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Transnational religious actors and international relations

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This chapter 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" 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.

A transnational religious actor may be defined as any non-governmental actor that 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 that, potentially, challenges the international order of territorialized nation-states dating 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 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 Cooperation (OIC), work to further ‘Islamic’ interests or goals within it. In contrast to the post-11 September 2001 (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.

It is this tension between the universal and particular dimensions of Islamic identity which is now being played out in the contemporary Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (al-sham in Arabic) seeks a restoration of a Sunni...
Islamic Caliphate\(^4\) in the MENA region, and now controls the Iraq–Syria border. However, in so doing, it territorializes the transnational aspirations of the *Umma*, conflating them with the homeland or *watan*. Thus, the Islamic State – as its name suggests – can’t be considered a transnational religious actor.

The foundational principles of the Westphalian order which, it is argued, have been legitimized by the development of the hegemonic realist paradigm of international relations (IR), will first be outlined before accounting for the ‘global religious resurgence’.\(^5\) Contemporary processes of globalization, it is argued, are central to the ‘return of religion’ to IR theory.\(^6\) Their impact on transnational religious communities in general will be analysed before we examine 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 an embryonic globalized transnational civil society – an alternative both to the Westphalian international order and the secularized liberal model of global civil society.\(^7\) 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’.\(^8\) 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.\(^9\)

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.\(^10\) However, they are implicitly post-secular in orientation. For Jürgen Habermas, the term ‘post-secular’\(^11\) 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.\(^12\) 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.

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

The Peace of Westphalia has been described as a ‘constitutive foundational myth’ of modern IR.\(^13\) 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’. The Westphalian settlement ‘secularized’ international relations by undermining religion as a mode of legitimacy. It achieved this through institutionalizing the principles of first, *rex est imperator in regno suo* (that ‘the King rules in his own realm’), and second, *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 IR. First, states are considered the sole legitimate actors in the international system. Second, 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. 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, 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 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’. Third, conventional theories of IR 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. 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, the influence of Islamism on political movements in Islamic cultural zones 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 the events of 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’. 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. In the light of the BJP’s stunning success in the 2014 elections, it can be argued that the party has successfully ‘re-branded’ India as a Hindu polity.

The global religious revival is not, however, confined to the global South. In the wake of the events of 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 was 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. 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. However, the election of Barack Obama, whose father was a Kenyan Muslim, for two consecutive terms as George W. Bush’s successor brought into question the contemporary significance of the US’s Anglo-Protestant heritage in an increasingly multi-ethnic and multi-cultural polity. 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’ 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 them, and a renewed sense of European cultural Christianity.

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’. 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, the 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.

Second, 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’. 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’, to the point where ‘many national projects today no longer involve an aspiration to acquire their own sovereign state’. 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 communications 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.

While 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.
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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’. 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.

As print capitalism helped produce the ‘imagined community’ of the nation, digital or ‘informational’ capitalism 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’. ICT has provided the ability to communicate across boundaries, 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 simultaneously both 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, first, eroding the capacity of the state to impose its secular vision on society; second, 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 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 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’. 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’. However, its historical roots lie in the ‘Imperial Catholic Church’ of the fourth century ad. The recognition of Christianity by the Emperor Constantine in ad 13 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

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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’.39 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’,40 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’.41

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’.42 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.43 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.44 This shift has been 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, as both Jose Casanova and Jeff Haynes have pointed out, a ‘homogenization and globalization of Catholic culture at elite level throughout the Catholic world’.45 This process of globalization and homogenization finds expression in three directions. First, 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:
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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.46

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.47 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’.48

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’, 49 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 and his predecessor.

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. This is best exemplified by his response to a question about the existence of an alleged ‘gay lobby’ in the Vatican. ‘If someone is gay and is searching for the Lord’, the Pope answered, ‘then who am I to judge him?’50

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 emphasises 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.51 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.52 Recently, this has taken the form of calling for an ‘ethical and economic revolution’ in order to address the pernicious effects of climate change.53

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 opposes and the previous Pontiff had earlier claimed to constitute a ‘fundamental threat to the faith of the Church’. 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 reinterpretation of the gospels ‘in a more meaningful way’ and the promotion of ‘the struggle for the liberation of Third World peoples’.

In conclusion, the Roman Catholic Church may be seen 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.

Sikh transnational religious actors: 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 Indian state of Punjab, where the overwhelming majority of the world’s twenty-three million 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 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 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’, while 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.58

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”.59 While 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 organization 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 possessing neither 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 second, improved communications, and the development of the Punjabi-language print media and, subsequently, ICTs in particular, have enabled the construction of a ‘diaspora’ consciousness.60 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.61 However, particularly after the storming of the Golden Temple complex in 1984, which led to a ‘national war of self-determination’ in the Punjab,62 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’.63 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 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 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.64 Furthermore, two adult French Sikh citizens – Shingara Singh Mann and Ranjit Singh65 – were unable to renew important documents as they declined to remove their turbans for their ID photo.

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*. One such organization is UNITED SIKHS. 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’.66 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’.67

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). Appeals were filed at the European Court of Human Rights and at the United Nations Human Rights Committee in New York with mixed results. Whereas the European Court of Human Rights rejected the case of Mann Singh, a Sikh who refused to take off his turban in order to renew his driving license, in 2008,68 the United Nations Human Rights Committee upheld Singhara Singh’s complaint that the French state had violated his right to religious freedom in 2013 in requiring him to take off his turban for his passport photograph.69

Despite the election of the Socialist Party leader, Francois Hollande, as French President in 2012, the French state has so far not signalled its willingness to heed the United Nations

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Human Rights Committee’s findings demonstrating the limits of soft power of religious transnational organizations such as the SGPC and UNITED SIKHS.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the global activities of religious actors has exposed the ‘secular conceit’ 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’.71

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’.72 One way in which it could become less Eurocentric and more global in its outlook would be to provide support for the campaign 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.

Notes

1 The author is Director of the Rotary Peace Center, International Christian University, Tokyo, Japan and President of the Asia-Pacific Region of the International Studies Association. He wishes to thank Jeff Haynes for the invitation to contribute to the second edition.
2 Teschke, The Myth of 1648.
4 The term ‘Caliphate’ derives from the Arabic Khalifa, a term denoting a series of Islamic states that were formed following the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632. Haynes, Religious Transnational Actors, 27.
6 Petito and Hatzopoulos, Religion in International Relations.
7 Kaldor, Global Civil Society.
9 Haynes, Religious Transnational Actors, 7.
Attempts to apply the post-secular to IR are still in their infancy, but recent 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, ‘The Postsecular in International Relations’, 931–42; and Shani, Religion, Identity and Human Security.

Teschke, The Myth of 1648, 3.

Bull, ‘The Revolt against the West’.


Haynes, An Introduction to International Relations and Religion, 32.

Fukuyama, The End of History.

Wendt, ‘Identity and Structural Change in International Politics’, 52.

Sayyid, A Fundamental Fear; Mandaville, Transnational Muslim Politics.

Kepel, Jihad; Roy, Globalized Islam.


Huntington, ‘Clash of Civilizations’, 34.

See Jaffrelot, The Hindu Nationalism Movement; Hansen and Jaffrelot, The BJP and the Compulsions of Politics in India; Bhatt, Hindu Nationalism.

Huntington, Who are We?

Modood, Multicultural Politics.

Jenkins, God’s Continent.


Pieterse, Globalization and Culture.


Anderson, Imagined Communities.


Anderson, Imagined Communities, 44.

Ibid., 46.

Castells, The Information Age, 13–21.

Appadurai, Modernity at Large, 3.

Casanova, ‘Globalizing Catholicism and the Return to a “Universal” Church’, 121.

Küng, The Catholic Church, 27.

Ibid., 45.

Ibid., 168.


The Holy See, Nostra Aetate, 5.

The Holy See, Dignitatis Humanae, 1.


Casanova, ‘Globalizing Catholicism and the Return to a “Universal” Church’, 126.

Haynes, An Introduction to International Relations and Religion, 139.

Casanova, ‘Globalizing Catholicism and the Return to a “Universal” Church’, 125.

Walzer, Toward a Global Civil Society, 7.

The Holy See, ‘Press Conference of Pope Francis During the Return Flight’.


http://jesuits.org/spirituality.

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55 See Frank, The Development of Underdevelopment.
56 http://eatwot.org/.
57 ‘Soft power’ is defined by Joseph Nye as the ‘ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments’ (Nye, Soft Power, 12). See Haynes, Religious Transnational Actors, for its application to the analysis of religious transnational actors in international relations.
58 Shiomani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, The Sikh Rehat Maryada, 1.
59 Ibid.
60 See Axel, The Nation’s Tortured Body; Tatla, The Sikh Diaspora; and Shani, Sikh Nationalism and Identity.
61 Singh and Tatla, Sikhs in Britain.
62 Pettigrew, The Sikhs of the Punjab; and Singh, Ethnic Conflict in India.
63 Singh and Tatla, Sikhs in Britain, 210.
64 Jasvir Singh, Bikramjit Singh and Ranjit Singh were expelled in 2004. They were joined in 2005 by Gurinder Singh and by Jasmeet Singh in 2006. Maha Singh has, furthermore, not been admitted in any school since 2006 on account of his turban (Mejindarpal Kaur, personal correspondence, 25 March 2007).
65 Shingara Singh Mann was unable to renew his driver’s licence and passport as he would not take off his turban for a photo ID, and Ranjit Singh, a 69-year-old political refugee, was refused a resident card in 2002 for a similar reason (Mejindarpal Kaur, personal correspondence, 25 March 2007).
67 http://unitedsikhs.org/about.php.
70 Connolly, Why I Am Not a Secularist, 19–47.
72 Küng, The Catholic Church, 213.

References


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