical

Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT): a non-denominational organization independent of the Roman Catholic Church which is committed to the reinterpretation of the gospels 'in a more meaningful way' and the promotion of 'the struggle for the liberation of Third World peoples' (<http://eatwot.org/>).

In conclusion, the Roman Catholic Church may be seen a global transnational religious actor which potentially challenges the Westphalian order through its assertion of the transnational nature of the Church, of the right of the pontiff to make pronouncements on spiritual issues which are considered binding on all Catholics, and, in particular, in its affirmation of the universal dignity and rights of man. Since Vatican II, the Church has been active in the promotion of human rights, democracy and the elimination of poverty throughout the world, most notably in Communist and developing societies. This has brought it into conflict with repressive state structures which derive their legitimacy from the division of the world into territorialized, sovereign states by the Peace of Westphalia.

Sikh Transnational Religious Actors: The Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak

Committee and UNITED SIKHS

Whereas the Roman Catholic Church can be termed a *global* religious actor commanding the allegiances of more people than *any* nation-state other than arguably India and China, with a budget to match, the same cannot be said of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC). The SGPC controls all Sikh temples, called *gurdwaras*, in the India state of Punjab where the overwhelming majority of the world's twenty-three millions Sikhs live. However, since its inception in October 1920, the SGPC has been central to the articulation of a *transnational* religious identity. It has done so by institutionalizing the orthodox *Khalsa* definition of Sikh identity through the *The Sikh Rehat Maryada* and providing Sikhdom with a central institutional structure within which to make pronouncements on issues concerning Sikhs globally.

The term 'Sikh' refers to the learners or disciples of the first Guru of the Sikh *Panth*, Nanak (1469-1539). Nanak developed during the course of his life, a religious and social philosophy which, although deeply influenced by both Hinduism and Islam, was distinct from both. The Sikh religious tradition is centred around a reading of a holy

book, the *Guru Granth Sahib*, written in a sacred script particular to the Sikhs (*gurumukhi*), in a Sikh place of worship, *gurdwara*. Anybody can become a Sikh, as long as one is baptized and conforms to the established practice of the *Khalsa Rahit* (code of conduct): Baptized (*amritdhari*) Sikhs following the edicts of the tenth Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708), are enjoined to keep their hair, including facial hair, long (*kes*); to carry a comb (*kanga*); wear knee-length breeches (*kachh*); a steel bracelet on the right hand (*kara*); and to carry a sword or dagger (*kirpan*). Those who embody these five symbols of Sikh identity, known as *Kes-dhari* Sikhs, constitute the *Khalsa*, or ‘community of the pure’ whilst *Sahajdhari* Sikhs; ‘slow-adopters’ may eventually progress towards full participation in the *Khalsa*.

These five symbols of Sikh religious identity, developed in opposition to prevalent ‘Hindu’ cultural practices, have been institutionalized by the SGPC and serve to construct boundaries between Sikhs and other communities, making *Kes-dhari* Sikhs an easily identifiable group in both an Indian and diaspora context. According to the *Rehat Maryada*, a Sikh is defined as:

Any human being who faithfully believes in

- i. One Immortal Being,

- ii. Ten Gurus, from Guru Nanak Sahib to Guru Gobind Singh Sahib,
- iii. The Guru Granth Sahib,
- iv. The utterances and teachings of the ten Gurus and
- v. the *baptism* bequeathed by the tenth Guru, and *who does not owe allegiance to any other religion*, is a Sikh. (SGPC 1994:1—emphasis mine)

Although this definition is wide enough to include different Sikh sects, it firmly draws the boundaries between Sikhism and other religions. Religious boundaries between Sikhs and other religions are reinforced by Article II of the *Rehat* which states that a Sikh's life has two aspects: 'individual or personal and corporate or Panthic' (SGPC 1994:1). Whilst the personal life of a Sikh is devoted to meditation on *Nam* (the 'Divine Substance') and to following the Guru's teachings, the corporate life of a Sikh entails a commitment to the *panth*. A single, corporate entity which includes all Sikhs, the *panth* is envisaged as an essentially democratic and egalitarian polity, with the SGPC acting as its Parliament, its Constituent Assembly. The SGPC affords the Sikhs a forum to legislate on all issues concerning the community and its headquarters in the *Akal Takht* inside the Golden Temple complex in Amritsar, is the site of all temporal power within Sikhdom. A comparison, therefore, between the SGPC and the Vatican can be made, although the SGPC is, unlike the Vatican, an elected, representative organisation open

to all Sikhs. Like Roman Catholicism – and unlike Islam- Sikhism has its own spiritual leader, the *jathedar* or leader of the *Akal Takht*. Although answerable to the SGPC and neither possessing the gift of infallibility nor temporal authority of the Roman pontiff, the *jathedar* can, however, make pronouncements on behalf of the *panth* which, although not binding, have a normative status within Sikhism.

Globalization has influenced Sikhism in two main ways: first, it has brought opportunities for migration from the Punjab; and secondly, improved communications, and the development of the Punjabi-language print media and, subsequently, ICTs in particular, have enabled the construction of a ‘diaspora’ consciousness (Axel 2001; Tatla 2001; Shani 2005, 2007a&b). Although migration from the Punjab to South-East Asia, East Africa and North America first took place during the colonial period, it was only after the partition of the subcontinent- and the Punjab- into two independent nation-states of India and Pakistan, that large-scale migration took place. The first destination for Sikhs from West Punjab (now Pakistan) displaced by partition was India itself as they replaced Muslims from East Punjab and the capital, New Delhi, going in the opposite direction. Subsequently, labour shortages in the West caused by the adoption of a Keynesian ‘full employment’ economic model, combined with the

underdevelopment of Indian society after two centuries of colonial rule, convinced many Sikhs from mainly agricultural backgrounds to leave their 'homeland' and settle overseas. Initially, the vast majority settled in the UK which was more willing to accept them given the shared Anglo-Sikh colonial heritage (Singh and Tatla 2006). However, particularly after the storming of the Golden Temple complex in 1984 which led to a 'national war of self-determination' in the Punjab (Singh 2000, Pettigrew 1995), Sikhs began to move elsewhere, with North America their preferred destination.

The growth of a sizeable Sikh 'diaspora' settled mainly in the West and numbering over a million, has posed new challenges for nation-states and the maintenance of Sikh identity. Unlike most other religious identities, Sikh identity is *embodied* and Sikhs have, therefore, found it more difficult to negotiate membership of the 'national' community while retaining the external symbols of the faith. In Britain, the 336,000-strong Sikh community has 'played a crucial role as a bridgehead community which has "pioneered" British multiculturalism' and in so doing has also 'expanded its remit to include greater public recognition of the culture and traditions of other ethnic minority communities' (Singh and Tatla 2006: 210). Although Sikhs have also consistently -and increasingly after 9/11- faced legal challenges to the maintenance of the five symbols of

Sikh identity -as well as employment, educational and legal discrimination- in North America, it is in continental Europe, and particularly France with its Jacobin traditions, that Sikhs have encountered the most difficulties.

In March 2004, the French state passed a law which bans conspicuous religious symbols and attire in public schools in order to uphold the principle of *laïcité*, which promotes the active promotion of secularism in the public sphere. Although the law does not explicitly target the Sikh community, Sikh school children are most affected by the ban since the wearing of the Five Ks is an integral part of *Kes-dhari* Sikh identity and is arguably more important to the maintenance of the Sikh faith than the cross is to Christianity, the skull-cap is to Judaism or the head scarf to Islam. Consequently, many of the 5,000-strong Sikh community in France have been faced with a stark dilemma: either to cease wearing the religious symbols which are the very *embodiment* of their faith; or to face exclusion from state schools. French (and other European) Sikhs have thus been forced to choose between ‘faith’ and ‘nation’. Despite the French government’s assurance that a ‘satisfactory’ solution for the Sikh community in France would be sought, the ban on religious symbols in the classroom has led to the expulsion of six Sikh schoolboys. Furthermore, two adult French Sikh citizens - Shingara Singh

Mann and Ranjit Singh - were unable to renew important documents as they declined to remove their turban for the ID photo.

These cases have been taken up by UNITED SIKHS, a transnational, apolitical organization operating outside the Sikh 'political system' centred on the *Akal Takht* and the SGPC. Often referred to as the Sikh 'Red Cross', UNITED SIKHS aims to 'transform underprivileged and minority communities and individuals into informed and vibrant members of society through civic, educational and personal development programs, by fostering active participation in social and economic activity' (UNITED SIKHS 2007). Founded in 1999 by a group of Sikhs from the New York metropolitan area who banded together to assist in the 'socio-economic development of immigrant communities in Queens, New York', it now has 'chapters in America, Asia and Europe that pursue projects for the spiritual, social and economic empowerment of underprivileged and minority communities' (UNITED SIKHS 2007). Chapters are in the process of being registered in Africa and Australasia (Mejindarpal Kaur, Interview, 25 March 2007).

Specifically, the role of UNITED SIKHS has been to coordinate the litigation by

‘instructing counsel and providing input on Sikh issues and definitions’ (Mejindarpal Kaur, Personal correspondence, 25 March 2007). At the time of writing, the case of the three French schoolboys expelled in 2004 is awaiting an appeal in the *Conseil D’Etat*, the highest French Court, while the appeal of the fourth against his expulsion is pending in the administrative appeal court. Although Shingara Singh Mann lost his appeal in the *Conseil D’Etat* to renew his driving licence without having to take off his turban for the ID photo, appeals have been filed at the European Court of Human Rights and the UN Human Rights Committee in New York for all the photo ID cases.

The *globalization* of the French turban cases testifies to the *transnational* aspirations of UNITED SIKHS both to protect the rights of Sikhs throughout the globe and to further the cause of ‘religious freedom’. According to European Director and Legal Team Leader, Mejindarpal Kaur, it ‘is necessary to appeal these cases to the international courts as if left unchecked the French law, which undermines religious freedom, will have a domino effect on religious rights globally’ (UNITED SIKHS 2006). The campaign, she claims, is not only for the French Sikhs, but ‘for 25 million Sikhs around the globe as the French Turban problem is one that concerns the whole Sikh community’ (Mejindarpal Kaur, Personal Correspondence, 25 March 2007). Several German states

have passed similar legislation that bans the wearing of religious signs and clothing by public servants and two Belgian Sikh schoolchildren have not been admitted to school because of their turban. It is important to point out that although Sikhs are not the only – or even the main – religious group affected by the ban, they are, as far as I know, the only ones fighting the law *transnationally* and their success may have important consequences for religious freedom globally.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the global activities of religious actors has exposed the ‘secular conceit’ (Connolly1999:19-47) of the Westphalian order which made transnational religious and cultural traditions subject to the disciplinary power of the sovereign state. Now that modern international society, based upon the separation of the ‘political’ from the ‘religious’ community and the subsequent subordination of spiritual to temporal authority, is faced with unprecedented global economic, political and social change, it has been argued that the modern secular settlement, which excludes the religious from the public sphere of politics, is unsustainable and that transnational religious actors will become increasingly more important in our ‘global age’. However, as Richard Falk has pointed out, all religious traditions have two broad tendencies: the first is to be

universalistic and tolerant towards others who hold different convictions and identities; the second is to be exclusivist and to insist that there exists ‘only one true path to salvation, which if not taken results in failure and futility, if not evil’ (Falk 2003:184).

It has been argued in this chapter that the Roman Catholic Church after Vatican II has indeed become more tolerant towards other religious traditions and, under the present pontiff, has signalled a willingness to enlist other faiths in its battle against militant secularism. However, a lot more needs to be done if the Church wants to emerge as a truly *global* political actor. According to the Catholic Theologian Hans Küng, the Church needs to satisfy four conditions if it is to have a future in the third millennium: it must not turn back but ‘be rooted its Christian origin and concentrated on its present tasks’; it must not be patriarchal and exclude women from Church ministries; it must not be narrowly confessional but be an ‘ecumenically open’ church; and, finally, it must not be ‘Eurocentric and put forward any exclusivist Christian claims (Küng 2001: 213). One way in which it could become less Eurocentric and more global in its outlook fulfil would be to provide support for the campaign, led by UNITED SIKHS, to overturn the ban on the manifestation of religious symbols in France. In so doing, the Catholic Church would not only advance the cause of religious freedom globally

but could also emerge as a potentially hegemonic actor in a newly emerging globalized 'post-secular' transnational civil society.

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