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What Transcends the Nation?

The invocation of "the people" as the foundation of the nation state raises the specter of "belonging" and involves a staging of the essence of the nation. In India, religion is taken to be the essence of the nation within the framework of *hindutva* ideology. Muslims are regarded not only as secondary citizens but also as enemy targets for national mobilization. The sovereignty of the Indian state thus necessarily depends on violence directed at the Pakistani national outside of its borders and at the Muslim population residing within.

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What transcends the nation? Nothing, perhaps, since the nation itself is transcendental. This is not immediately evident, since nationalisms are considered immanent and secular in the sense that their reference point is "the people," not God. Such a secular "this-worldly" reference is modern, becomes dominant in the nineteenth century with Max Weber (1993, 1) and others, and affects everyone everywhere down to the present. It frames religion and not the other way around. "We, the people" (the first phrase in the preamble of the US constitution) is not stating an unambiguous, empirical fact but a declaration, a performative utterance in John Langshaw Austin's (1962) sense, which produces a metaphysical entity. Liberal political theory following John Rawls (1971) sees the nation as the collective will of autonomous, rational subjects who keep references to transcendental truth out of political deliberation. Nevertheless, nationalist ideology portrays the nation as an unassailable, transcendental essence, transcending personal and regional identity and requiring its members to die for it if need be. Who will be defined as "the people" and who will not be is the most important question that needs an answer in nationalist discourse and studies. Religion is potentially a source of national identification besides ethnicity, language, and history. Religion needs to be nationalized, made part of national identity. Crucial in this is the development of tools of enumeration and censuses that produce majorities and minorities. Religious divisions have always been political, even in the premodern era, but they acquire a new salience as a result of nationalism, for they can be transcended in nationalism by a politics of reconciliation and inclusion, but they can also be reinforced through political mobilization. Often one finds a combination of ethnicity and religion, and one can speak about the political process of the ethnicization of religion or the religionization of ethnicity.

In recent comments on secularism beyond the West, the philosopher Charles Taylor (2015, 14–15) has argued that the rise of the nation state and the mobilization around a national identity has been crucial for developing secular modernity. He argues that a national society becomes "reflexive," in analogy with the reflexive individual, in taking a critical stance to itself and devising ways of self-transformation. Taylor distinguishes three important aspects of the reflexive nation state, what he calls the three D's: Disenchantment; Disciplines, in the sense of self-examination and self-control, leading to the autonomous, reflexive individual, the appropriate citizen of a democratic reflexive society; and Disembedding, the process whereby people

acquire an identity that is independent of any particular social order or community. According to Taylor, "we become modern by breaking out of 'superstition.' The enchanted world was one in which spirits and magical forces could cross a porous boundary and shape our lives, psychic and physical" (ibid.). In Taylor's view, modern persons are now "buffered" selves, no longer porous selves. This line of reasoning obviously follows from Weber's notion of *Entzauberung* (disenchantment), a specific argument about secularization that focuses on rationality (Lehmann 2009).

In my view, Weber, Taylor, and a whole tradition of enlightenment thinkers miss the fact that modernity itself has aspects that could be called "magical" (Meyer and Pels 2003). Not long after Weber died in 1920, Germany saw the rise of an ultra-nationalist movement that did anything but disenchant society. One of its striking aspects was a mobilization of society to grasp state power. After capturing the state, a thorough rationalization of its bureaucratic apparatus was realized to execute the orders in a state hierarchy that had synthesized state institutions and party organizations. Italy, Spain, and Portugal went through a similar process, which also characterized the Communist bloc. There is nothing *entzaubert* (disenchanted), so to speak, about this. It is precisely authoritarian state power that could be called magical.

Sovereignty and violence

The question I wish to raise is perhaps not so much how authoritarian or fascist the Indian state is, which is difficult to measure, but how it treats its minorities and how violent it is. Contrary to liberal political theory that argues that the modern nation state is based on democratic choices that are made by "buffered selves" (auto-nomous, rational actors) and that passion should be outside of politics, I want to suggest that the sovereign nation state is built on the arbitrary use or containment of violence. For Weber, this is, of course, the state's monopoly of legitimate violence. Legitimacy, however, is itself a circular product of violence. If the state is built on violence, its legitimacy must also be built on violence. Undoubtedly, the rule of law is crucial, but the construction of the legal system and the application of the law is part of a political process.

Nationalism definitely uses founding myths, ritual and symbolic politics, exorcism, and the unpredictable behavior of charismatic leadership (all also elements of religion) in its mobilization of people. The magic of the nation state is often interpreted as populism, but one needs to see that the nation state itself by definition rests on the idea that the people legitimize the state. The question then becomes who "the people" really are and, more importantly, who does not belong. What, therefore, is the relation between minorities and majorities that are ethnically and/or religiously defined?

The sovereignty of the state thus does not only depend on its recognition by other states but also on the recognition of its power within the nation. That recognition ultimately rests on the state's ultimate ability to assert itself violently both internally and externally. The state itself is, of course, a reification of itself, and power is unevenly distributed. There are specific sites or events at which sovereignty is asserted, for example courts, election campaigns, or urban slums. It is the performance of power

through violence, spectacular or secret, that is crucial to sovereignty (Hansen and Stepputat 2005, 3).

Achille Mbembe (2003, 11) has argued that, "the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die" (ibid.). Mbembe's concern is "those figures of sovereignty whose central project is not the struggle for autonomy but the generalized *instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations*" (2003, 14, italics added). Mbembe takes his cue from Michel Foucault's notion of "biopower" (2004, 22) and Agamben's concept of the "state of exception" (2005), directing our attention to the myth of the enemy, of the terrorist, and the politics of death in a state of exception.

The history of violence against Muslims in independent India is a fundamental premise of the Hindu nation and of Indian politics. The making of *hindutva* (Hinduness) out of India's incredibly varied traditions would not be possible without staging an "intimate enemy" (Nandy 2009), like Ravan the arch-demon against Ram the heroic deity in the epic known as the *Ramayana.* The origin of the Indian secular state lies in a violent conflict between Hindus and Muslims that led to the Partition of India and Pakistan and caused the displacement of around fourteen million people and the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives. The traumatic series of events from which Pakistan and India emerged continues to bedevil the relations between the two countries as well as between the Hindus and Muslims who live there. A number of wars followed the Partition, the most important of which was the 1971 war in which Bangladesh seceded from Pakistan (Korom, this volume). In India, a system of riots has emerged especially around elections, mostly targeting Muslims (Brass 2003).

Indian secularism

India is generally seen as a secular state, although the constitution does not proclaim it as such. The landmark assessment of the secularism of the Indian state is Donald Eugene Smith's *India as a Secular State* (1963). He distinguishes three distinct but interrelated sets of relationships concerning the state, religion, and the individual. The three sets of relations are as follows:

1. religion and the individual (freedom of religion)
2. the state and the individual (citizenship)
3. the state and religion (separation of state and religion)

I am only concerned with number 1 in this article. Article 25 (1) of India's constitution deals with individual freedom of religion:

> Subject to public order, morality and health and to the other provisions of this Part, all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion.

In an elaborate comment on Smith's book, Marc Galanter (1998, 258) observes that Smith understands freedom of religion not as freedom of religion "as it is" in India but freedom of religion "as it ought to be." He rightly points out that the constitution and,

even more, so the analysis of Donald Smith both show the spirit of Hindu reformism and the essential interventional mission of the modern developmental state.

The secular state intervenes in religious practice, for example, by prohibiting the practice of untouchability. As Galanter succinctly puts it, "Secularism cannot be entirely neutral among religions when it undertakes to confine them to their proper sphere" (1998, 259). "Proper sphere" here is certainly what, according to the theory of modernization, would be the result of a process of secularization. This was indeed what important nationalists such as Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964) and even Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876–1948) hoped for, but while there is secularism in India, there is hardly secularization. There are attempts by Nehru and others to see India as a civilization and to see tolerance as a typical quality of that civilization. In fact, however, there is no unified civilization within the Indian Subcontinent, but only a wide variety of Hindu and Muslim traditions. Communities are not in themselves tolerant of each other but attempt to be self-regulating while perceiving others in the spirit of hierarchical relativism. In the colonial period self-regulation and hierarchical relativism become impossible to maintain in a newly minted national polity, although Mohandas Gandhi's writings make continuous references to it. Religious communities come under the sway of colonial regulations and anticolonial nationalism. In the imperial encounter, Hinduism has been made into a majority religion by nationalism, and as a public religion it cannot easily be relegated to the private sphere of individual belief.

A pertinent question asked by Partha Chatterjee (1998) in the context referred to above is the following: is secularism an adequate, or even appropriate, ground on which to meet the political challenge of Hindu majoritarianism? It is indeed striking that the Hindu nationalists of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the ruling party in India today, have not attacked the secular state. Instead, they have argued that their rivals in the Congress Party are "pseudo-secularists," suggesting thereby that they themselves are the genuine secularists. How does one square that suggestion with the undeniable fact that the current prime minister of India (then the chief minister of Gujarat) condoned (and allegedly orchestrated) the pogrom on Muslims in Gujarat during 2002? The answer to that question lies in the fact that the institutions of the secular state (police, judiciary) can be used to marginalize and even victimize a religious minority. The Indian brand of secularism is in itself not adequate in protecting the Muslim community in India.

The Congress Party kept radical anti-minority Hindu majoritarianism at bay until the 1980s. Starting with campaigns against the conversion of Dalits to Islam in the early 1980s, however, the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) developed an issue-oriented political mobilization against Muslims. I witnessed the start of a campaign "to liberate Ram's birthplace" in Ayodhya in 1984 (van der Veer 1988). The mosque that was allegedly built on the destroyed birthplace of Ram by the first Mughal Emperor Babar was already contested as far back as 1949, when an image of Ram had appeared miraculously inside the mosque named after him. Given the devastating conflicts and population movements surrounding the Partition, Nehru's government decided to deny both Hindu and Muslim communities access to the mosque except for one day annually when a Hindu committee allowed local Hindus to enter the

mosque to worship there in commemoration of the day of the deity's appearance. This was still the case in 1984 and continued to be the case till the destruction of the mosque by Hindu nationalists (RSS, VHP [Vishva Hindu Parishad], and BJP) in 1992.

Widespread rioting in India, the most important being in Mumbai, followed the destruction of the mosque. Mumbai is often regarded as a space of secular modernity and therefore different from the rest of the Indian nation. As a center of transnational trading it is connected to various "hinterlands" engendering a particular sense of religious cosmopolitanism. Wealthy Muslim trader groups, like the Bohras and the Khojas, are connected to the Middle East and Africa as well. Other trading groups like Gujarati Hindus or Jains, especially prominent in the diamond trade, as well as Parsis, originally prominent in the lucrative opium trade with China, but currently the largest private landowners in Mumbai, all have partly overlapping networks that are both religious and economic. This goes to say that Mumbai can be seen as a site that connects several spatial and religious imaginaries that are ritually expressed in the staging of the Muharram and Ganapati processions, the former being Muslim and the latter being Hindu (Green 2011).

The Muharram and Ganapati processions are the largest citywide mobilizations of people, but there are numerous smaller processions organized every day. In a city with huge infrastructural problems, these mass events that attract hundreds of thousands or even millions to the streets cause major traffic disruptions but at the same time fill people with purpose and affect. Hindus throughout India worship the elephant-headed god Ganesh or Ganapati on the special day that is devoted to him, but in Maharashtra, the state in which Mumbai is located, public rituals supplement the domestic ones practiced elsewhere. Historically, these public rituals were initiated under the leadership of one of the most important nationalist ideologues, Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856–1920), at the end of nineteenth century, in order to unify Hindus by bridging the gap between Brahmans and non-Brahmans. This unification by ritual of a Hindu nation implied opposition to British rule in the colonial period but also opposition to the Muslim Other.

In the postcolonial period only the antagonism toward Muslims has remained. In cities like Mumbai, with an important Muslim community, the processions of Muharram (Muslim) and those of Ganapati (Hindu) more and more became ritual expressions of competition for space and power. Ritual competition then morphed into riotous confrontations in 1992. Even events far from the city led to large-scale rioting and communal violence in Mumbai, in which hundreds of Muslims were killed, with passive or sometimes active support from the police. These events continue to poison the structures of feeling that earlier characterized the city. Cities like Mumbai have become the privileged platforms for nationwide mobilization around sensitive issues, partly because people from everywhere in India have migrated to Mumbai and are in touch with what happens "back home," especially after the emergence of cell phones and social media.

Muslim trading connects Mumbai via old mercantile routes to Karachi and Dubai (Green 2011). Such connections showed up in a dramatic fashion in a series of bomb blasts in 1993, discussed in the following paragraphs. An important aspect of trading in Mumbai is the so-called *ḥavāla* system, which is the unofficial transfer of money

by money-carriers. This form of indigenous person-to-person banking supports much of the trade, especially in gold, silver, and diamonds, and Muslim traders have privileged access to the Muslim hinterland. Obviously, organized crime is part of this world of trade connections, although it is not synonymous with it. In retaliation for the killings of hundreds of Muslims by Hindu mobs in Mumbai during 1992, a series of bomb explosions took place in Mumbai in 1993, targeting conspicuous buildings like the Stock Exchange and the Air India Building. A Mumbai criminal gang that was connected to Pakistan and the Gulf, and whose leaders had moved to Dubai and Karachi after the blasts, executed these bombings (Robbins 2006).

The campaign to cleanse Indian history of Islamic monuments has not yet succeeded in getting a temple built on the ruins of Babar's mosque, but it has certainly succeeded in transforming the Hindu nationalist party into a national party that was able to defeat the Congress in a series of elections down to the present. Despite the 1992 demolition of the mosque, no temple has been built even now, twenty-five years later. The issue remains enmeshed in the judicial process, despite the BJP's political dominance. It is reasonable to suggest that the BJP is not terribly keen on pushing the issue, since keeping it simmering is more profitable in electoral terms.

An excellent illustration of keeping the controversy alive is the events that occurred in Gujarat during 2002. Narendra Modi declared, apparently without any evidence, that the burning of a train carrying Hindu pilgrims was a pre-planned attack. In addition, he claimed that the so-called "Godhra incident" was not a communal one at all, but a one-sided collective act of violent terrorism originating from one single community (Ghassem-Fachandi 2012, 59). In his account of the 2002 pogrom in Gujarat, Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi (ibid.) has argued that Modi deliberately made the incident into an act of terrorism against the Hindu nation by a minority that did not belong there and only pledged allegiance to the enemy state of Pakistan.

Ghassem-Fachandi points to three elements of signification that licensed the widespread participation in and consent for the killing of Muslims. First, a rumor appears that Muslims abducted Hindu women out of the train. Again, no evidence was produced, but the story was carried in Gujarati newspapers, some of which made it into a report about Hindu girls being taken as sacrificial victims by Muslim ghosts. Second, there was a deliberate use of the language of Hindu sacrifice to convey an oblation into fire (*homa*). Third, excessive use of photography was deployed to depict brutalized women and children, which in Ghassem-Fachandi's interpretation creates a mix of attraction and disgust. All of this created an atmosphere in which a Hindu majority was formed that could not escape being implicated in the violence without necessarily having participated in it. This majority carried Modi to electoral success.

Another objective of Modi's rhetorical move to brand the attacks as terrorism was also to connect them to the founding violence of the Indian nation, the Partition. During my first visits to India in the 1970s, the memory of the Partition was hardly ever invoked, except for some matter-of-fact references. In the 1980s, however, this gradually changed. Not only scholarly and autobiographical accounts started to appear, like Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence* (1998) and Gyan Pandey's *Remembering Partition* (2001), but more generally people began to openly refer to their experiences during that grim period of India's colonial history. The Ayodhya conflict,

seen in this specific context, had put into question the secular and progressive history of independent India.

Nationalism and democracy

If we think of what happens in India today under the banner of the Modi government as a "crisis of democracy," we have to realize that rather than a "crisis" of democracy it is the "product" of democracy. The BJP has been democratically successful by instigating violence. Showing oneself to be a strong leader in India by killing scores of people is not an uncommon strategy for electoral success. In Uttar Pradesh (UP), a state with approximately 220 million inhabitants (if it were a separate country, it would be the fifth country in terms of population, before Brazil or Pakistan), where Ayodhya is located, the BJP has also been victorious.

UP is now led by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, the Hindu abbot of the Gorakhnath Math in Gorakhpur, and the disciple and successor of Swami Avaidyanath, whom I knew as a firebrand during the Ayodhya agitations. Politics in UP, as in many other Indian states, revolves around specific caste or caste clusters (Brahmans, Thakurs, Yadavs, and Dalits) and around religion (Hindus, Muslims). The equations (and coalitions) are constantly shifting, reminding us of Ernest Renan's (1823–1892) dictum that the nation state is a daily plebiscite (Renan 1996). Hindu nationalism has been around since the end of the nineteenth century and only now has the BJP been able to capture this central state (and some of the regional ones more firmly). Hindu nationalism is an integral element in Indian politics that has been ideologically and organizationally used to bring the BJP to power, but it would be a mistake to believe that the Congress Party did not use it as well. It would also be a mistake to think that only the innovative use of religious symbolism has brought the BJP to power, since politics is a constellation of conjectural forces, including importantly the decline of the so-called "Congress System of Patronage." However, religious symbolism did play a major role in mobilizing people for a pro-Hindu/anti-Muslim cause, which also galvanized electoral politics.

Obviously, nationalism (like religion) acquires some of its hegemonic force by claiming that it only "awakens" or "revitalizes" what is always already present; namely, a unified nation. It constantly fights both against its internal and external enemies, as well as against processes of fragmentation. Region, language, history, caste, and class, as well as religion, can all be used both to unify and to diversify. Their alignments are conjectural and are sometimes produced by political strategy, as in the case with the alliterative Mandal (caste reservations) versus Mandir (temple) opposition. In fact, in 1984 not much attention was given to the campaign to liberate Ram's birthplace. The moment was captured by the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984 by her Sikh bodyguards (now widely seen as martyrs by the Sikh community), who killed her because she had given the order to launch Operation Blue Star against the Sikh holiest of holies, the Golden Temple in Amritsar, which harbored Khalistani separatists. Her assassination was followed by a Congress Party–led pogrom against the Sikh minority. Sikh separatism does not get very many headlines today, but it did in the 1980s, so it is useful to remind ourselves of the jigsaw movement of nationalism.

The dominance of the BJP in recent elections in India has fostered the idea that secularism in India has declined and religious nationalism increased. This is partly, but not entirely, the case. It might be useful to consider that the Congress Party for the longest time has been able to keep many factions, including religious nationalist forces, contained within itself. Gandhi, for example, was a Hindu nationalist, but because of his broad understanding of nationalism he was murdered by Hindu nationalists who held a stronger anti-Muslim stance.

The BJP has always seen the secularism of the Congress Party as "pseudo-secular," as mentioned earlier, due to the "pampering" of minorities, while portraying itself as truly secular. Whatever the interpretation of this rhetoric, it is clear that secularism is not a straightforward term. Moreover, the temple-mosque conflict in Ayodhya (and similar ones in nearby Banaras and Mathura) had been simmering for several decades. It was only in the late 1980s that the movement to "do something about it" gained momentum. No doubt, something changed, a rearrangement of the configuration formed by secularism and religious nationalism, but many elements had been there already for quite a long time (van der Veer 1994). It is a constantly negotiated arrangement that takes place primarily in the courts but can be taken to the streets when a community is made to feel that it is not fairly treated.

Conclusion

If the Indian sovereign nation has its roots in violence against Muslims, what is the place of secularism? One important mode of Indian secularism is that it can be used as a strategy to avoid or contain communal violence. In that respect, Gandhi can be understood as a secular Hindu. Secularism as a political project of the pacification of religious differences in society is historically also fundamental in the emergence of the European nation state. The Reformation stands out as the first period in European—and possibly global—history when religious refugees became a mass phenomenon. After the Jews and the Muslims came the Puritans who settled in the United States, the Anabaptists, the Huguenots, and everyone else who fled during the several wars of religion that followed the Reformation. As Nicholas Terpstra argues in *Religious Wars in the Early Modern World* (2015), the Reformation was not just a movement for intellectual and religious change. It was also Europe's first grand project in social purification. Its adherents were deeply concerned with exile, expulsion, and refugees. The forced movement of religious migration was a normal, familiar, and expected feature of public policy that was conceived to build a cohesive society. The formula of *cuius region, eius religio* ("whose realm, whose religion") was a principle that legitimized a combination of migration and war. At the end of the Thirty Years War, the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 built a fragile international system to deal with the treatment of minorities. Political scientists and historians generally interpret this treaty as the basis of the sovereign nation state. In Europe, therefore, the nation state has been built upon violence and the possible resolution of violence by separation and cleansing. Nevertheless, the German lands continued to be sites of huge migration to Eastern Europe (including Russia) and to the United States. Some

forty-four million people of German descent live in the United States alone, according to the US Census Bureau (2016).

This scenario is the deep history of modern nationalism. The idea of purification by expulsion became a legitimate aspect of statecraft, combining ethnic and religious cleansing. In the German case, Lutheran Protestantism became part of German nationalism in the nineteenth century, but one does not need religion for the cleansing of the nation. The two competing totalitarian ideologies of the twentieth century, Nazism and Communism took up where the religious wars had left off. The collapse of the Habsburg Empire and Czarist Russia gave rise to an unprecedented un-mixing of populations. Cleansing was both by expulsion and by extermination. Nazi and Soviet regimes from 1933 to 1945 murdered fourteen million people between Berlin and Moscow. These were all civilians, abandoned to state power, which reminds us that the state protects some, but attacks others.

Nationalism is not primarily about rationality and freedom. It is as much about violence and sacrifice, about sex and gender, about desire and excess. A nationalism to counter the current xenophobic nationalism of the BJP would not be based on the superiority of its enlightened politics but on a passion that would mobilize people against the destruction of their neighbors and their property. One of the interesting developments in Gujarat is that Gandhian nonviolence and *satyāgraha* (holding on to truth) has deteriorated into anti-Muslim vegetarianism (Spodek 1989). Nationalism is embodied (Alter 2000), as Frank J. Korom also shows to be the case in his article included in this collection. It is thus the Hindu understanding of the hierarchy and interaction of bodies or, more precisely, bodily fluids that is central to both violence and nonviolence. This visceral nationalism cannot be comprehended from liberal, political theory but requires close attention to affects that connect bodies to sovereignty.

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