The Institutional Logic of Religious Nationalism: Sex, Violence and the Ends of History

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Let us begin with a story. ‘God is great!’ the Talibani fighters called out when the video showed one of their fighters blow himself up in a suicide attack. The Haqqani Taliban fighters who in 2008 captured and sought to ransom New York Times correspondent David Rohde revered the suicide bombers. As they prepared themselves for martyrdom, they enjoyed watching the bombers’ tapes, as well as American war movies and playing violent video games like Delta Force. Yet it was women’s bodies that were on their minds. They complained bitterly that the American soldiers dishonored Afghan women by making them stand before them without their burqas; they accused the NATO forces of turning Afghan women into prostitutes in their military bases. Their commander railed against the way American women were forced to wear revealing clothing, transforming themselves into sex objects. American men were afraid to die, they claimed, because they were captured by worldly pleasures, by the exposed flesh of women such as these. Although the American newspaperman’s guards saw him as a polluting unbeliever who came from a land governed by the relentless pursuit of pleasure, it was Western love songs they wanted to hear him sing and to sing with him: ‘She loves you, yeah, yeah, yeah’.

The Taliban are religious state-makers – decentralised and ethnicised, and hence transnational, as it is – seeking to ground political authority in their particular fusion of popular Pashtun, Deobandi and Salafi Islam. They are an instance of religious nationalisms that have sprung up around the world – in Egypt, Algeria, Palestine, Israel, India and the United States – seeking to fuse two ontologies, two logics of action, that of divinity and of the nation-state.

1In writing this essay I have had the stimulation and critique of Jeff Alexander, Tom Carlson, Nathan French, Phil Gorski, Ron Hassner, Heather Haveman, Naveed Sheikh, Ahmet Temel, Matt Wilson and the members of my Weber-Nietzsche seminar with Tom Carlson, particularly Rico Monge whose theo-theoretical disputations were mighty indeed. I am also indebted to the members of the Macmillan Center Initiative on Religion, Politics and Society seminar at Yale Seminar for their critique, particularly Jeffrey Guhin, Andrew March and Gulay Turkmen.


All religious nationalisms are forms of politicised religion, but not all politicised religions are religious nationalisms. Religious nationalisms are a particular form of politicised religion, that is religious movements that engage in political projects that make the state not only a medium, but an object, of collective action. The specificity of their project is located in their desire to transform the nature of the nation-state itself. They all seek to make religion the nation-state’s institutional ground. Although it would be more correct to refer to the religionisation of the nation-state, I will use the term religious nationalism. Religious nationalisms are variously composed of three elements: they understand the nation-state as a collective religious subject; they seek to derive the authority of the state from divine writ; and they understand the nation state to be a potential instrument of divine will, often associated with salvific or redemptive significance. It is this last element which does not obtain in most contemporary Sunni forms of political Islam. For religious nationalism, politics is a religious obligation.

Contemporary religious nationalisms are characterised by a particular conjunction. On the one hand, they tend towards bodily violence – the killing of officials, of non-believing opponents, of enemies inside and out. That violence is either enacted in the present or anticipated in an apocalyptic future. On the other hand they are preoccupied with the regulation of sexuality – homosexuality, abortion, marriage, divorce, pre- and extra-marital sexuality, evolution.

To explain this practical conjunction, I shift the level of analysis from the agonistic struggle between groups towards the logic of institutional fields and the struggle over field boundaries. While such contests may be manifest in and carried through group conflict, I do not give groups analytic primacy. My premise is both that the politics of institutional boundary conditions have a sociological particularity and that the way in which those boundaries are contested is conditioned by the institutional logics of the fields whose scope is at stake.

To account for the violence of religious nationalisms, one can point to its instrumental value as an efficacious and cheap tactic by which groups seek to obtain power, particularly under conditions of repressive governance or foreign occupation. If the analysis stops there, their violence, and indeed their political project, tends to be shorn of religious meaning, religion reduced to a political medium. To explain its conjunction with erotics one has to look beyond this instrumental political calculus to the institutional logic of religion and to the institutional concordances between religion and nation-state. Religions, like states, organise and invest the making and unmaking of bodies with their

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5Gulay Turkmen distinguishes between the nationalization of Islam and the Islamicization of the nation, using Turkish and Palestinian Hamas discourse around the shaheed as exemplars of the two cases based on whether the defence of the nation is an end to which religion is a means or the promulgation of religion is the end to which the nation is a means (G. Turkmen, “Religious Nationalism vs. Nationalist Religion: The Discourse of Martyrdom in Turkey and Palestine,” in (New Haven, CT: Yale University, Department of Sociology, 2010). Although nationalist and religious elements are to be found in the accounts of interviews with relatives of the shaheeds in both cases, Turkmen argues that the object of sacrifice is primarily the nation in the first and God in the second. Whether these differences are due to the positioning of Islam in formation of the religious nationalist discourse or the structural position of those who promote this discourse — the army of an existent nation-state facing an internal territorial-ethnic minority vs an emergent state in contest not only to form a state against religious—nationalist others (the Israelis) but against a more secularized nationalism (the PLO) — remains to be examined.


own significance. States, like religions, depend on a faith in a transcendental cause. That religious nationalist movements tend toward violence and are preoccupied with the regulation of sexuality, I will argue, can be derived from the institutional logic of religion, from its parallel and conflicting claims to the ontological ground of state authority, from the fraught relation between birth, death and state authority that religious nationalists expose and activate.

Institutions have logics.8 The elemental thing to notice about contemporary religious nationalism is that it seeks to change institutional boundaries. I seek to develop an institutional approach to religious nationalisms that variously aim at transforming the identity, the ground of authority and the cosmological or salvific significance of nation states. Rather than building from the material and political interests or value orientations of genders, classes, status groups or communities, the social as an agonistic game between groups, I explore religious nationalism as a political project that seeks a shift in institutional architecture. My question here is primarily the internal institutional order of its practices, not their external conditions of possibility.9

In keeping with Aristotle’s notion of praxis, institutional logics join subjects, practices and objects into bundled sets that have an inner referentiality, a performative order, in which an unobservable substance is enacted in practice. To understand religious nationalism, one should look for the institutional logic of their practices, the ways in which these practices enact a religious ontology of the nation-state, here seeking to inscribe divinity within the public sphere.10

State and religion: the two spheres feed off common sources. Using the inner logic of Max Weber’s theory of value spheres, I will first show how the constitution of political authority involves a ‘religious’ ordering of love and death, which lends itself to religious politicisation.11 In Weber’s later work on value spheres, he pointed back to the religious dimension of every modern domain as a polytheism, and by implication to the co-constitution of power and value that is missing in much of his political sociology. It is Weber’s later effort to conjoin instrumental and value rationality, what Jeffrey Alexander has referred to as a ‘presuppositional multidimensionality’ – an effort that Alexander argues failed precisely in Weber’s empirical political sociology – that makes Weber’s value

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9Philip Gorski, for example, looks at variations in religion’s institutional location and structure as a determinant of its politicization; P. S. Gorski, “Religious Nationalism: A Neo-Weberian Approach,” in Religion and Nation (Konstanz: University of Konstanz, 2007).
10The task is conjointly hermeneutical and explanatory in that the bundling of material institutional practices depends on an immanent order of meanings performed through those practices and vice versa, in the manner of an ontological production function. It also opens a terrain for explanation in that the nature of the institution from and through which political projects are launched probably affects the nature of those projects, the strategies they use to effect them, as well as the conditions under which such projects are launched. My analysis does not yet consider variations in the institutional logic of the state, the way what Talal Asad calls its discursive grammar, between personalistic authoritarian or democratic states for example, shapes the incidence or nature of the religious nationalist challenge to that state. I am indebted to Jeff Alexander for pointing this out.
11Patricia Thornton has correctly pointed out my neglect of the Weberian sources of institutional logic, which she argues, would provide a way to develop an approach to ‘embedded agency’; P. H. Thornton, “The Value of the Classics,” in P. S. Adler (ed.), The Oxford Handbook of Sociology and Organization Studies: Classical Foundations (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 20–38. This essay is an initial offering seeking to explore those sources.
spheres approach so intriguing. Weber developed his theory of value spheres against the profusion of libertine erotics among the intelligentsia on the one hand, and the profligate death of a devastating war and the Russian revolution on the other. This not only has an uncanny resonance with the situation I seek to understand, but it also has a bearing on the potential consonance of an institutional approach with the political project we are seeking to explain.

I next argue that there is a religious meaning immanent to the patterning of religious nationalists’ practices. Religion affords the materials for the reconstruction of the state not only, as Weber made clear, because the state is ultimately a ‘religious’ institution, dependent on passionate faith beyond reason, but also because religion concerns itself with the making and taking of life, indeed with love that makes life both possible and meaningful, and out of which any institution, and the state above all, must be constructed. Violent death and reproductive sex are institutionally natural stakes in a struggle over the interface between state and religion.

### Violence, Love and the State: the State of Max Weber’s Passion

Max Weber instructed us that the meaning of death is the fundament out of which the authority of state is composed. Religious violence is, of course, instrumental and strategic, aiming at territory, resources and political power, but it is also a struggle over the institutional monopoly of violence and an engagement in a contest over the very meaning of death, over the ‘for which’ one is willing to die or mete out death. ‘This location of death within a series of meaningful and consecrated events’, Weber wrote, ‘ultimately lies at the base of all endeavors to support the autonomous dignity of the polity resting on force’.

Weber considered politics in the state potentially violent for a multitude of reasons, not the least of which is by definition. Politics is potentially violent – and this is critical in the case of religious nationalism – because the distribution of power in society depends not simply on an adjudication of distributional conflicts within every domain, but on an adjudication of life spherical jurisdiction between domains, what Weber refers to as ‘value spheres’ or ‘life-spheres, each of which is governed by different laws’ (Weber 1958a: 123; 1958d: 323-324, 328).


15Ibid., pp. 323–4, 328; M. Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” in H. Gerth and C. W. Mills (eds), *From Max Weber: Essay in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 123. Brubaker distinguishes between three dimensions of autonomy of value spheres: causal, axiological and normative, depending on whether a sphere operates according to its own laws, its own intrinsic value or its own norms (R. Brubaker, *The Limits of Rationality: An Essay on the Social and Moral Thought of Max Weber* (London: Routledge, 1987), pp. 83–6). Brubaker argues that the economic and the political spheres are autonomous in the causal, but not in the axiological and normative dimensions, whereas the religious, intellectual, aesthetic and erotic spheres are organized around subjective internalization of particular values and the norms associated with their realization. This, I would argue, although there is warrant for it within Weber’s work, is a debatable distinction.

16Heidegger erred in presuming that the metaphysics of modern science ‘holds complete dominion over all the phenomena that distinguish the age’. Heidegger writes: ‘Now if science as research is an essential phenomenon of the modern age, it must be that which constitutes the metaphysical ground of research determines first
Political decision as to which value – here Weber also uses the term ‘cause’ – can neither be founded in that value nor defended rationally vis-à-vis the claims of other values. This is because each increasingly rationalised value sphere is itself extra-rational, institutionally given, dependent on a passionate identification with that value, indeed on what Weber also calls ‘faith’. Each value sphere, science included, contains an irreducible value rationality, making ‘unconditional demands’ which ‘bind’ the actor to it, what Weber called *werta rational*, independent of the chances of its actualisation. Individuals who aspire to human personality must serve one or another god, must choose among a warring pantheon. Like Kant’s categorical imperative, serving a god with an ethic of conviction requires that one obey without regard to consequences, and as Kant himself said, as if one were serving a God.

Weber famously linked Protestant worldly asceticism to the ‘spirit of capitalism’ through religious valorisation of worldly work as a ‘calling’, in which the capitalist world became an open-air monastery where people perform their labours ‘as if it were an absolute end in itself’. In fact all institutions are religious, binding their adherents through faith, sacrifice and passion. Institutional values function, Weber argues, as ‘gods of the various orders’, or ‘godheads’, which in their plurality must be considered a ‘polytheism’. Modernity may rationalise these values, condensing them into self-conscious postulates. These gods may ‘take the form of impersonal forces’ that operate through external compulsion and objectified mechanisms. Nonetheless, each institution still depends – at its institution, at its core and in its conscious transformation – on those who have a ‘calling’.

Weber’s institutional values operate as if they were Protestant, and particularly Calvinist, gods, which are sources and loci of election, even if they never measure up as ‘gods’ to the problem of the meaning of death that first entered the world with the emergence of the eternal God. Pushing Weber’s intellectual architecture I would argue that an exterior institutional value operates as though it were a transcendental, eternal ‘subject’ that can bind humans for its own sake. Just as in Protestantism men manifest their love of God through this calling, the institutional value is a timeless ‘object’ of human love, an Augustinian divine love that one cannot lose. Institutional values can neither be derived from the


18M. Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 25–6. For an excellent discussion of Weber’s approach to action, see Alexander (note 12), 1983, pp. 22–9. Alexander points out that *zweck* and *wert* rationalities are distinguished not by the element of calculation, but by their orientation in the first case, to external conditions, and in the second, to values themselves. The more external conditions shape action, the less value orientations have any bearing on action and more law-like human behaviour is likely to be. Alexander points out that this opens up a normless instrumental rationality, a lawful materialism without voluntary agency.


21Weber, “Religious Rejections of the World” (note 14), pp. 354–6. Just as Calvin supposed that believers were elected through God’s indecipherable and irresistible grace, an election manifest in, but not derived from, their faith, an election likewise manifest in their dedication to a worldly ‘life task’, so Weber argued that institutional values operate as loci of election, in which most are ‘forced to obey’, but to which those with a calling give themselves as evidence that they have been called, indeed ‘a spiritual aristocracy of the predestined saints of God’; Weber, *The Protestant Ethic* (note 19), p. 121.


senses nor from intellectual abstraction, but they are that for which the religious man makes ‘himself ready for the reception’. The world loves us in a plurality of ways.

Institutional values ‘call’ and some individuals respond, only becoming personalities to the extent they orient their actions, and the meaning of their lives, around the substantive value of the institution. Weber’s authentic subjects, the institutional elect, are those who passionately, and without warrant, throw or project themselves into an incalculable institutional becoming, in spite of its procedural excesses, its distributive mistakes, the temporariness of its achievements. Indeed this passion, this love of the ‘irrational content’ of the value is critical to the operability of the institutional logic, to its ‘invisible church’. Weber argued that the historical emergence of an eternal God both stripped life of its unambiguous meaning and in counterpoint contributed to the deification of cultural values. Through these values individuals participate in one or another institutional life-force that outlives them.

Carl Schmitt posited a religious foundation of the Western sovereign of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, built on a late medieval nominalist model of the singular transcendent God, a theology that supposed God as an agent whose sovereignty over creation, his absolute powers or potentia absouta, are neither exhausted, nor bound, by his ordained laws or potentia ordinata. Such a God, whose actions are neither constrained by, nor amenable to human reason, is thus free to make the sovereign decision, the miracle, the violent suspension of law. In nominalism, the authority of the law hinges on divine will, not right reason.

Unlike Carl Schmitt, whose political theology of sovereignty is grounded in a nominalist model of an omnipotent God who seeks to defend an existent mode of life, Weber centred his analysis around the charismatic political leader drawing on the figure of the prophet, the one who experiences himself called to a mission, to an ultimate end, who is able to lead because of his passion, and whose followers’ relationship to him is likewise based on passionate identification. ‘[T]he substance of the prophecy … is to direct a way of life to the pursuit of a sacred value’. It is not the instituted sovereign who defends a mode of life, but an emissary prophet who announces, embodies, instills and attempts to instantiate a new mode of life, a new ‘valid order’, that must resist certain representation, calculable fabrication, and yet which affords the only path to subject formation. Not the instituted defender of the divine order, but the prophetic institutor of a new order is at the centre of Weber’s political imagination.

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27 Yet it is this God’s very transcendent quality, his absolute freedom, that ultimately established the conditions in the West to take down kings and let the people speak. As Louis Dupré has shown, such a god’s absolute power became the model for the modern subject; L. Dupré, Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). On the one hand, it generated a new kind of Cartesian knowing subject whose knowledge is grounded in the certainty of his subjective representation, and on the other hand, it created a new kind of religious subject, whose salvation is justified by his own faith, a faith likewise indicated by his words, in other words, a Protestant. Individual and collective subjectification – the rational individual and the democratic nation-state – occur in tandem in the wake of the formation of a ‘Protestant’ subject.
Weber understood that the decision on the state’s ‘cause’ is supplemental to the institution, which can never found or guarantee it. Schmitt, who attended Weber’s seminar, would define the state by its ends, specifically the decision on the ‘real enemy’. For Schmitt the political decision was thus a decision on violence because it was a decision on war, a decision that can never be derived from the law. Weber found no analytic traction in the category of the enemy. For him the exceptional quality of the political decision is anterior and elsewhere: political leaders must make value choices that no form of formal rationality can prescribe, nor can they be grounded in instrumental rationality as they are commitments to causes, not claims to causal knowledge. Weber secularised Thomas Hobbes’s state of nature – in fact a war between Christian gods – into a genuine institutional polytheism. No value sphere can internally justify its own values. Only the prophet or ‘the savior’, armed with ‘the gift of grace’, Weber argues, can answer the question: ‘Which of the warring gods should we serve?’

Because the state cannot be defined by its ends, it both makes charismatic authority necessary and violence probable, particularly at their institution. It is not, as in Agamben’s political philosophy, a potentially violent relation to bare life that is the constitutive exception, but a passionate, faith-based, and hence potentially violent relation, to value that must be both excluded and included for the state to live in history. The political is a site of incalculability generated by the multiplicity of values, by the incommensurability of political means and political ends, by the very nature of violence which, by compelling obedience, is in performative contradiction and can be instrumentally at variance with the value of the value itself.

The political calling, Weber understood, is supplementary to the institution, something that the institution cannot secure, but upon which it depends. It is a taking of a stand that is the core of Weber’s understanding of politics as ‘any kind of independent leadership in action’. Independence here refers to the capacity to choose, aim at and seek to mobilise a following and a set of laws around an end, a ‘passionate devotion to a “cause,” to the god or demon who is its overlord’. Leadership is necessarily charismatic because it can neither be derived from past practices nor from existing law. The political formation of value is a religious, and specifically a prophetic, process, a charismatic phenomenon.

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32Weber was quite cynical about the state’s proclivity to fight the ‘real’ enemy. Writing of the situation where the ‘social community’ takes state form, he noted: ‘This force has inevitably bred new deeds of violence against external and internal enemies; in addition, it has bred dishonest pretexts for such deeds. Hence it has signified an overt, or what must appear worse, a pharisaically veiled, absence of love’; “Religious Rejections of the World” (note 14), p. 355.
40Ibid., p. 115.
41It is found among neither bureaucrats, party bosses nor parliamentary politicians. ‘Conscious departures from tradition’, Weber wrote in *Economy and Society*, ‘were originally almost entirely due to prophetic oracles or at least to pronouncements which were sanctioned as prophet and thus were considered sacred’; Weber, *Economy and Society* (note 18), p. 37.
The states lives off exceptional political decisions, decisions which are acts of love. The political leader loves and is loved into existence, by the passion of his cause and by the love of his followers who submit beyond reason to his call. Although Weber understood the political, with its impersonal, power-oriented lovelessness, as living ‘in an inner tension with the god of love’, political leadership is itself a secularised love affair, as indicated by Weber’s template for the charisma of the political leader, the etymology of charis being God’s love, His bestowal of grace, of salvation, of transcendence and immortality. The truly political decision is a calling and a calling is, for Weber, akin to a mark of grace. The charismatic leader inspires ‘absolutely personal devotion’ in that he is understood to have an ‘extraordinary and personal gift of grace’. He is ‘the root of the idea of a calling in its highest expression’. The leader is called and lives for the ‘cause’ that has called him. It is the love of the leader and his singular embodiment of a cause – a causeless cause – that makes the institution of a new ‘valid order’ possible. In a plebiscitarian democracy, political leadership is not enabled contractually through rational consent with the voters, but through the leader’s embodiment of a cause, ‘an ethical substance’, and his followers’ emotional identification – indeed ‘the exploitation of mass emotionality’ – with him and it. The leader is loved because he is understood to love; it is this love – both subject and object – that makes him who he is.

Political leadership is a love affair. Certainly the pleasures of power are not enough. A true political leader is a good lover, not one animated only by emotion and ‘romantic sensations’. Neither an emotional Lutheran, nor the mystic possessed by divinity, he is more a sober, self-controlled Calvinist world-maker who understands himself as a divine tool, with the ‘sense of matter-of-factness, of passionate devotion to a “cause”’. He is the ‘mature’ lover who lives his passion as ‘an embodied creative power’. Animated by love of the cause, the leader with a calling for politics is mindful of the consequences of his actions. True political passion is not ‘sterile excitation’, but a love that seeks to inscribe the real world in the image of the ultimately unknowable beloved. Like those inner-worldly lovers who combine erotic desire and ethical responsibility (see below), a political calling is ‘given’ as though it were ‘grace’. For the true political leader wertrationalitat and zweckrationallillitat, and the correlative ethics of ultimate ends and responsibility, are always interlaced and supplemental.

The institutional specificity of the political requires both passion and violence. One must love to order loves. ‘To take a stand, to be passionate – ira et studium – is the politician’s element, and above all the element of a political leader’. To be a political leader one must

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45Although charisma inheres in the person, it cannot, as Agamben argues, be reduced to auctoritas, to the force of law or sovereign decision which emerges with the suspension or neutralization of the law. For Weber, I would argue, charisma is tied to value which must have a relation to, yet exceed, the law or norm. It the embodiment of that ‘cause’, Weber argues, that makes a political leader, and hence charisma is, contrary to Agamben, ‘a more originary form of power’; G. Agamben, State of Exception (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 83–6. For Weber, charisma aligns not with Paul, but with Calvin, for those who understand themselves as tools of these ‘godheads’.
46Ibid., p. 127.
47Ibid., p. 115.
51Weber, “Politics as a Vocation” (note 15), p. 95; ‘Devotion to politics’, Weber argues, ‘can be born and nourished from passion alone’ (p. 115).
both love and be willing to fight for one’s love. Only those willing to die for their calling are able to achieve a meaningful death.\(^{53}\) For Weber the political decision on violence was secondary to the violence of decision, between values, between gods, and, he implied, between lovers. Weber moved effortlessly from politics to war, suggesting the homology between a defeated people like the Germans, a defeated party and finally a rejected beloved.\(^{54}\) The last are compared with ‘world views among which in the end one has to make a choice’. ‘Rarely will you find’, Weber wrote in this context, ‘that a man whose love turns from one woman to another feels no need to legitimate this before himself by saying: she was not worthy of my love’.\(^{55}\)

Weber espied a conflict between the nation-state and salvation religions that was as much born of their institutional commonalities as it was from their substantive conflict. It is those commonalities – in their love and their violence – that make religious nationalism a socio-logically probable form. Writing in the midst of the First World War, it was already clear to Weber that religion was a natural basis for that ‘pathetic pride’ of the national community.\(^{56}\) On the one hand the ‘brotherly ethic’ of universal salvation religions with their ‘God of “love”’ conflicts with the violence of the state.\(^{57}\) Yet it is love, by and of the political leader, Weber argues, that is the source of his charisma, his extraordinary capacity to lead. Moreover it is the impersonal brotherly love of the national community that is an essential ground of that leadership. Weber understood that salvation religions and the modern nation state both draw on an original logic of kinship, extending and ultimately universalising the solidarity and sentiment of the sib on the one side, and on particularistic ‘notions of common descent and of an essential, though frequently indefinite, homogeneity’, on the other.\(^{58}\)

Weber also underlined the unique capacity of the nation-state through violent conflict to create a ‘a pathos and a sentiment of community’ comparable to that of religion:\(^{59}\)

War thereby makes for an unconditionally devoted and sacrificial community among the combatants and releases an active mass compassion and love for those who are in need. And, as a mass phenomenon, these feelings break down all the naturally given barriers of association. In general, religions can show comparable achievements only in heroic communities professing an ethic of brotherliness. (p. 335)

War provides death a ‘consecrated meaning’ through this ‘community unto death’.\(^{60}\) Love – of the cause, of the leader, of one’s community and combatants – makes death meaningful.

Religious nationalism can thus be read as the kind of ‘Puritan’ solution to the ‘competition between the brotherliness of religion and of the warrior community’.\(^{61}\) In their violence, religious nationalisms not only capture the almost impersonal brotherliness of


\(^{54}\) Weber also equates a man’s erotic conquest of a woman with the ‘conquest of power’; ibid., p. 345.


\(^{60}\) Ibid.

\(^{61}\) Ibid., p. 336.
Calvinist love, but the particularised grace of the nation which has a chosen role to play in the outworking of salvation, here identified with an objective, cosmic historical trajectory.\textsuperscript{62} The love of the nation and the love of God are thereby fused and made objective.

The Exceptions of Religious Nationalism: Love, Violence and Divinity

For Weber the meaning of death is the groundless ground of the nation-state, the source of the legitimacy of its violence, and hence of the institution itself. It is the political constitution of that death and that life that religious nationalisms contest. Schmitt located the political, and hence derived state violence from, the sovereign decision to defend not life itself, but a mode of life, a secularisation of a divinely given order. The violence of religious nationalism, seeking to impose, not to defend, a mode of life, points to the state as that organ which seeks a monopoly on symbolic violence, not on the legitimate use of force, but on the force of legitimation, and hence to the violence that occurs when that monopoly is contested. It also points to the political as a religious function, a necessarily extraordinary, extra-legal constitution of a collectivity, of the formation of a mode of life, of legitimate ends making. Their violence is not a violence of constitutional exception, it is an exceptional violence of constitution.

Religious political violence repudiates the state's monopoly on legitimate violence, grounding itself in a divine source of authority outside human law. It is this absolute sovereign, this God who has and can move in extraordinary and unexpected ways in human history, whose revelation of law was one such extraordinary intervention, from which today's religious nationalists wish to derive the sovereignty of their states. The indeterminate historicity of God and the collectivity's return to him are of a piece. So, too, is the violence of their respective law-makings. God's entry into history was and is an awesome, often violent, intrusion. The collective return to God, like the original turn, is both memorial and prefiguration, a mark and medium of divine plan.

The movement of religious men and women into the public sphere, the politicisation of religion, and the religious violence accompanying it, express the extraordinariness of that divine force – God's historicity – in which the adherents of religious nationalisms not only believe, but participate.\textsuperscript{63} Religious nationalisms understand themselves as participating in a history in which the divine is an active force, not simply as a source of past revelation, but as an agent in the human fulfillment of a divine plan for history.\textsuperscript{64} Their politics is a worldly 'calling' in the Weberian sense of all inner-worldly ascetic sects, in which the 'world is all the more affirmed as the theatre of God-willed activity, in which they understand themselves as 'God's tool'.\textsuperscript{65}

Islamists, for example, understand Allah to have revealed a singular source and template for human governance and a telos of human history – its extension to all humanity in a global Islamic community – which Muslims are enjoined to realise in history as their enactment of God's will. However, they also believe that Allah continues to be active in the human realisation of His ends. The radical Islamist Sayyid Qutb, intellectual scion of the


\textsuperscript{63}Gorski, "Religious Nationalism" (note 9).

\textsuperscript{64}Philip Gorski points to the political particularity of the Weberian religious stance of 'world mastery'; Gorski (note 9).

Muslim Brotherhood tortured and finally executed by Egyptian President Nasser in 1966, is a prime source and pertinent example. Islamists inspired by Qutb understand themselves to be living once again in a period of *jahiliyyah*, a ‘conscious ignorance’ of the revealed oneness of God’s sovereignty, which ‘takes the form of claiming that the right to create values, to legislate rules of collective behaviour, and to choose any way of life rests with men, without regard to what God has prescribed’. For Qutb, the impetus for this Islamist movement which would re-establish Islamic law as the ultimate arbiter of all human activity, that would restore God’s sovereignty, lies not in human agency, but ‘outside the human sphere and beyond this world’. ‘If God intends to actualize His mission and His religion’, Qutb writes, ‘only He will do so, but not as a recompense for human suffering and sacrifices’.

More than divine historical agency is at stake in the practices of religious nationalism. The most simple – and revealing – aspect of religious investments of love and death is their persistent and obsessive corporeality, their investment and practical involvement in the making and unmaking of human bodies. These political practices have a politico-theological significance. Sex and violence are at religion’s core, corollaries to the divine capacity to create and destroy human life. Aristotle, who made substance the ground of his theory of knowledge as an uncovering, as revealability, sought its template in the human body. The practices of religious nationalism likewise point to something uncovered, a relation to a naked, sacred, sensuous and interior truth, an immanent transcendent. It is the truth of this life in which they would ground their state.

Religious nationalisms seize on life’s exception to human law, to the domain of what Agamben calls ‘bare life’, which he identifies as the referent of sovereignty. Sovereign power is not a political-theological category, Agamben asserts, but derives from an origin-ary exclusion of this bare life from both law and religion. Contrary to Foucault’s periodised movement from classical sovereignty to the bio-power of governmentality, bare life is and always has been the content of sovereign power. It is this life, caught in the sovereign ban, declared outside the law and thus vulnerable to death, that is, he argues, the original sacred life, ‘the earthly foundation of the state’s legitimacy and sovereignty’. In Agamben’s story, bare life becomes both the bearer of human rights and national sovereignty. The modern nation state, Agamben argues, grounds sovereignty as it seizes hold of *zoe*, in a culturally unmediated biological people, not the People of the polis, joining the status of citizenship to the biological fact of birth, if not of race, as well as bodily pleasure — the pursuit of happiness. The modern nation-state grounds its sovereignty not in free, political subjects, but in human life, *tout court*.

Religious nationalisms refuse the modern state’s foundation in biological life, the sufficiency of birth, the primacy of bodily existence and the valorisation of corporeal pleasure, of utility and biological need — precisely what Hannah Arendt disparaged as ‘the social’ — as the basis of state authority and political action. For its followers it is neither the abstract

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69Euben, 1999: 73.
71Ibid., p. 127.
72Ibid., pp.128–9.
individual nor the physiological person, but human life understood as divine creation that must be the ontological ground of political authority.

These theo-political movements are likewise bound up with a this-worldly mastery of a life which they understand to be excessive to human law. Religious nationalisms contest the secular state’s capacity to take life because, they insist, it is not grounded in its divine making. They, too, seize on life’s exception to the law, but it is not the same exception, not the same life. Both their violence and their sex point to a different substance, an alternative basis of sovereignty. Religious nationalisms centre not on Arendt’s natality as the non-relational phenomenological ground, but as the loving relational ground, of political action.\(^74\)

Agamben identifies bare life as the state of nature that Thomas Hobbes located both outside the sovereign order as its brutishly violent source and at its very inside in the sovereign’s own, legally unmasterable, savage powers.\(^75\) For politicised religionists, God’s capacity to make life is part and parcel of His capacity to take it, a power excessive to the law, a fecundating power that is pervasive, for example, in Moses’ relation to God, a relation which Hobbes himself used as his model for the sovereign and that was the template for numerous early modern European nationalisms.\(^76\) The sovereign God in whom religious nationalists would ground the sovereignty of their states is not only a law-giver who can deliver spectacular pains in its defence, but one who guarantees extraordinary birth, who rewards his followers with fertility, including collective birth, the one who not only takes, but who makes life, the one who loves his people fiercely and jealously.\(^77\) Not just death, but erotic love and the birth in which it issues provides an originary template for institution, for making place for the law and the collective subject who adopts it as their own. The religious nationalist model of state sovereignty is also a model of human procreation. Law and life both derive from an exceptional divine source. God’s violence is but one side of His boundless love, His possessive desires and exclusive demands. Islamist movements, too, manifest this conjunction of fear and love.

Divine making of life is linked to its human taking. As Weber pointed out it was the ‘Creator’ God that was critical to a ‘rationally active asceticism, [which] in mastering the world, seeks to tame what is creatural and wicked through work in a worldly “vocation”’.\(^78\)

It is monotheism’s foundational linkage of disobedience to divinity, sexual desire and death, Weber argues, that affords the salvation religions a theological means to introduce political violence as a ‘disciplinary means’ to impose the divine commandments on a depraved, creaturely world.\(^79\) Understanding themselves as enacting God’s will, they seek ‘to tame the world of sin, for His glory’. Weber recognised that it was by such means that ‘crusaders’ are born, Calvinists and Islamists being his prototypical cases.\(^80\) Indeed within the Islamic world today it is from this religious obligation to ‘call’ fellow Muslims to piety, ‘to enjoin others in the doing of good or right, and the forbidding of evil or wrong’, that both pietist movements seeking to build an Islamic civil society exhort their neighbors to prayer and Islamist groups murdered men whom they understood as an immoral tyrant – President Sadat.\(^81\) Asceticism is for them not an individual ethical choice, but a collective religious obligation.

\(^{74}\)Ibid.

\(^{75}\)Agamben, *Homo Sacer* (note 37).


The effort of these religious nationalisms to subordinate sexuality to divine law is of a piece with their desire to derive sovereignty from divinity, and with their struggle to create a pious civil society as the ground for the national community over which the state claims sovereignty. Their sex, like their violence, partakes of and must be ordered by this divinity whose sovereignty is located in his capacity to give and take life. Like the European political communities fashioned in the Reformation by Lutheran and Calvinist religious movements, religious nationalists today seek to discipline the members’ sexuality. (Both Calvinist and Lutheran consistory, the political nuclei out of which their governing bodies evolved began as marriage courts.\footnote{Gorski, 2003, p. 119; see also pp. 54 123.})

In *Milestones*, his most influential political text, Qutb links sovereignties without God to natural, materialist understandings of procreation, which together reduce citizen men to their animal needs, precisely to what Agamben called modernity’s beast, the wolf-man.\footnote{Qutb *Milestones* (note 68).} The negation of the transcendent God and the consequent grounding of political order in nature, has led, Qutb argues, to Communist ideologies where ‘the basic needs of human beings are considered identical with those of animals, that is, food and drink, clothing, shelter, and sex’, and to capitalist societies where ‘physical desires’ reign supreme.\footnote{Ibid., p. 66.} Without God, citizens are animals. For Qutb man is not only more than animal, he is more than man. Man’s ‘creation’, Qutb writes, ‘is the result of the Will of Allah rather than of his father and mother. The father and mother may come together; but they cannot transform a sperm into a human being’.\footnote{Ibid., p. 74.} Only by recognising the divinity involved in conception, in birth, in the making of life, can a Muslim live a life worth living.

It is the procreative God whom religious nationalists deploy to counter modernity’s investments of eros. Religions become politicised not only because nation-states are integrally involved in the delimitation of what religions can do and hence what they are, because religion is political in its very delimitation, but because of the state’s regulation, and non-regulation, of this sexual domain, the remaining core of religion’s competence. Foucault pointed to the modern ‘proliferating meaning’ of sex that grew out of the rise of what he called bio-politics, ‘the taking charge of life, more than the threat of death’.\footnote{M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume I: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage, 1980), pp. 143, 148.} Legitimate sexual behaviour, child birth and abortion, the very right to bear children, sexual education, marriage and divorce, the sexual division of labour, the respective rights of husbands, wives and children, not to mention the right to die, have all become objects of legislation and administration by the modern state. This changing state of sex has brought religions around the world back into the public sphere. The secular politicisation of sex, its increasing encroachment on religion’s residual legal competence, is the ground of its re-divinisation.\footnote{There is, I suspect, a relationship between the religious construction of sex and their hermeneutics. Just as the divine is immanent in life, an excess over which He exercises sovereignty, so He is immanent in His revealed word. Neither sexual desire, nor meaning, can be allowed to proliferate according to human interest alone. Life, meaning, and perhaps value, too, in the case of money, is a divine property which humans can neither replicate nor reproduce on their own terms. For example, the Christian Reconstructionist Gary North who has been vital in linking Christian fundamentalists to the ‘Tea Party’ opposition to the American monetary policies, including the quantitative easing of the Federal Reserve in 2010, argues that the tactics violate the biblical injunctions against both theft and ‘just weights and measures’. ‘North argues’, Julie Ingersoll points out, ‘that the Bible prohibits what he calls “multiple indebtedness,” which makes the Federal Reserve System of fractional reserve banking “legalized counterfeiting”; J. Ingersoll, “Better Dead Than ’Fed’: Behind Palin’s Dig at ’Unbiblical’ Fed,” in *Religion Dispatches* (2010). An ethical life is one that submits to this immanence, that does not imagine an excess that is a humanly...}
Religious nationalisms react in particular to the way in which modern man has made a
god of eros, cut off from both sacrament and reproduction. Again it was Max Weber who,
early in the last century, pointed to the religious significance of modernity’s transformation
of sexual life, which he called ‘the greatest irrational force of life’, into an irrational inner-
worldly salvation from the rationalisation of the modern world.\(^\text{88}\) In contrast to the ‘cycle of
their existence’ and ‘the naive unambiguity of the substance of . . . life’, the moderns, Weber
argued, made a ‘sacrament’ of the ‘direct fusion of the souls of one to the other’.\(^\text{89}\)

The lover realizes himself to be rooted in the kernel of the truly living, which is
eternally inaccessible to any rational endeavor. He knows himself to be freed
from the cold skeleton hands of rational orders . . . This consciousness of the
lover rests upon the ineffaceability and inexhaustibleness of his own experience.
The experience is by no means communicable and in this respect it is equivalent
to the ‘having’ of the mystic . . . Knowing ‘life itself’ joined to him, the lover stands
opposite what is for him the objectless experiences of the mystic, as if he were
facing the fading light of an unreal sphere. (p.347)

Weber argued that it is this substitutability, both psychological and physiological, between
eroticism and piety, that makes for such antagonism between secular eroticisation and what
he calls ‘heroic piety’. Exclusive, subjective and incommunicable, erotics is the inimical
counter-pole of ‘all religiously oriented brotherliness’. Eroticism, Weber contends, negates
bondage to God, brotherliness with man, and obedience to divinely revealed norms.
The erotic can substitute for the religious, Weber argues, because the religious was always
already erotic. Weber derived rationalised religion from the magical ‘orgy’, pointed to the
common meaning of erotic coupling and mystical union with God,\(^\text{90}\) and hence contra
Foucault and Agamben, implied that we moderns seek our truth in erotic because our
truth was always erotic. As a primal source of its own religious – magical and subsequently
prophetic – powers, as the very medium by which death was introduced into the world, it is
not surprising that politicised religions are all obsessed with modernity’s erotics, to reclaim
its control for their own, all seeking to re-invest erotic life with religious meanings, to disci-
pline and regionalise sexuality in particular ways.

It is to the proliferation of a secularised sexuality, one subjected to state regulation, com-
modified incitement, and cultural sacralisation, upon which religious nationalists seize.
They would sacramentalise what has been progressively naturalised. Religious nationalists
seek to re-inscribe God in response to modernity’s sexualisation of social life, a sexualisa-
tion that derives from the making of sex into an object of government intervention on the
one side and its elevation into a substitute transcendence on the other. Religious national-
isms emerge against a backdrop of market liberalisation that feeds on the expansion of
desire, floods the labour market with newly employed women and undercuts the welfare
functions of the state. The secularity of the modern unregulated market is to them an
immodest world of selfish bodily pleasures.\(^\text{91}\) In a newly commodified world energised

\(^\text{89}\)Ibid., pp. 347, 356.
University Press, 2005).
by an expansive sensuous desire, in particular by woman’s desired and desiring bodies, they seek to set their bodies apart, to construct a purity and a piety held in common in response to the increasingly unequal pleasures of a commodified world, to discipline the unnatural excesses of monetary and erotic exchange. In a world that has transformed sex into pleasure and physical reproduction, they would recast it as divine creation.

For example, in 1947 it was a ‘keen desire to guide the nation’, that prompted Hasan al-Banna, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood to write “Toward the Light”, an impassioned call for Islamic reform to Egyptian King Faruq. A year later, the Brotherhood would be banned and not long after al-Banna assassinated. Al-Banna, who had founded the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in 1928, here targeted the ‘problem of women’ and their ‘loose behavior’ as one of the ‘principal goals’ of his Islamic reform movement. It was necessary, he wrote, to censor songs, to supervise summer vacation sites where ‘promiscuity’ flourished, to launch ‘a campaign against ostentation in dress and loose behaviour’. The Muslim Brotherhood would push for legislation for the ‘encouragement of marriage and procreation’, including the ‘closure of morally undesirable ballrooms and dance-halls, and the prohibition of dancing and other such pastimes’.

Still today although supporters of Islamism, the surveys show, want our democracy, they refuse our liberal, secular sex. Even Bin-Laden’s supporters do not see democracy as a Western imposition. However, they do refuse homosexuality, gender equality, divorce and abortion. Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, astute survey researchers, conclude: “These issues are part of a broader syndrome of tolerance, trust, political activism, and emphasis on individual autonomy that constitutes “self expression values”. The extent to which a society emphasises these self-expression values has a surprisingly strong bearing on the emergence and survival of democratic institutions”. It is not, I would argue, tolerance and trust, but the ontological construction of sexuality and an inability to cede sex to civil rights that are at issue.


94 According to the Pew Center surveys in 2003, Muslim respondents do not see democracy as a colonizing Western form. The same countries where majorities support the proposition that Islam should play a large or larger role in their societies are also major supporters of democratic government in their home countries (Pew Research Center, 2003). Commitment to the public relevance of Islamic values is not inconsistent with support for democracy. Bin-Laden, of course, represents the quintessential neo-fundamentalist. Those who support Bin-Laden should hate the West’s universalizing of political freedom. Pew asked respondents if they had confidence in Bin-Laden to ‘do the right thing’. Those Islamic countries in which a sizable proportion had ‘a lot’ or ‘some’ confidence in Bin-Laden also had sizable majorities who believed that democracy was not simply a Western way of doing things and could work in their countries. Yet what about those Muslims who themselves support Bin-Laden’s variant of radical Islam? The Pew Center kindly ran cross-tabulations for me with the question about support for Bin-Laden, and only for Muslim respondents. Re-analysing 2003 survey data on Muslim support for democracy and support for al-Qaeda’s jihadism, precisely a form of radical Islam with restrictive views of gender relations, majorities — often overwhelmingly ones — of respondents in Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Lebanon, Pakistan, Palestine and Turkey who supported Bin Laden’s actions, also believed that their country could and should have a democratic future. When I got the printouts and reported my interpretation, the Pew project director’s first response was that I must have misread the data. Cross-tabulations provided to the author by Nicole Speulda, Project Director, Pew Research Center for The People & The Press, 20 September 2004.

95 Inglehart and Norris 2003, p. 67.
Religious nationalism, and political Islam in particular, have the organisation of sexuality, indeed bodily desire, at their centre. Just as for the early Christians, who following Paul and much later Augustine, understood their inability to control their lusts as a mark of the insufficiency of their will to obey the revealed law, for the Islamists the propriety of one’s sex, the ability to properly order it, is constitutive of one’s relationship to God, of the strength and political coherence of the community, and the kind of subject that predominates. For Qutb, for whom every external struggle is also an internal one in consciousness and community, the founding of relationships between men and women based on ‘lust, passion and impulse’ is a defining trait of a jahili – backward or ignorant – society.96 Qutb reminded his followers that those societies whose members are unable to control their ‘unruly desires’, who follow the counsel of those ‘given to excesses’, Allah will eventually reduce to ‘stubble’. In contrast, quoting Noah in the Quran (71:10–12), those who ask God for forgiveness, will be made ‘powerful through wealth and children’.97 This follows Islam’s foundational narratives in which the initial conquests, the futuh, were understood to be consequences of the internal individual transformations resulting from the embrace of the Prophet’s message, encouraging a pious asceticism so that they would be warriors by day and ‘monks by night’.98 ‘Every community has its monasticism’, Muhammad reportedly told his companions, ‘and the monasticism of my community is jihad on the path of God’.99

In Islamic thought there is both an etymological and causal link between fitna, identified as sedition or deviation that divides the community in Islam’s foundational civil wars, and sexual temptation.100 Fitna, as trial or temptation, has its template in man’s inability to control his sexuality, to contain his sex inside marital bonds, a template for lawlessness associated with sedition, wrong belief and secession.101 This is associated with the hadith in which troops returning from battle were told by the Prophet: ‘You have come for the best, from the smaller jihad (al-jihad al-asghar) to the greater jihad (al-jihad al-akbar)’. His followers being unclear about his meaning, Muhammad clarified what he meant: ‘The servant’s struggle against his lust’ (mujahadat al-`abdi hawah).102 For Islamists like Qutb, the struggle against erotic desire – indeed against all the desires of the ‘lower self’ with which it is associated – within prepares one for the struggle against the enemy without.103 Islamic jurists link seduction to sedition.104

96 Qutb, Milestones (note 68), p. 83; In the Shade of the Qur’an (note 66), p. 189.
97 Qutb, Milestones (note 68), pp. 85–6.
101 S. Pandolfo, Impasse of the Angels: Scenes from a Moroccan Space of Memory (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1997). M. N. Swanson, “A Study of Twentieth-Century Commentary on Surat al-Nur (24):27–33,” The Muslim World 74 (1984), pp. 187–203. Roy (note 3), p. 277. One of Pandolfo’s Moroccan informants informs her that, just as seduction by a woman sets a man on fire, so, too, ‘the society itself is on fire! Fitna of riches, fitna of children, fitna of invasion, razing, and war, fitna of blood, fitna of women ... It is all fitna, one fitna, and it has no cure! Fitnas comes in different forms, but the sovereign fitna, the Sultan of fitnas, is the fitna of love!’ (p. 98).
102 Euben, 2002.
103 Euben, 1999 (note 69), pp. 73–4. Naveed Sheikh explains that the proper translation of hawa is ‘desire which springs from the lower self or the unenlightened mind, including desire for recognition, fame, social position, material possessions etc.’ In Islamic understanding, hawa derives more from the ego, nafs, than from the body itself, jism. Personal email to the author, 13 June 2010. Matt Wilson has pointed to the linguistic proximity of
The radical asceticism of religious nationalist movements is a medium for an alternative construction of the sovereign subject, an individual whose political action in history is joined to his mastery of his pleasures and whose mastery is a foundation for the formation of a well-ordered and powerful collective subject. Individual and collective subject formation are co-implicated sexual projects. Their asceticism, their sexual politics, is also a refusal of the pleasures of the dominant class, pleasures which are emblems of their high status, as well as markers of the secular freedom upon which the state seeks to stand. To not only refuse those pleasures, but to vilify them as evil, is to seek to strip the dominant group of legitimacy, to render them evil, and to affirm their own subordination to a higher sovereign: he who commands life and death. Let us be clear: their sex is war. Their sex also affirms their commitment to a particular theodicy, an economy of divine love, in which their suffering and their enemies’ pleasures are not meaningless: the first is to be rewarded, the second punished. It is a religious revaluation, not devaluation, of the world. Unlike Nietzsche’s plebian resentment, their followers strike with their own hands; they do not wait for the last judgment. It is not an ‘imaginary revenge’. They will not allow evil to wait for hell. These sovereign individuals, these divine – and not blonde beasts – choose war now.

Religious nationalism builds off individual will, on his or her choice, turning this atomic modality of modernity into a means by which they would bind individuals to God. Theirs is not an anti-modernity, but a modern rejection of this modernity, a kind of religious ‘liberalism’, not only in the sense that individual differences in will and talent generate inequalities in the ability to enjoy material pleasures, but in that these movements cultivate individuals who have the capacity and the discipline to choose to dedicate themselves to God and who seek to create a political order in which this choice will become possible for all. Religion is required to contain these pleasures within moral limits and to counter the de-masculinising effects of poverty, not to counter the individualistic mainsprings of the social order. Both within Christianity and Islam these movements are formed from individuals who refuse traditional authorities, both political and religious, who stay within the tradition but draw on marginal texts, minoritarian readings, weak hadith as discursive resources, who arrogate to themselves the right to interpret revealed law and to discern its implications for how one must live one’s life. There is a pietistic, ethical preoccupation within these movements, a program of self-regulation, that responds to the failure of the state, including, for example, a state nominally grounded in Islam, to generate and sustain a moral order, to secure a virtuous world. Islamists understand themselves to have an individual obligation to moralise the social order both through piety and politics. The ability of God to operate in history is linked both to the capacity

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104 Mahmood, Politics of Piety (note 91), pp. 110–1.
107 March (note 87).
108 There is, by implication, a politics immanent in pietistic movements, not just in the sense that this kind of subject formation opens political possibilities in terms of organizational capacities and in defining religion and securing interpretive authority outside the scope of state regulation, but in its formation of subjects whose forms of life regulation may ultimately conflict with the state; Mahmood, Politics of Piety (note 91); “Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire” (note 81). Within Islamist movements, the inseparability of the two is manifest. In the writings of Qutb, it is precisely this interdependence of inner belief and outer political enforcement of moral practice, between internal and external ‘tyranny’, that makes ‘all sin’ political. ‘For Qutb’, Andrew March argues, ‘it is almost always the corruption of the social, political world that causes humans to be overpowered by their capacity for vice’; March, (note 87), p. 203.
of individuals to turn towards God by opposing the sovereign and as the medium through which a post-traditional political community is to be composed. Religious nationalisms are modernist operations built from an individual’s relation to his or her God. It is this which links Osama bin Laden and Glenn Beck.

Religious nationalist movements are patriarchal masculinist projects. 109 Sex and violence, semen and blood: these practices join two bodily registers for purity and sacrality, and the status and power they religiously express. 110 These movements struggle to defend and purify the collectivity, to re-form and defend both individual and collective bodies, human and political nation-states. Like most nationalist movements, these arise under conditions of actual or threatened penetration by alien powers, both military and cultural, territorial and symbolic, in reaction to the dual threat of subordination and seduction, both of which are understood and experienced as threats to masculinity, to masculine agency both of the individual and the collectivity, or as Cynthia Enloe argues, from ‘masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation, masculinized hope’. 111 As in other violent projects of the nation-state the heterosexual language of masculinity runs through every religious nationalist movement like a red thread. 112 Sexual austerity and violence are dual registers by which to imagine and prepare the reformation of a collective body and an individual self under threat.

This project of individual and collective subject formation has an explanatory warrant in psychoanalytic theory. 113 As Freud pointed out these two bodily egos, individual and collective, can each be a medium through which the other operates psychologically: perceived threats to the individual subject, failures of the masculine self, can be acted out on a collective register, as efforts to masculinise the collectivity; and perceived threats to the collective subject, incapacities of national agency, may be countered and redressed through attempted reconstructions of the sexualised masculine self. The transom of subject-formation works both ways.

The nation is understood by the people as a body, a super corpus, a territory in which collective representation takes place whose territoriality is itself a collective representation. Collective representation refers to the way societies symbolise their existence, the way the social takes symbolic form, the making of a metaphor. Whether god or parliament, collective representation is located in the public sphere. Men have historically dominated the public sphere, their bodies massed, displayed and sacrificed, as the primary medium and

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110 As the great historian of religions J. Z. Smith has shown us, the sacred is a religious grammar of power with its own distinctive spatial language of dangerous access, unlike purity, which is a grammar of status, written through a language of degradation, of segregation of the pure from the impure; J. Z. Smith, To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987).


113 This semiotic project has a psychoanalytic warrant first through the link between body and subject formation, and second between the ego’s reaction to the loss of the ideality of a person and that of a collectivity. Freud argued that the self, the ego, is first formed as a bodily form, through the surface of an imagined human morphology, the image of a sexed body. In the psychoanalytic account the father enters as an authoritative ideal, an ideal of authority. Freud argued that a collective subject — the collectivity that is an authoritative symbol — can easily enter this eroticized individual subject-making mechanism. Freud makes the loss of the ideal of ‘country’ a substitute for a lost person as well as itself a basis of melancholia, the loss of a collective symbolic object setting in motion the experience of ego loss; S. Freud, Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989). Melancholia is a response to the loss of an ideal, of an individual or a collective subject, the one able to substitute for the other.
content of collective representation, the way a collectivity exhibits itself to itself and to the
world.

For millennia the public sphere, the locus of the law, has been sexed, a masculine space, a
space for male bodies. The public sphere was first defined by its difference from the dom-
estic, a private space identified as feminine, associated with the fleshy motherly matter of
reproduction. The division between state and family was the institutional ground of
both the difference and the hierarchy of gender, wherein women are defined as non-pol-
itical agents to be protected by men who populate the state. The property of being a
male, of thence of being a subject, someone who did something, was dependent on the
fact of owning and hence protecting the reproductive powers of women. Male subjectivity,
in other words, was historically constituted through the ownership of women’s bodies,
bodies housed as and in the property of men, both of those properties – the woman’s
body and the house – dependent on a law, a nomos, defined outside the household, a
law that originates in the public sphere, in masculine territory. The house emerges as a
bounded space for the institution of marriage, as a means to protect a father’s genealogical
claims, his line, by isolating the women whose reproductive powers are his property. It is
through the construction of houses as private property, houses that house the reproductive
powers of women, that men were constituted as public beings, social subjects, who control
nature first by controlling the procreative powers of women. In other words, men are made
into subjects, agents capable of socially recognised action, by making women into objects
whom they exchange between them, the exchange of women being the first economy, a
commerce in sexual rights. Being a man depended on the right to have women.

If these religious movements are a way to mark the land, to defend or redefine a nation’s
boundaries, we can interpret its obsessive control of women’s bodies as a parallel figuration,
the policing of a bodily frontier. A state is known through its boundaries, through the
continuous territory that it controls, by its capacity to regulate the conditions for entry.
A woman’s bodily purity and state sovereignty are parallel symbolic orders. Woman’s
body as a token of national territoriality is common in nationalist discourse, both in the
modern and the ancient world. Clothing, controlling and sequestering the female
body, taking it out of the sites of collective representation, religious nationalists reassert
the maleness of the public body and the femaleness of the territory – as a loved body
that must be maintained inviolate, a perpetual possession. Theirs is a sexualised politics
and a politicised sexuality. Manliness is known by one’s capacity to compete for, to pene-
trate, and to possess the bodies of women. Woman’s vagina is, of course, the ultimate

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Contradiction in Terms? Or: Why Women and Gender Are Essential to Understanding the World ‘We’ Live


in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex,” in R. R. Reiter (ed.), *Towards an Anthropology of Women*
ford University Press, 2001).

117 It is striking that even Iranian president Mohammed Khatami, a cleric, at the same time both forbade students
from bringing to class materials bearing the Latin alphabet or other ‘decadent Western symbols’ and from portray-
that, in the United States at least, religious nationalism’s preoccupation with women’s bodies is related to the larger
obsession, a consuming interest, with bodily form and functioning, where the body is a substitute for other forms
of collective incorporation over which we have lost control.

118 J. B. Landes, *Visualizing the Nation: Gender, Representation, and Revolution in Eighteenth-Century France* (Ithaca,
sacred space in sexual cosmogony, that which must not be violated, an eroticised template for other divisions. The defence of the female body as male property is a model of masculine political agency.

So far I have pointed to the ways politicised religious movements partake of the gendered order of the formation of any nation-state as delineated by feminist theorists. Yet what difference does religion make?

Religious nationalisms involve an outraged reaction to the effeminisation of the collective public body as a result of military, economic and cultural penetration of its boundaries. Individual and collective bodily egos are religiously reformed in concert. One turns to God, the Super man, for the individual agency to protect, to enforce and to activate the nation’s collective body, for the power to sacrifice, to engage in purifying violence, to perform masculinity, to be – in the end – more than man, that is, to have more than human value and power. This is manifest, for example, in the Islamist understanding of the shaheed, the witness or martyr, who not only has his sins remitted, is protected against the pains of death, but is to be married to a slew of houris, or ‘heavenly maidens’. Palestinian Hamas members who die in violent attacks on the Israelis understand it as their ‘wedding day’. Religion provides theological language and rite – of sacrifice and martyrdom – for a meaningful death not only to counter that of patriotism and citizenship, but to outdo them.

To forge a modern nation, the state depends on an abstract space, upon the bland fact of residence, mere location, to build a universal citizen transcending other group loyalties. This anybody depends on any place. Modern citizenship depends on the empty space of the state. Religion marks the particularity of the place, often re-centring collective representation in sacred space. As religious nationalism fills that space, the joining of God to the territorial nation, it fuses two collective representations, a couplet of spirit and matter, a male force joined to a female territorial body.

The intrusion of state and market into the reproductive and solidaristic domain of the family not only has shifted its order and reduced its scope, it has made sex and gender relations into malleable facts, rather than the givens of culture or nature. The logics of administrative coercion, citizenship rights and market exchange have enabled the disassemblage of this familial cultural formation based on individual choice, on the individual as the atom of regulation and exchange. They have both eroded male privilege and offered languages of legitimation for sexual choice.

Because the institutional core of religion claims sovereignty over life and death, the regulation of sex is central. The centrality of sex, of course, is linked to that of the family in which these movements seek to contain it. Religious nationalists give primacy to the family, not to democracy or the market, as the social space through which society should be conceived and composed. Theirs is a particular outworking of the notion that the personal is political, but not in the way that Western feminists

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120 Friedland, “Money, Sex and God” (note 92).
121 Turkmen (note 5), p. 11.
124 Sigmund Freud writes: ‘the almighty and just God, and kindly Nature, appear to us as grand sublimations of father and mother, or rather as revivals and restorations of the young child’s ideas of them’; Freud (note 113), p. 83.
ever imagined. These movements, in fact, gives primacy to the private sphere as the core of its political project, a politics understood to be necessary to contain human passions and pleasures. 125

Familial discourse, with its particularistic and sexual logic of love and loyalty, is pervasive in religious nationalism. ‘The family’, the Ayatollah Khomeini declared, ‘is the fundamental unit of society and the main centre of growth and transcendence for humanity’. 126 For Qutb, too, the family’s production of moral beings ‘is the only measure by which true human progress can really be gauged’. 127 In the United States, the unifying core of Protestant fundamentalism is likewise its defence of the heterosexual and male-dominated family. Pat Robertson, the founder of the Christian Broadcasting Network, writes, ‘The basic unit of social, local, national and international organisation in God’s world order is the family’. 128 Looking at the political programs of Islamic movements, there is no consistent economic policy, nor form of government. The two pillars of contemporary Islamic politics involve a restrictive regulation of sexuality, eliminating it as a public presence and containing it within the family, and the promotion of a welfare state – or a religiously organised civil society – that not only enables families to survive physically, and particularly to care for those – orphans and widows in particular as enjoined in the Quran – who cannot rely on families for support. 129 Islamic politics are a politics of love.

Religious nationalisms seek to promote the materiality of the family, not only its sexual and gendered codes, but its capacity to cohere across time, from the logic of the capitalist market which has commodified sexuality, transformed love into a consumption good, and from the state which steadily intrudes upon its erotic life, extending the logic of rights and regulation into this intimate sphere. It is partly for this reason that so many women support these patriarchal movements, seeking to shore up the loyalty of their husbands and the value of their mothering. Against the gender-equalising force of the market and the demos, they re-assert a divinely ordered patriarchalism. 130 These movements – whether the evangelical Christians of America or Islamic movements in Egypt and Iran – do authorise female religious agency, including their moralisation of men. 131 Nonetheless the patriarchal family is for them a template for political order, the ground of a revitalised and moralised male agency.

Because the family is an order of creation, not merely an order of production or governance, religions all seek to stitch its transitions, its relations, into rite through which their trans-rational order is given concrete form. Religion emplaces the order of human creation within the cosmos, joining the life cycle to cosmogony, rites that point before life and after death. As the postcolonial theorist Talal Asad has shown us, institutional differentiation is an open game. 132 Asad has written of our understanding of religion as reflecting the Western differentiation in which religion came to be defined as the regulation of the

125March (note 87).
126Riesebrodt (note 109), p. 145.
127Qutb Milestones (note 68), p. 83.
129A. Mahmood, Politics of Piety (note 91); Afary (note 91).
ethical self, the interiority of the soul, and the marking and meaning of the life course, in which the rites of the life-cycle – of birth and marriage and death – are all that remain to the religious domain. This differentiation separates two spaces, the secular and the sacred. It is within the former that humans self-consciously make history and exact the truth of both nature and society, through the freedoms authorised by the nation-state. It also divides two temporalities, two times – that of collective history and individual biological life – from each other. The political–religious imaginary rejoins the meaning of one’s life to the origin and telos of a redemption set in historical time, to a history that points beyond both birth and death, a joining of a collective and an individual afterlife.

Qutb, the Egyptian Islamist, wrote that as a result of modernity the ‘clouds that weigh over creation are thicker and denser than before’. Qutb also refused modernity’s progressive historical transcript, rather organising time into successive periods of jahiliya, or pre-Islamic and post-Enlightenment ignorance. Secular societies, he argued, have forgotten that their wealth, their children, their political power are all ‘gifts of Allah’. The ‘organic body’ of Islamic society must therefore again be ‘born’ from the Islamic movement whose origins are ‘not the result of any human effort or thinking’, but come from ‘the will of Allah’. ‘This Divine element sows the seed of the Islamic movement in human hearts and simultaneously prepares them for action and practical life’. In contrast to modernist Egyptian nationalist history, locating the well-springs of history either in a national culture traceable back to Pharaonic Egypt or a nationalised – and largely spiritualised – Islam, Qutb underscored true history as man’s giving being to God’s will. God is, as Abraham said, ‘He Who gives life and death’ (Quran 2:258). For Qutb non-materialist creation and the re-sacralisation of history are linked. One finds the same linkage in the Palestinian Hamas whose covenant declares its nationalism ‘part of the religious creed’:

‘If other nationalist movements are connected with materialistic, human or regional causes, nationalism of the Islamic Resistance Movement ... is connected to the source of spirit and the granter of life, hoisting in the sky of the homeland the heavenly banner that joins earth and heaven with a strong bond’.

And finally Jerry Falwell, who headed the Moral Majority, drew a straight line between the moral making of a divinely given life and the making of pre-millennial history. Falwell declared:

I believe as we trust in God and pray, as we Christians lead the battle to outlaw abortion, which is murder on demand, as we take our stand against pornography, against the drug traffic, as we take our stand against the breakdown of the traditional family in America, the promotion of homosexual marriages ... As we pray and preach and lead, Christian friends, I think there is hope that God may one more time bless America.

Religious nationalisms reconstitute body, space and time. The preoccupation of religious nationalisms with sexuality and violence, points to an alternate temporality, a rejection of the regime of infinite progress, of methodical accumulation of uncertain knowledge, of a
progressive natural history. It is a modern rejection of our modernity, a modernity that it
tself derives, as the great German thinker Hans Blumenberg has pointed out, from the
playing out of Christianity’s theological contradictions – between divine will and human
salvation – latent in late medieval nominalism. If for Schmitt, nominalism was the template
for modern sovereignty, for Blumenberg it was the theological condition in whose impos-
sible shadow modernity was formed. Contrary to Karl Lowith who understood progress as a
secularisation of Christian salvation, Blumenberg argued that nominalism was a critical
step in the emergence of modernity. In nominalism, the will of God is excessive, ungrasp-
able and hence unconstrained by God’s ordained law, as a result of which the world loses its
providential quality, no longer necessarily unfolding as a fulfillment of a divine plan for
humanity. Stripping the world of certain knowledge and providential meaning, Blumen-
berg argues that it fell to man to subject its unfinished materiality to ends he sets
himself rather than those set by nature.138 Blumenberg called this historical turn ‘self-asser-
tion’, a positing of human historical projects of which there could be no surety, only
unfoundable ends. Hypothetical knowledge and the assertion of human purposes were his-
torically connected. Modern man’s self-assertion was a reaction over the longue durée to the
very absoluteness of God’s power which exculpated man.

In nominalism one cannot know the mind of God and history loses its knowable divine
end. This coupling of will and endlessness was integral to Carl Schmitt’s understanding of
the religious foundation of the Western sovereign of the seventeenth and eighteenth cen-
turies. For Schmitt the ultimate sovereign function is a contentless decision on the
enemy. Against this backdrop, one can read religious nationalism’s preoccupation with
sexuality as an effort to restore the link between human creation and human history, the
making of individual and collective bodies, their sexuality potentially part and parcel of
the redemptive meaning of history, both issuing from their participation in God’s absolute
will. A religiously ordered sexuality is integral to re-establishing the divine telos of human
history. It seeks to re-ground political foundation in creation, collective birth in human
birth, the making of a new collective body in the formation of individual bodies. One’s
life and death find their meaning in the linked salvation or redemption of individual and
collective bodies.

These religious movements refuse history’s endlessness. They seek to ground both the
making of life and history not only in a divine force, but in a divine plan. They thereby
rejoin the temporality of human life to history. They refuse the generalised utilitarianism
that has afforded a proliferation of bodily pleasures, steadily eroding the classic tension
between nature and culture, in which culture is intended to contain, not to enable,
erectic pleasure. They position life, both its making and taking, beyond human law. They
refuse the grounding of state sovereignty in bare life, in which it increasingly falls to the
state to decide life and death, as an exception. For them, life is an exception to human
law, but as a manifestation of divine will. Human life has meaning based on its relation
to a divine plan, a plan the general contours of whose end can be gleaned, in which
their lives are tools of enactment.

Conclusion

Politicised religions and secular nation-states both make claims to life: its taking, its living,
its making. However, because the ultimate ground of state authority they seek to institute or
defend differs – divinity and popular national sovereignty, redemption and happiness,

salvation and progress – it is not the same life. This is a struggle between state and religion over the ontology of that life, its source and telos, and hence its meaning and the nature of the historicity in which it is inserted. It is not only fought out, but performed, in the practices of politicised religion, a what immanent in the how of its practices. The divine makes a difference. The ontology, the nature of that life, conditions the practices deployed in the political project. Both their violence and their sex need to be understood as meaningful strategies, as powers that are simultaneously instrumental and cosmological.

Feminist theorists have identified the violence of domination and the erotics of love and reproduction as the public masculine and the private feminine, respectively, a division which they understand as the gendered ground of a masculinist state. Rather than the gendered order of institutions, I have sought to lay out the institutional ordering through which the gendered project of politicised religion is constituted. The nature of its institutional project – here the religious meaning of life and death – matters to the order of its practices, its preoccupation with sexuality, the primacy it gives to the family, its patriarchal masculinism, indeed to its capacity to make history and the kind of history it seeks to make.

Rival orderings of erotic life, violent death are all based on a faith beyond reason, on significance beyond sense. The religious nationalist political practices of sexual regulation and physical violence are ontological enactments, comportments that index God's absent presence, the divine as sovereign, whose sovereignty is manifest in its relation to life, a life which must be excessive to the law and whose excess is precisely what grounds the sovereign's authority. There is a sex to sovereignty that we need to think again if we wish to understand these forms of politicised religion. For the adherents of religious nationalism, the dialectic of our time is not capital and labour; rather it is organised as God and body, in rival ontological claims to life, in the meaning of death upon which the authority of any state must feed. The state is grounded in the nature of the love for which we are willing to kill and to die.

Notes on Contributor
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139 Friedland 2007.