'A Revolt against the West' : Politicized Religion and the International Order – A Comparison of the Islamic *Umma* and the Sikh *Qaum*

Giorgio SHANI

Abstract

The collapse of first Soviet Communism in the early 1990s and the twin World Trade Towers on September 11th 2001, has led to a resurgence of interest in culture and identity in international relations.[1] In particular, religion, which had hitherto been an overlooked element in international relations, has moved center stage, especially in relations between North and South. In this article, it will be argued that the global religious revival in the South or non-western developing world may be seen as a 'revolt against the West' and against the Westphalian international order in particular. Two case studies of politicized transnational religious movements will be examined: that of Political or Radical Islam on the one hand and Sikhism on the other. It will be argued that although, important theological, philosophical and historical differences do exist between the two communities, both Islamic and Sikh narratives share a rejection of the subordination of the religious to the political and thus challenge the Westphalian order.

Introduction

With the coordinated highjack of four planes on September 11th 2001 in the US, politicized religion moved from the margins to the center stage of international relations (IR). Previously, religion was, in the words of Jonathan Fox, an 'overlooked element of international relations.'[2] Indeed, Fox goes as far as to state

---

that IR, in common with other social sciences, has its origins in the rejection of religion. Modernists such as Almond and Coleman[3], Apter[4], Deutsch[5] and Rostow[6], believed that 'modernization' would reduce the political significance of what Geertz termed 'primordial attachments'[7]. Although at the level of popular consumption, Samuel P. Huntington's crude 'clash of civilizations' thesis[8] has been seen to have foreshadowed the events of September 11th, ironically in the United Nations Year of Dialogue between Civilizations, the main dynamic of cultural conflict may be seen to lie not in irreconcilable differences between primordial religious and cultural traditions but in the global resurgence of politicized religion.

The Religious Revival in the South

The global resurgence of religion in both domestic and international politics belies the belief, most famously and crudely espoused by Francis Fukuyama, that the ending of the Cold War has created a world - wide consensus in favour of secular liberal-democracy. Fukuyama had argued that secular-liberal democracy constituted the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the final form of human government. As the ideal of liberal democracy could not be improved upon, secular liberal-democracy, free from the fundamental 'internal contradictions' of alternative political systems such as Communism or Fascism, was seen to constitute 'the end of history'[9]. The rise of politicized collective religious identities in the Middle East[10], North Africa[11], South[12] and South-East Asia[13] during the 1990s has shattered this assumption.

---

3. Gabriel Almond and James C. Coleman, eds. *The Politics of Developing Areas*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960).

4. David Apter, *The Politics of Modernization* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1965).

5. Karl Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communications*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1953)

6. Walt W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth*: *A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959).

7. Clifford Geertz, *Old Societies and New States* (New York: Free Press, 1963).

8. See Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs*, 72, (Summer 1993):pp. 22-49 and *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of the World Order*. (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1996). For a critique of Huntington's argument see Edward W. Said, " The Clash of Ignorance", *The Nation* (18/10/2001) and Amartya Sen, 'A World Not Neatly Divided' *The New York Times* (23/11/ 2001).

9. Francis Fukuyama, The End of History and the Last Man, (London: Penguin, 1992).

10. After the Oslo Accords, HAMAS replaced the PLO as the voice of the *Intifada*.

11. The Front Islamique du Salut (FIS) won the Algerian election in 1991 only for the army to step in.

12. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) replaced the Indian National Congress (INC) as the hegemonic force in Indian politics after the 1996 elections.

Three main interrelated reasons may account for the global religious revival, particularly in the South.[14] In the first place, the global religious revival may be seen as having its origins, particularly in the South, in the 'legitimacy crisis' of the postcolonial secular state. The secular nationalism of first generation post-colonial leaders such as Nehru, Nasser, Nkrumah and Sukarno conspicuously failed to bring economic development or freedom from the structural constraints of the world economy. Their failure, although not acknowledged in their lifetimes, became clear with the abandonment of their legacies by their successors. 'Political decay', the decline of politics into authoritarianism, corruption and patrimonialism since the late 1960s was followed, in sub-Saharan Africa, by 'political collapse', the disintegration of some states.[15] By the early 1990s, the third-generation post-colonial elites had abandoned secularism, democratic socialism and non-alignment in favour of economic liberalisation, a pro-Western stance on international affairs and, most importantly, the use of a religious vocabulary to mobilise mass support (or at least, maintain mass acquiescence). In India, the emergence of the 'Hindu right' under the leadership of the Bharatiya Janata Party as the hegemonic force in Indian politics through strategic regional alliances with movements such as the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) in Punjab may be seen as the final nail in the coffin of Nehruvian secularism. India's democratic structures rather than resulting in the demise of religious identities as predicted by India's post-colonial leaders, has led to the emergence of a pan-Indian Hindu cultural nationalism with local variations.

This begs the question of why 'religion' continues, to use a modernist term, to be the language of public discourse. At a deeper level the global resurgence or 'politicization' of religion, may be seen to 'reflect a deeper and more widespread disillusionment with a "modernity" which reduces the world to what can be perceived and controlled through reason, science, technology, and bureaucratic rationality, and leaves out considerations of the religious, the spiritual or the sacred'.[16] Disillusionment with but not rejection of modernity for as Mark Jurgensmeyer has pointed out, religious nationalism has a contradictory attitude

---

13. Abdurrahman Wahid, leader of the *Nahdatul Ulama* (Renaissance of Religious Scholars), the biggest Islamic organization in the world, became Indonesia's first directly elected President in October 1999.

14. See Scott M. Thomas, "Taking Religious and Cultural Pluralism Seriously : The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Society", *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 29, 3 (2000), pp. 815-842.

15. See Samuel P. Huntingdon, *Political Order and Changing Societies*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1968).

16. Thomas 2000: 816.

towards modernity. Secular ideas but not secular politics are rejected.

> At the same time, however, they (religious nationalists) see no contradiction in affirming certain forms of political organisation that have developed in the West, such as the democratic procedures of the nation-state, as long as they are legitimised not by the secular idea of a social contract but by traditional principles of religion.[17]

Lastly, the global resurgence of religion in the South may be seen as the latest wave of 'revolt against the West'. According to Hedley Bull, 'the struggles of non-western people to throw off the cultural ascendancy of the Western world so as to reassert their identity'[18] - the resurgence of indigenous cultures in the post-colonial world- was the third 'wave' of revolt against Western domination of the international system, following on from 'the struggle for sovereign equality'- the anti-colonial struggles of the 1940s to 1960s- and 'the struggle for racial equality and economic justice'- the campaigns against Apartheid, Zionism and the attempts to reform the international economic order in the 1970s and early 1980s. As a result of the failure of secular nationalism to fulfill its promises to 'the people' it invented out of the cultural mosaic of colonial societies, state elites have had to respond to more popular perspectives which in turn have challenged the assumptions of Western cosmopolitan modernity. Bull's observation that 'as non-western peoples have assumed a more prominent place in international society it has become clear that in matters of values the distance between them and western societies is greater than in the early years of...decolonisation'[19] seems to be supported by the global 'religious' revival.

The Westphalian Order

The contemporary world order may be described as an 'international' or 'inter-state' order, an order composed of territorialized nation-states. Nation-states claim 'the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory'[20] and seek to unite the people subjected to its rule by means of cultural

---

17. Mark Jurgensmeyer, *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State*, (Berkley; University of California Press, 1993): 7.

18. Hedley Bull, "The Revolt Against the West", in Hedley Bull and Adam Watson eds. *The Expansion of International Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984): 217.

19. ibid., 217.

20. Max Weber. 1991. *From Max Weber*, (trans. and eds). H.H.Gerth and C.Wright Mills (London; Routledge,1991): 78.

and linguistic homogenization.[21] Bull defined international order as 'a pattern of human activity that sustains the elementary or primary goals of the society of states, or international society'.[22] A society of states exist 'when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions.'[23] A society of states, or international society, presumes the existence of a system of states 'formed when two or more states have sufficient contact between them, and have sufficient impact on one another's decisions to cause them to behave…as parts of a whole'.[24] The primary or elementary goals of a society of states are for Bull, 'the preservation of the system and the society of states itself'.[25] This is to be achieved through 'maintaining the independence or external sovereignty of individual states'.[26]

Conventionally, the contemporary international order is understood to have its origins in the 1648 Peace of Westphalia which gave rise to a European system or society of sovereign states. The Peace of Westphalia divided Europe into distinct and sovereign states whose boundaries were defined by international agreements. The norms and practices of this European system or society of states were then imposed upon the non-western world by European imperial powers. The most important of these norms and principles were firstly, *rex est imperator* in regno suo, that 'the King rules in his own realm', and *cujus regio, ejus religio*, 'the ruler determines the religion of his realm'. This had the effect of dividing the political from the religious community, temporal from spiritual authority. Anti-colonial movements, by casting their claims to independence in terms of a demand for their own sovereign states, made the 'expansion of international society' based upon an international order of territorialized sovereign states possible . For Jackson, the rules constitutive of Westphalian international society include as follows (1) sovereign equality, (2) refraining from the threat or use of force; (3) inviolability of frontiers; (4) nonintervention in internal affairs; (5) respect for human rights; (6) equal rights and self-determination of peoples; (8) co-operation amongst states; (9) fulfillment in good faith of obligations under

---

21. Montserrat Guibernau "Globalization and the Nation-state", in Montserrat Guibernau and John Hutchinson (eds.) *Understanding Nationalism*. (Cambridge: Polity, 2001): 242.
22. Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (London: Macmillan, 1977): 8.
23. Ibid., 13.
24. Ibid., 9-10.
25. Ibid., 16.
26. Ibid., 17.

international law.[27] Jackson refers to state sovereignty as the most important norm of international relations.

Nationalism is constitutive of the contemporary international order. According to the norms underpinning international regimes governing sovereign statehood, sovereignty is seen to reside with the nation. The nation-state continues to be the primary internationally recognized structure of political association. Only nation-states are admitted into the United Nations or other international organizations. Chapter XI, Article 73 of the UN Charter affirms the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples. This was echoed by the General Assembly which declared in its resolution in 1960 (GAR 1514) that 'all peoples have the right to self-determination'. However, this right to self-determination is confined to claims by state elites. After decolonization, the language of self-determination was used to legitimize the post-colonial state although the post-colonial state boundaries did not always coincide with national boundaries. For Mayall, the post-war international order institutionalized the principle of national self-determination and, in so doing, 'tamed' it by 'freezing' the political map. In this sense 'the world has been made safe for nationalism.'[28]

The nationalist world order is dependent upon the continued existence of the sovereign state system. Nationalism, as Meadwell has pointed out, 'continues to be about territory, and territorial politics presupposes states in the modern era.[29] The territorial configuration of the Westphalian world order impacts upon personal identity by privileging one form of collective identity, belonging to a nation, over others i. e. class, gender, locality, ethnic and religious affiliation. However, as recent events have shown, the Westphalian international order predicated on the territorialization of political communities and the privatization of religion has been under siege from deterritorialized faith based communities. Radical Islamic groups continue to have widespread support throughout the Islamic world and the primary targets of the US 'war against terror' in Afghanistan, Osama Bin Laden's *Al-Qaeda* network, include nationals not only of Arab but also North-African, Central Asian and Western states. Although it remains to be seen whether the physical elimination of the *Al-Qaeda* network and

---

27. Robert Jackson, *The Global Covenant: Human Conduct in a World of States.* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2000).

28. James Mayall, *Nationalism and International Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 50.

29. Hudson Meadwell, "Stateless Nations and the Emerging International Order", in T.V. Paul and John A. Hall (eds.) *International Order and the Future of World Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 262.

their Taliban 'protectors' will ease the security threat to Western governments and citizens, it is clear that the politicized religious narratives continue to pose questions of the Westphalian order which can not be answered by force alone. What is needed, instead, is an intercultural dialogue about the values and principles of international society - a dialogue in which transnational faith communities as well as secular, territorialized nation states are able to take part. According to a leading advocate of such an intercultural dialogue, Bhikhu Parekh:

> The point of the dialogue is to deepen mutual understanding, to expand sympathy and imagination, to exchange not only arguments but also sensibilities, to take a more critical look at oneself, to build up mutual trust, and to arrive at a more balanced view of both the contentious issues and the world in general.[30]

Although such a dialogue may not immediately lead to a cessation of atrocities such as those of September 11th or the recent bombing of a Bali nightclub[31], an inter (and intra) cultural dialogue may help further isolate terrorists from the communities in whose name they claim to be acting.

Political Islam : the Voice of the *Umma*

The most conspicuous challenge to both Western imperialism and the Westphalian order has come from 'political Islam or 'Islamism'. As Esposito and Voll have put it, 'throughout the Muslim world, Islamically oriented intellectuals have transformed Muslim political discourse in ways that are highly visible in both domestic politics and in international relations.'[32] At its most basic, political Islam or Islamism may be seen as 'the language of political reaction to Western cultural domination'.[33] For, as Burgat reminds us, one cannot express the rejection of the West using its language and terminology. Although political Islam involves many different types of movements and does not constitute a single,

---

30. Bhikhu Parekh, " Terrorism or Intercultural Dialogue" in Ken Booth and Tim Dunne (ed.) Worlds in Collision: *Terror and the Future of Global Order* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002): 275.

31. I refer here to the car bombing of a nightclub near Kuta Beach in Bali, Indonesia on October 12th 2002. Although at the time of writing, the group or groups responsible for the atrocity which may have left hundreds dead are not known, suspicion has fallen on the Jemaah Islamiyah which many believe to be linked to *Al-Qaeda*.

32. John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, "Islam and the West: Muslim Voices of Dialogue", *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 29,3 (2000): 613.

33. Francois Burgat and William Dowell, *The Islamic Movement in North Africa.* (Austin : University of Texas Press. 1993): 63.

coherent ideology, politicized Islamic discourses have challenged, often violently, both the legitimacy of states structures and western hegemony in the Islamic world. The central demand of political Islam is to reorganize state power throughout the Muslim world on the basis of *hakimiyyat Allah* (God's rule). This entails the establishment of an Islamic state (*dalwa Islamiyya*) ruled in accordance with an Islamic system of government (*nizam Islami*) based on shari'a law.[34] The Islamic belief in *din wa dawla* (unity of religion and state), has led some Liberals to view the ideal Islamist state as a 'clerical dictatorship' - a new pattern of totalitarian rule legitimized by religion.[35] Esposito and Voll have isolated two distinct 'visions' associated with political Islam: a 'conflict' vision associated with 'jihadists' such as Sayyid Qutb and a 'dialogue' vision espoused by current President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mohammad Khatami. For Sayyid Qutb, writing shortly before his execution by Egyptian (secular) authorities in 1966:

> Islam only knows two types of societies: the Islamic society and the *jahili* (willfully ignorant of Islam) society. The 'Islamic Society' is the society in which Islam is followed - in creed, practice, rules of life, institutions, morals and behaviour. The jahili society is the society in which Islam is not followed.[36]

Qutb's belief that ' the battle' between the two civilizations 'is continuous and jihad continues until the day of judgement'[37] contrasts with Khatami's vision of a 'dialogue of civilizations' - a vision officially adopted in 2001 by the UN. For Khatami, 'give-and-take among civilizations is the norm of history'.[38] According to Esposito and Voll, 'dialogue' for Khatami, is 'not a passive policy of accommodation, it is a competitive strategy for strengthening and transforming Islamic civilization.'[39] What jihadists and advocates of dialogue with other 'civilizations' (or indeed all Muslims) have in common is, in the words of Manuel Castells, is a 'fundamental attachment ... not to the watan (homeland) but to the *Umma*, or community of believers, all made equal in their submission to Allah'.[40]

---

34. See Bassam Tibi, "Post-Bipolar Order in Crisis: The Challenge of Politicised Islam", *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 29,3 (2000): 49-50.
35. Fred Halliday, *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation*, (London; I.B. Tauris, 1995): 69.
36. Qutb in Esposito and Voll 2000. 615.
37. Ibid., 616.
38. Ibid., 629.
39. Ibid.
40. Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 1997): 15.

Whilst for Zubaida, political Islam in the middle east is a form of nationalism, 'one that appears more viable and credible than the old tainted nationalisms of the failed authoritarian regimes',[41] it is clear that the Muslim collectivity is neither territorially defined nor particular to a single ethnic group. In other words, it is not possible to speak of political Islam as a form of nationalism as there is no Muslim 'nation'. As Sayyid points out:

> The Muslim *Umma* is ... not the nation writ large. One of the main qualities that distinguishes the nation from other forms of collectives is its limited and restricted nature. The nation is at best an enterprise based on exclusionary universalism. It is a bounded entity; it is not open to everyone ... The only universalism that the logic of the nation can articulate is one that is based on exclusion rather than inclusion ... The idea of the *Umma* rejects all such limits, its universalism and implicit expansionism is constantly re-iterated. Clearly, the Umma is not a nation.[42]

If not a nation, than what term can we use to describe the Muslim *Umma* (a community of believing men and women unified by faith and transcending state boundaries)? Sayyid suggests *diaspora* in that diaspora, like the *Umma*, is an anti-national phenomena.[43] Diaspora may be seen as an anti-national phenomenon in that the existence of diasporas within the nation-state interrupts the closure of the nation. Whilst for Sayyid, the nation suggests 'home' in that it acts as a fixed, territorial arena for everyday practices, diaspora suggests 'homelessness', the possibility of not belonging, of not feeling completely at home in a fixed, territorial arena. Sayyid points to both the Jewish and Black experiences as illustrating the anti-national character of diasporas in particular to Arendt's privileging of a 'Jewish homelessness' which allows the Jews to escape the limits of a single nation and Gilroy's evocation of the 'Black Atlantic' as countering the cultural absolutism of black nationalism and the closure of the western project. Members of the Jewish and Black diasporas have a paradoxical relationship to the nation. On the one hand, they demonstrate the possibility of the nation in their attempt to maintain a sense of nationhood in the context of territorial dispersal. On the other hand, they point to the impossibility of the nation to provide a common 'home' for all its

---

41. Sami Zubaida, *Islam, the People and the State: Political Ideas and Movements in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1993): xix.

42. S. Sayyid, "Beyond Westphalia: Nations and Diasporas- The Case of the Muslim *Umma*", in Barnor Hesse (ed.) *Un/settled Multiculturalisms: Diasporas, Entanglements, Transruptions* (London: Zed Press): 36.

43. Ibid., 41.

inhabitants; to erase difference.

The *Khalsa Panth*: the Sikh *Qaum*

However, in the case of the Sikh *Qaum* or community, no clear distinction between 'nation' and 'diaspora' or watan and *Umma* is possible. The Sikh *Qaum* comprises three inter-related narratives of religious community, nation and diaspora. In comparison to the Muslim *Umma*, the Sikh *Qaum*, referred to as the *Khalsa Panth* has a strong attachment to a territorially-defined ancestral homeland in the context of territorial dispersal. It is difficult, therefore, to separate the Sikh *Umma* from the *watan*.

The first narrative identifies the Sikhs as followers of as universal world religion, such as Islam or Christianity. Sikhism is seen to consist of a series of doctrines and practices centered around a reading of a holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib, written in a sacred script particular to the Sikhs (*gurumukhi*), in a Sikh place of worship, gurdwara. Anybody can become a Sikh, as long as one is baptized and conforms to the established practice of the *Khalsa Rahit* (code of conduct). Baptized (*amritdhari*) Sikhs following the edicts of the tenth *Guru*, Gobind Singh, are enjoined to keep their hair, including facial hair, long (*kes);* to carry a comb (*kanga*); wear knee-length breeches (*kachh*); a steel bracelet on the right hand (*kara*); and to carry a sword or dagger (*kirpan*). Those who embody these five symbols of Sikh identity, known as *Kes-dhari Sikhs*, constitute the *Khalsa*, or 'community of the pure' whilst Sahajdhari Sikhs; 'slow-adopters' may eventually progress towards full participation in the *Khalsa*.[44] These five symbols of Sikh religious identity, developed in opposition to prevalent 'Hindu' cultural practices, serve to construct boundaries between Sikhs and other communities, making *Kes-dhari* Sikhs an easily identifiable group in both an Indian and diaspora context.

The origins of this narrative may be traced back to the pre-colonial *panthic* tradition of Northern India. *A Panth*, consisting of those religious ideas and practices concerned with spiritual experience, may be used to identify the devotees of a specific spiritual leader. The Sikhs were the disciples of Nanak who organized themselves into a 'community of the pure' under Guru Gobind in order to resist forced conversion to Islam. The *langar*, a common dinning-room situated in a *Gurdwara* in which meals are served to all, irrespective of caste or even

---

44. Hew McLeod, *Who is a Sikh? The Problem of Sikh Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989): 96.

creed, may be seen as constitutive of such a universal society. Caste barriers in particular are broken down by this tradition of compulsory commensality facilitating the individual's quest for salvation as part of a community of equals. Indeed, all *Khalsa* Sikhs, irrespective of caste, adopt the name *Singh* (lion) and *Kaur* (princess) when initiated into the *Panth*. This narrative, of Sikhism as a world religion, is strongest amongst *Khatris*[45] from West Punjab, 'twice-migrant' *Ramgharias*[46], and of course, the tiny minority of *Gora*[47] Sikh converts in advanced capitalist societies. In the imagination of these Sikh communities, the Punjab represents not so much a 'homeland', as it does for *Jat*[48] Sikhs with relatives and perhaps, property, in East Punjab, but a 'holy land'.[49] This narrative of Sikhism as a universal religion is institutionalized in the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee's definition of Sikhism.

The second narrative identifies the Sikhs as a nation with definite physical boundaries, those of the Indian state of Punjab. The Sikh community, seen from within this nationalist narrative, corresponds to A.D. Smith's definition of a politicized *ethnie*, or nation.[50] For Smith, an ethnie is a 'named human population with myths of common ancestry, shared historical memories and one or more elements of a common culture, including an association with a homeland and some degree of solidarity, at least amongst the elites.'[51] The Sikh *ethnie* share common ancestry myths dating back to the founding of the Khalsa in 1699 and historical memories of martyrdom and persecution under successive Mughal, British and Indian rulers. Furthermore, since the overwhelming majority of Sikhs are Punjabis, Sikhs share a common language (Punjabi), an association with a homeland (the Punjab) and their own political system comprising of a Sikh 'parliament', the *Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee* (SGPC), and a 'Sikh' political party, the *Shiromani Akali Dal* (SAD). The SGPC affords the Sikhs a forum to legislate on all issues concerning the community and its headquarters in the *Akal Takht* is the site of all spiritual *and* temporal power within Sikhdom. The *Jat* dominated SAD, which has controlled the SGPC ever

---

45. Merchant castes.

46. Artisan caste who migrated to British East Africa.

47. White (Caucasian).

48. Majority agricultural caste.

49. See Gurharpal Singh, "A Victim Diaspora? The Case of the Sikhs", *Diaspora: Journal of Transnational Studies*, 8,3 (1999): 303.

50. For a more detailed account of the development of Sikh nationalism, see Giorgio Shani, "The Construction of a Sikh National Identity", *South Asia Research*, 20,1 (Spring 2002), pp. 1-19.

51. Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999): 13.

since its inception, is committed to looking after Sikh interests. Seen from inside this narrative, the Sikh nation has its origins in a Punjabi *ethnie*. Sikhism is seen as indigenous to the Punjab. Not everyone can be a Sikh; one is born into an ethnie, or ethnically defined community. This ethno-symbolist view of the Sikh nation is reflected in the recent work of Sikh scholars as well as in the nationalist narratives in the Punjab as articulated by actors operating within the Sikh political system. In *Religion and Nationalism in India: The Case of the Punjab* (2000), Harnik Deol illustrates how the origins of modern Sikh national consciousness (1947-95) lie in the historical roots of Sikh communal consciousness (1469-1947). For Deol, a specifically Sikh ethnic identity based upon the Sikh religious tradition and Punjabi language pre-dates colonial rule. Consequently, the introduction of print capitalism in the colonial period merely 'energized' the existing tendencies towards differentiation between the diverse religio-linguistic communities of the Punjab rather than, as in Benedict Anderson's formulation, creating a radically different consciousness.[52] Like Deol, Gurharpal Singh believes modern Sikh identity to be 'remarkably cohesive'[53] having its roots in a *Jat* Punjabi *ethnie*, 'a sacred text and religious tradition dating from Guru Nanak'.[54] This view is shared by hegemonic Sikh organizations operating within the Sikh political system. For the Council of Sikh Affairs, 'the Sikh thesis, as laid down by the Gurus, is that they have a separate religion and culture and that in order to safeguard it they must maintain their distinct, socio-political entity'[55] Central to this nationalist narrative is the *territorialization* of Sikh socio-political identity in the homeland of the Punjab. As early as 1946, the SGPC committed itself to the 'goal of a Sikh state' and therefore, the territorialization of the Sikh Qaum. The Sikh people needed a state of their own to 'preserve the main Sikh shrines, Sikh social practices, Sikh self-respect and pride, Sikh sovereignty and the future prosperity of the Sikh people.'[56] However, it is only within the last two decades that the Sikh nationalist narrative became hegemonic amongst male, *Jat Kesdhari* Sikhs in the Punjab and the diaspora displacing alternative narratives based upon regional, caste and religious identities. This has coincided with the

---

52. Harnik Deol, *Religion and Nationalism in India: The Case of the Punjab* (London: Routledge, 2000): 90.

53. Gurharpal Singh. *Ethnic Conflict in India: A Case Study of Punjab*. (London: Macmillan): 87.

54. Ibid., 78.

55. Council of Sikh Affairs, *Compendium of Statements and Resolutions*. (Chandigarh: SGPC Publications, 1983):13.

56. Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee. 1946. *Resolution of Sikh State*. (http://www.maboli.com/sikh_hr/pages/documents/1946 resolution.html)

rise of diasporic organizations operating outside the Sikh political system.

The third narrative identifies the overseas Sikh communities, numbering over one million out of a total Sikh population of between 16 and 17 million[57] collectively as a diaspora. Although the overwhelming proportion of this overseas Sikh population had migrated in the post-colonial era, the rise of Sikh mass migration outside South Asia can be traced to the posting of Sikh soldiers to British colonies by the British colonial army in the nineteenth century. Rural Jat Sikhs, designated as a 'martial race' by the British colonial authorities[58] were stationed in South East Asia (Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia) and East Africa (Kenya and Uganda). From there, Sikh migrants with army connections sought to settle in the West, particularly on the Pacific coast of North America where communities were established before the imposition of anti-immigration legislation in the early twentieth century.[59] The partition of the Punjab following the creation of the independent, successor states to the British *raj*, India and Pakistan, in 1947, had the effect of creating a large internally displaced Sikh population within India who formed the backbone of post-war Northern Indian migration to the UK. They were joined in the UK by *Ramgharia* Sikhs following political changes in East Africa in the early 1970s. Today, half of the overseas Sikh population has settled in the UK (400,000-500,000) with Canada (147,440) and the USA (125,000) the preferred destination for the more upwardly mobile.[60]

Diaspora, derived from the Greek verb *sperio* (to sow) and preposition *dia* (over) (Cohen 1997:ix), has come to be used to describe any deterritorialized[61], transnational[62] community. James Clifford has appropriately called it a 'traveling term in changing global conditions.'[63] Whilst in earlier times, the term diaspora was reserved for the Jewish and Armenian dispersion, it now, according to the editor of the journal *Diaspora*, 'shares meanings with a large semantic domain

57. Darshan Singh Tatla, *The Sikh Diaspora: The Search for Statehood.* (London: UCL Press, 1999): 11 and Brian Keith Axel, *The Nation's Tortured Body: Violence, Representation, and the Formation of a Sikh "Diaspora"* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001): 9.

58. See Richard G. Fox 1985. *Lions of the Punjab: Culture in the Making.*(Berkeley: University of California Press).

59. Karen Leonard. "Pioneer Voices from California: Reflections on Race, Religion and Ethnicity', in N. Gerald Barrier and Verne A. Dusenbery (eds.), *The Sikh Diaspora: Migration and Experience Beyond the Punjab.* (Delhi; Chanakya Publications, 1990).

60. Tatla 1999: 43.

61. Deterritorialized in this context merely refers to movement from a "homeland" irrespective of whether the migration was forced or voluntary.

62. Transnational in this context refers to interstate or global flows and networks.

63. James Clifford, Routes: *Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century.* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997): 244.

that includes words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest worker, exile community (and) ethnic community'.[64] The narrative of diaspora as applied to the Sikhs relies upon what Brain Keith Axel terms *the place of origin thesis*.[65] The argument is that the place or origin or 'homeland', regardless of birthplace, constitutes the diaspora. Sikh claims to being a diaspora are therefore contingent on securing a 'Sikh' homeland. Tatla in his seminal study of the Sikh diaspora, identified the Sikhs as a 'victim' diaspora[66], which has been mobilized by what he considers to be a single critical event- the storming of the Golden Temple complex in Amritsar in 1984 by Indian troops.[67] From Tatla and Axel's attempts to account for the formation a Sikh diaspora, we can conclude that narratives of a Sikh diaspora are contingent on two factors: (1) the existence of a 'homeland' and (2) 'forced' dispersion from it. Both of these factors are key features of the Sikh nationalist discourse in the diaspora.[68]

The Sikh *Qaum* and the International Order

The Sikh *Qaum* challenges the international order in two ways.[69] Firstly, by asserting the right of national self-determination in the Punjab, nationalist organizations have contested the legitimacy of the Indian state's use of force in the Punjab. The goal of Sikh nationalist activity, particularly in the diaspora, is the achievement of territorially defined sovereign statehood, *Khalistan*. This challenge is partial in that it constitutes a challenge to the prevailing order whilst reproducing its central features: the territorially demarcated sovereign state. The contemporary political map of South Asia has twice before been redrawn (Pakistan in 1947 and Bangladesh in 1971) and this suggests that this territorial

---

64. Khachig Tölölian. " Nation State and its Others: In Lieu of a Preface", *Diaspora: Journal of transnational Affairs* 1,1 (1991): 4-5.

65. Axel 2001:8-9.

66. Cohen in his introduction to the series of global diasporas, had earlier distinguished between victim, labor, trade, imperial and cultural diasporas. Unlike the vast majority of South Asian diasporas, the Sikhs were not indentured laborers and therefore do not correspond to Cohen's definition of a labor diaspora. A case could, however, be made for including the first wave of male, *Jat* Sikhs into the UK as a labor diaspora, with *khatris* forming a trade diaspora.

67. Tatla 1999 : 6.

68. See Giorgio Shani, "The Territorialization of Identity: Sikh Nationalism in the Diaspora", *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 2,1 (2002), pp. 11-20.

69. For a more detailed examination of the ways in which the Sikh *Qaum* challenges the international order see Giorgio Shani, "The Politics of Recognition: Sikh Diasporic Nationalism and the International Order", *International Journal of Punjab Studies*, 7, 2 (July-December 2000), pp.193-223.

challenge can be accommodated.

The second way in which the Sikh *Qaum* challenges the Westphalian international order is through a rejection of sovereign statehood and an assertion of the sovereignty of the *Khalsa Panth*. As no territorial limits are placed on the sovereignty of the *Khalsa*, it is possible that Sikh political aspirations can be accommodated through existing federal arrangements within India. Sikh political structures, particularly the SGPC-Akali Dal complex, constitute an alternative, indigenous political system[70] for ordering the *Khalsa Panth*. According to Hinsley, sovereignty contains both internal and external dimensions. Internally, sovereignty entails the idea that there is a final and absolute political authority in the political community and externally that *no final and absolute authority exists elsewhere.*[71] The Sikh *Qaum* is seen as sovereign in that all political and spiritual power is located within the *Khalsa Panth*. The concepts of temporal and spiritual sovereignty are symbolized within the Sikh *Panth* by the twin swords of the sixth Guru, Hargobind, *miri* and *piri* and institutionalized within the Golden Temple complex by the *Akal Takht* and *Harimandir*. Prior to the tenth and last Guru, Gobind Singh, the wearing of both swords had been the prerogative of the Guru. Gobind Singh, however, conferred spiritual sovereignty (*piri*) on the Guru Granth Sahib and temporal sovereignty (*miri*) symbolized by the *kirpan*, upon the *Khalsa Panth* through the proclamation of *Raj Karega Khalsa*, ('The *Khalsa* shall rule' and, by implication, is sovereign). No territorial limits were placed on the sovereignty of the *Khalsa*. Thus, although a distinction was made between the spiritual and the temporal, the *Khalsa Panth*, from its very inception, was constituted as a transnational, sovereign *religio-political* community - one which first threatened and then challenged the authority of successive Mughal, British empires and 'Indian' rulers in Delhi.

Conclusion

In this article, it has been argued that the politicization of the Islamic and Sikh religious traditions pose important questions of the Westphalian international order. In particular, both traditions problematize the separation of the religious

---

70. See Paul Wallace, 'Religious and Secular Politics in Punjab: the Sikh dilemma in competing political systems', in P. Wallace and S. Chopra (eds), *Political Dynamics of the Punjab*, (Amritsar; Guru Nanak Dev University Press,1979):1-32, for a discussion of the Sikh political system.

71. See F.R. Hinsley, *Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

and political community. Both Islamic and Sikh religious traditions do not acknowledge this separation and the presence of Islamic and Sikh communities has been interpreted by some groups within liberal democratic societies, especially the world's largest democracy, India, as a threat to the sovereignty of the nation-state.[72] For Muslims, there is a belief in *din wa dawla*, the unity of religion and state, whilst Sikhs believe in *miri* and *piri*, the inseparability of religious and political authority.

Some commentators have argued that in the light of the events of September 11th 2001, politicized religion in general and Islam in particular poses a 'threat' to the international order - a threat which legitimizes the use of force against Islamic movements and regimes which may or may not be involved in terrorist activity. Francis Fukuyama commenting on the rise of what he terms 'Islamo-Fascism' stresses the need for 'development' within the Muslim world. For Fukuyama, the Muslim world is at the same juncture today as was Europe in the 'Thirty Years' War' before the Peace of Westphalia. Fukuyama equates 'modernity' with both secularism and religious tolerance - concluding that he hopes a more 'liberal' strand of Islam will emerge.

> The Muslim community will have to decide whether to make its peace with modernity and in particular with the key principle of the secular state and religious tolerance.[73]

What Fukuyama fails to note is that religious tolerance, far from being a 'western' value, was practiced in South Asia long before the arrival of the British; in the Mughal court of the Islamic ruler Akhbar the Great in the 16th century and the 'Sikh' Empire of Maharajah Ranjit Singh in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Indeed, as Indian Noble Laureate Amartya Sen notes in a critique of Huntington's 'clash of civilizations' thesis, 'when Akbar was making his

---

72. The mistaken murder of a Sikh man, Balbir Singh Sodhi, shot outside his gas station in the suburb of Mesa, Arizona, USA in the wake of the tragic events of September 11th 2001 (hereafter the 9/11 incident) illustrates the extent to which, the turban and the beard of the male Sikh, shared with the Taliban, marks the male Sikh out in popular consciousness as a threat to the secular institutions of the liberal-democratic nation-state. The fact that Sodhi was mistaken for a Muslim is significant for by murdering Sodhi, Frank S. Roque was able to claim that he was a patriot 'standing up for his brothers and sisters'. Although a case of mistaken identity, the murder of Sodhi was not an isolated incident. Sikhs as well as Muslims were targeted for racist verbal and sometimes physical abuse throughout the West in the aftermath of 9/11 and both have historically been targets for Hindu nationalists in India.

73. Francis Fukuyama, " History and September 11", in Ken Booth and Tim Dunne, *Worlds in Collision: Terror and the Future of Global Order* (London: Palgrave, 2002): 34.

pronouncements on religious tolerance in Agra, in the 1590's, the Inquisitions were still going on in Europe'.[74] It was in such a climate of religious freedom and tolerance that the Sikh tradition was allowed to develop and flourish. It would seem, therefore, that no one religious or cultural tradition has a monopoly on tolerance, truth or even terrorism, and that an intercultural dialogue that seeks to question the values underpinning the Westphalian order is the best way out of the present impasse.

---

74. Amartya Sen, 'A World Not Neatly Divided' *The New York Times* (23/11/ 2001).