This chapter focuses on the role which transnational religious actors play in international politics. Conventionally, international relations (IR) has been organized around the principle of state sovereignty since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. The Peace of Westphalia secularized IR by undermining religion as a mode of legitimacy (Teschke, 2003) and enshrined the territorially bounded sovereign state as the basic unit of IR. In the late twentieth century, globalization 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. The 11 September 2001 (hereafter 9/11) attacks attributed to the al-Qaeda network of radical Islamist terrorists signaled the ‘return of religion’ to IR which had been heralded almost a decade earlier by Samuel P. Huntington in his influential ‘Clash of Civilizations’ thesis (Huntington, 1993, 1996).

Attempts by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (al-sham in Arabic) to restore a Sunni Islamic Caliphate in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region have been seen as an example of the challenges posed by transnational religious actors to the Westphalian order. However, as I previously argued in the second edition, the Islamic State cannot be seen as a transnational religious actor since it aspired to state sovereignty, territorializing the transnational aspirations of the Umma, and subordinating them to the defense of homeland or watan. This aspiration to territorial sovereignty ultimately led to its defeat as, unlike al-Qaeda, it could be militarily defeated on the battlefield as it was successively by both the Russian-backed Assad regime and the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces between 2015 and 2019.

The transnational aspirations of ‘global’ religious actors have been furthermore recently called into question by the resurgence of the nation-state and the emergence of authoritarian populism as an alternative to neoliberal globalization. Authoritarian populism refers to the centralization of power by the state in the name of the people against an ‘elite’ and/or a stigmatized minority. Although its critics regard it as fundamentally undemocratic in that authoritarian populist regimes frequently exceed the power given to the executive through constitutions and often break the law, authoritarian populism rests on the support of the ‘people’, and authoritarian populist regimes have been democratically elected, often with landslide majorities, as seen in the case of India, Brazil, Hungary, Russia, Turkey and, arguably, the US under former President Trump. In such circumstances, religion plays a key role in legitimizing authoritarian populism regimes (DeHanas and Shterin, 2018). This can be seen in the case of Russia where the Russian Orthodox Church under Patriarch Kiril has supported the regime of President Vladimir Putin.
and has blessed its illegal military actions in the Ukraine considering it a ‘holy war’ (Leustean, 2021). Consequently, it could be argued that we are witnessing a re-nationalization of transnational religious actors.

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. In this chapter, 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 and the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC)–Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) nexus, 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, potentially, challenges the international order of territorialized nation-states which dates back to the Peace of Westphalia. It is 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 IR 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, 2012). In contrast to the post-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. This tension between the universal and particular dimensions of Islamic identities accounts for the difficulty which ‘political Islam’ faces in establishing itself within the Westphalian order. However, other religions experience the same difficulties, given the Westphalian order’s Protestant roots, as is illustrated through our case studies of Catholic and Sikh transnational actors.

The foundational principles of the Westphalian order which, it is argued, have been legitimized by the development of the hegemonic realist paradigm of IR, will first be outlined before accounting for the ‘global religious resurgence’ (Thomas, 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 looks 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 an embryonic globalized transnational civil society – an alternative both to the Westphalian international order and the secularized liberal model of global civil society (Kaldor, 2003). According to Lipschultz (1992, p. 390) a transnational civil society is a result of the ‘self-conscious constructions of networks of knowledge and action, by decentralised, local actors, that cross the reified boundaries of space as though they were not there’. Transnational civil society comprises groups and organizations in different states that work together to create cross-border communities that pursue common goals. According to Haynes who differentiates the term from ‘global civil society’ since the latter implies a universal reach that some transnational networks do not have, the concept has three main components. First, transnational civil society encompasses non-state actors motivated by social or political goals rather than economic goals, as is the case with transnational corporations. Second, these actors interact with each
other across state boundaries and do not necessarily promote the interests of state actors. Finally, they take a variety of forms; prominent transnational actors include ‘secular’ international non-governmental organizations such as Amnesty International and Greenpeace as well as those with a more explicitly religious mission (Haynes, 2012, p. 7).

Following Haynes, it is argued that transnational religious communities, such as Christendom, the *Umma* or, as argued here, the *Khasa Panth*, may be seen as transnational civil societies (Haynes, 2007, pp. 45–46, 150). However, they are implicitly *postsecular* in orientation. For Jürgen Habermas (2008), the term ‘post-secular’ refers to the inclusion of religious-based world views, translated into a language accessible to all, into the public sphere so as to guarantee its neutrality. Consequently, the term ‘post-secular’ transnational civil society refers here to a network or coalition of non-state actors representing the interests of different transnational secular or religious communities, sharing a common interest in working together to overcome the challenges posed by globalization and the Westphalian states system.

However, in recent years, we have seen simultaneous processes of *de-globalization* taking place and the return of the nation-state to its role as the most important actor in IR.

The rejection of the elite-led neoliberal project of globalization can be seen by the abandonment of the states that did much to promote it in the late twentieth century: the US and UK. The decision of the UK to leave the European Union (EU) in 2016 foreshadowed the election of Donald J. Trump as president on an explicitly nationalist agenda. A billionaire populist, Trump promised to ‘make American great again’ by putting its own interests first, and under his leadership, the US withdrew from multilateral agreements to combat climate change, imposed and raised tariffs on imports and started building a wall on its border with Mexico to keep illegal migrants out. This represented an uncompromising rejection of globalization. Although the People’s Republic of China attempted to fill the vacuum in global leadership with its ambitious Belt and Road initiative which sought to recreate the Silk route in a global era, the discovery of the Covid-19 virus in Wuhan led to an unprecedented lockdown which is still in place in parts of the People’s Republic of China at the time of writing. The Covid-19 pandemic represented the most significant challenge to globalization with most states imposing travel restrictions and full lockdowns of their populations in order to stem the global pandemic. It also impacted on the global economy resulting in high rates of unemployment and rising costs of living. Confronted by economic collapse, states attempted to revive their economies through stimulus packages which many commentators saw as the end of the globalization of neoliberalism. However, the resurgence of state control of economies and restrictions on freedom of movement, even in the EU where freedom of movement was guaranteed by Article 50, does not mean that globalization *per se* is ‘dead’. Rather, it is argued that globalization has been transformed and taken on a *disembodied* form; that is, instead of the circulation of objects and peoples across borders, it has taken the form of the exchange of ideas, images, texts and programs digitally (Steger and James, 2020). This has allowed transnational religious actors to communicate and, in some cases, mobilize their followers online despite the restrictions of the pandemic.

**Beyond Westphalia? Globalization, transnational religious communities and international relations**

The Peace of Westphalia has been described as a ‘constitutive foundational myth’ of modern IR (Teschke, 2003, p. 3). Conventionally, the contemporary international order is understood to have its origins in the 1648 agreements which brought the Thirty Years War (1618–1648) 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 and Watson, 1984). The Westphalian settlement ‘secularized’ international relations by undermining religion as a mode of legitimacy’ (Teschke, 2003, p. 3, italics added). It achieved this through institutionalizing the principles of firstly, rex est imperator in regno suo (that ‘the King rules in his own realm’), and a jus 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 IR. 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, 2007, p. 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, which some commentators saw bringing history to an end (Fukuyama, 1992), most conventional theories of IR are anchored in the same ‘realist’ assumptions. First, conventional theories view the state as both the key actor in IR 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, 1995, p. 52). Third, conventional theories of IR share the neo-realist assumption that a strict separation of domestic (intrastate) and international ( interstate) relations is possible.

Since the beginning of the new millennium, 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). 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 (Roy, 2003; Kepel, 2004), the influence of Islamism 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, Syria and Thailand. Indeed, the violent manifestation of Islamic radicalism as exemplified by 9/11 and the subsequent ‘war on terror’ has 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, p. 43). In India, the emergence of the ‘Hindu right’ under the leadership of the Bharatiya Janata Party, largely accomplished through strategic regional alliances, has challenged the previously hegemonic ideology of Nehruvian secular nationalism as espoused by the Indian National Congress. 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. In light of the Bharatiya Janata Party’s re-election in 2019 with an increased majority, and its abrogation of Article 370 which provided autonomy to the Muslim-majority state of Kashmir within India, it has been argued that the Bharatiya Janata Party has successfully ‘re-branded’ India as a Hindu ‘Rashtra’ or state (Shani, 2021).

The global religious revival is not, however, confined to the Global South. After 9/11, Christianity has once again become an important component of Western identity. In the US,
Samuel P. Huntington (in)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 radicalized 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. The Christian Right, and evangelicals in particular, also played a key role in the election of President Trump in 2017 despite his professed lack of faith. Many saw in Trump an instrument through which to redefine America’s national culture along Christian lines (see Haynes, 2021) and, through his appointment of Supreme Court justices, to overturn *Roe v. Wade* which guaranteed the right of abortion. In an increasingly culturally diverse Europe, religion has become a faultline along which contemporary conflicts over national security and multiculturalism have been fought. 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 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, p. 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 co-exist and compete with other forms of collective identities on an individual level. As a result, the assertion of a national identity no longer necessitates a rejection of pre-national, communal identities, particularly those based on ethnicity and religion.

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, ‘territorialism as the previously prevailing structure of social space was closely interlinked with nationalism as the previously prevailing structure of collective identity’ (Scholte, 2005, p. 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 organized 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, p. 228). The *deterritorialization* of nationalism has created space for the reassertion of transnational religious identities. Indeed, religious identities seem 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 information and communication technology (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. ICT 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 (Shani, 2020).
Whilst for Benedict Anderson 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 (1991, p. 44), ‘the embryo of the nationally imagined community’.

As print capitalism helped produce the ‘imagined community’ of the nation, digital or ‘informational’ capitalism (Castells, 1996) 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, p. 3). ICT 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 (Shani, 2020). 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 IR 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 examine how contemporary globalization has empowered both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic transnational religious actors representing two transnational religious civil societies: Catholicism and Sikhism. The choice of examples is dictated by cultural familiarity and a desire to avoid generalizing from the experience of contemporary militant political Islam which is stigmatized as constituting a threat to the international order.

The Roman Catholic Church

According to José 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, p. 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, p. 27). However, its historical roots lie in the ‘Imperial Catholic Church’ of the fourth century. The recognition of Christianity by the
Emperor Constantine in 313 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, legalism, 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, p. 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 though 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, p. 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’ (Holy See, 1870, p. 9).

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 28 October 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’ (Holy See, 1965a, p. 5). 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 (7 December 1965), the right of individuals and communities to religious freedom was affirmed (Holy See, 1965b, p. 1). 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 1.2 billion (https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2013/02/13/the-global-catholic-population/) – with a clear shift from north to south. This shift was reflected in the ordination of the first non-European Pope, Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, who took the name Francis I, on 13 March 2013.

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 a homogenization and globalization of Catholic culture at the elite level throughout the Catholic world. 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 José Casanova (1997, p. 112), 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.

The second direction in which it finds expression is in the increasingly active role of the papacy in issues dealing with IR, 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, p. 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, p. 116).

Lauded as ‘the people’s Pope’ by *Time* magazine who made him their ‘person of the year’ in 2013 following his consecration as Pope (*Time*, 11 December 2013), Pope Francis I has attracted widespread support from Catholics and non-Catholics alike for his ‘progressive’ stance on sexuality, opposition to war and concern with poverty and the environment. However, the views articulated by the pontiff are rooted in his faith and as such do not represent a growing secularization of traditional Catholic values arising from the globalization of secular liberalism but their re-articulation in a rapidly globalizing world. Indeed, the present pontiff remains implacably opposed to abortion, same-sex marriages and the ordination of women priests. In contrast, however, to Pope Benedict’s concern with contesting the hegemony of secular enlightenment universalism, the current pontificate emphasizes the need to look outside of the traditional Catholic heartland of Europe and to look outward to a world in need of salvation, particularly in the Global South where endemic poverty and rising inequality arguably pose a greater threat to Catholic values than same-sex marriage. The present pontificate may therefore be seen as apostolic rather than ‘self-referential’ and to favour the work of evangelization over administration (www.catholicculture.org/commentary/otn.cfm?id=1084). This emphasis on evangelization is significantly influenced by the present pontiff’s training as a Jesuit, an order of the Catholic Church founded by St. Ignatius of Loyola in 1540, which seeks to find ‘God in all things’ through active service in the community, particularly in education (http://jesuits.org/spirituality). Recently, this has taken the form of calling for an ‘ethical and economic revolution’ in order to address the pernicious effects of climate change in his Encyclical *Laudato Si* (Holy See, 2015). His most recent Encyclical, *Fratelli tutti*, has called for a global solidarist ethic based on a united and indivisible humanity in which every man
and woman is each other’s brother or sister, in order to deal with the challenges posed by Covid-19. Implicit in the Encyclical is a critique of the Westphalian order:

Aside from the different ways that various countries responded to the crisis, their inability to work together became quite evident. For all our hyper-connectivity, we witnessed a fragmentation that made it more difficult to resolve problems that affect us all.

(Holy See, 2020)

The hegemony of the papal orthodoxy within Roman Catholicism has, however, not gone unchallenged, 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 opposes and the previous pontiff had earlier claimed to constitute a ‘fundamental threat to the faith of the Church’ (Ratzinger, 1984, p. 2). 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. 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 re-interpretation of the gospels ‘in a more meaningful way’ and the promotion of ‘the struggle for the liberation of Third World peoples’ (http://eatwot.net/).

In conclusion, the Roman Catholic Church may be seen as a global transnational religious actor exercising a considerable degree of ‘soft power’ 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. Recently, the tensions between the Westphalian order and the papacy can be seen in the efforts of the pontiff to mediate in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The pontiff’s offer to mediate in the dispute, in which both the Russian and Ukrainian Orthodox churches have played key roles in legitimizing the actions of their governments in the eyes of God, appears to have fallen on deaf ears (www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2022-03/cardinal-parolin-holy-see-mediation-offer-war-ukraine-russia.html). This illustrates the limits of the power which the papacy, as a global transnational actor, wields in a territorialized, international order. The attitude of powerful state leaders such as Vladimir Putin may not be all that different from that of his Soviet predecessor who allegedly dismissively inquired how many divisions the Pope had. This will be further illustrated in our discussion of Sikh transnational religious actors who have neither a pope nor divisions.

The Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee

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 26 million Sikhs live (Singh and Shani, 2021,
p. 1). 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 Sikh Rehat Maryada* and providing Sikhdom with a central institutional structure within which to make pronouncements on issues concerning Sikhs globally. Together with the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), the main Sikh political party which has traditionally controlled it, the SGPC forms part of the ‘Sikh political system’ (Singh and Shani, 2021)

The term ‘Sikh’ refers to the learners or disciples of the first Guru of the Sikh Panth, Guru 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 on a reading of a holy book, the *Guru Granth Sahib*, written in a sacred script particular to the Sikhs (jathedar), 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); carry a comb (kanga); wear knee-length breeches (kachh); wear a steel bracelet on the right hand (kara); and 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, p. 1)

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, p. 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 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; Shani, 2008; Singh and Shani, 2021). Although migration from the Punjab to Southeast 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, 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 (Shani, 2008). 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, p. 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 and 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 schoolchildren 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 is to Islam. Consequently, many of the 5,000-strong Sikh community in France have been faced with a stark dilemma: either cease wearing the religious symbols which are the very embodiment of their faith or face exclusion from state schools. French (and other European) Sikhs have thus been forced to choose between ‘faith’ and ‘nation’.

The inability of the SGPC to influence French government policy, despite the election of a Sikh, Manmohan Singh, as Indian Prime Minister, demonstrates the limits of the committee’s ‘soft power’ outside the Punjab qualifying its transnational aspirations. It has also created space for the emergence of other transnational actors representing the interests of Sikhs outside of the Sikh ‘political system’ centred on the Akal Takht. The proliferation of Sikh TV channels, radio stations, news outlets and websites in Punjab and the diaspora, and the unprecedented expansion in social media, has created opportunities for imagining the Sikh panth on a global scale in real time. In previous work, I termed this a ‘global Sikh qaum’ (Shani, 2008, Singh and Shani, 2021). In the global Sikh qaum, sovereignty is asserted not exclusively over the territorially
defined homeland of the Punjab but over the entire Sikh global community, with calls for, among other things, special Vatican-like status for the Golden Temple. However, Sikh identity remains predominately territorialized in a Punjabi ethnie (Singh and Shani, 2021). Therefore, there are territorial limits to the imagination of a ‘global’ Sikh qaum.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the global activities of religious actors have exposed the ‘secular conceit’ of the Westphalian order which made transnational religious and cultural traditions subject to the disciplinary power of the sovereign state. In the second edition of The Routledge Handbook of Religion and Politics, I suggested that transnational religious actors will become increasingly more important in our ‘global age’. However, the Covid-19 pandemic and the resurgence of territorial nationalism in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine has called globalization into question. The territorial nation-state remains the basic unit of IR and places limits on the activities of transnational religious actors and their capacity to reimagine the communities which they represent as illustrated by our case studies of the Roman Catholic Church and the SGPC.

Given its global reach, highly centralised and hierarchical structure, its membership of the UN and diplomatic activities, the Roman Catholic Church still can exert enormous influence over their billion and a half followers worldwide. However, the absence of state power means that the pontiff is unable to carry out the agenda for a global spiritual renewal in order to combat the effects of climate change and the Covid-19 pandemic. The absence of any (military) ‘divisions’ also inhibits the ability of the Roman Catholic Church to mediate in international disputes or bring them to a successful end. The limit of the power of the SGPC to legislate on issues concerning Sikhs outside of Punjab also constrains its ability to act as a transnational religious actor and represent a ‘global Sikh qaum’. One way in which transnational religious actors could effect change within the Westphalian system would be to collaborate in trying to steer the global political agenda beyond the parochial interests of states towards that of humanity, and the planet, in general. A recent example is the meeting of global religious leaders in the Vatican before COP26 in 2021 in which Catholic and Sikh religious actors participated. Their participation points the way towards an emerging globalized ‘post-secular’ transnational civil society which may co-exist, yet not yet replace, a world of territorialised nation-states.

Notes

1 The author wishes to thank Jeff Haynes for the invitation to contribute to the third edition.
2 The term ‘caliphate’ derives from the Arabic Khalīfa, a term denoting a series of Islamic states that were formed following the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 (Haynes, 2012, p. 7).
3 Critical scholarship in IR has cast doubt on the extent to which translation from religious into secular language is indeed possible without transforming the meaning of faith-based claims or whether the term is indeed applicable to non-Judeo-Christian cultural contexts (see Mavelli and Petito, 2012; and Shani, 2014).
4 ‘Soft power’ is defined by Joseph Nye as the ‘ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments’ (Nye, 2004, p. 12). See Haynes (2012) for its application to the analysis of religious transnational actors in IR.
5 The term ‘Sikh’ has its origins in Sanskrit (sisya) meaning disciple or student (Singh and Shani, 2021, p. 1).
7 Forty religious leaders gathered in the Vatican. Among them was the Sikh non-governmental organization EcoSikh which represents a Sikh perspective on the environment. The meeting was hosted by His Holiness Pope Francis who addressed the participants by calling for greater dialogue between religion and science (see Holy See, 2021).
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