Transnational religious actors and international politics

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ABSTRACT *This article generally examines the phenomenon of transnational religious actors and seeks to assess the claim that their activities can undermine state sovereignty. It starts from the premise that globalisation facilitates the growth of transnational networks of religious actors. Feeding off each other's ideas and perhaps aiding each other with funds, they are bodies whose main priority is the well-being and advance of their transnational religious community. The article focuses upon two specific transnational religious actors: the Roman Catholic Church and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference. It concludes by noting that, like Islamic radicals, the Catholic Church has been influential in some national contexts in helping undermine the hegemony of authoritarian governments, but that this should not be seen as a more general threat to state sovereignty.*

The final two decades of the 20th century were an era of fundamental global political, social and economic changes, often associated with the multifaceted processes known collectively as 'globalisation'. A rubric for varied phenomena, the concept of globalisation interrelates multiple levels of analysis. McGrew suggests that globalisation amounts to the product of myriad 'linkages and inter-connections between the states and societies which make up the modern world system'.[1] There was not only the consolidation of a truly global economy and, some would argue, the gradual emergence of a 'global culture', but also a number of fundamental political developments, including the steady, if uneven, advance of democracy to many parts of the world. In addition, there were myriad examples of the political involvement of religion, leading the US commentator, George Weigel, to claim that there was a global religious revitalisation, or, as he put it: the 'unsecularization of the world'.[2]

Weigel did not mean to imply that this was 'only' an *apolitical* re-spiritualisation; rather it was one linked to the interaction of religion and politics, facilitated by the processes of globalisation and encouraged by the communications revolution. Beyer suggests that we now live in 'a globalizing social reality, one in which previously effective barriers to communication no longer exist'.[3] The development of transnational religious communities was greatly enhanced by ease of interpersonal and inter-group communications, helping to spread their message and to link up with like-minded groups across state boundaries.[4] If Weigel is right and there are political connotations to the 'unsecularization of the

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world', it should be possible to judge the nature and substance of cross-border interactions between religious actors, especially of the world religions, such as Islam and Christianity, with their widespread, transnational networks.

I start from the premise that globalisation is likely to facilitate the growth of transnational networks of religious actors which, feeding off each other's ideas and perhaps aiding each other with funds, form bodies whose main priority is the well-being and advance of their transnational religious community. In this article I want to examine the phenomenon of transnational religious actors and assess the claim that their activities undermine state sovereignty. In this context, I focus upon the Roman Catholic Church and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference.

States and transnational religion in historical context

To answer the question: to what extent have transnational religious interactions undermined state sovereignty?, we need, first, to ascertain what state sovereignty *is*. Bealey defines sovereignty as 'a claim to authority, originally by sovereign monarchs, but by states since the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. A state becomes sovereign when other states recognise it as such.'[5] In Bealey's view the concept of sovereignty refers to states' independence from overt interference by other *states*; no mention is made of non-state bodies.

The absence of focus on religious bodies when discussing the concept of sovereignty is not unexpected given the history of the past 400 years in Western Europe. Earlier, Islam had expanded from its Arabian heartland in westerly, easterly, southerly and northern directions for nearly a millennium. As a consequence vast territories in Africa and Asia and smaller areas of Europe (parts of the Balkans and much of the Iberian peninsular) came under Muslim control. However, unable to deal with the emergence of centralised Christian polities the demise of the Islamic European empire was swift, a consequence of the rise of centralised European states with superior firepower and organisational skills. In sum, Islam, a religious, social and cultural system, grew to become a global religion via the growth of a transnational religious community.

Christendom is another historic example of a transnational religious society. During mediaeval times, 'Christendom' referred to a generalised conception among Christians of being subject to universal norms and laws derived from the word of God. Later, and contemporaneous with the demise of Islam as a major cultural force in Europe, expansion of Europeans to non-European areas facilitated the growth of a transnational Christian community, albeit one divided by differing interpretations of Christianity. The transborder spread of Christianity was facilitated by the search for gold in the Americas by sundry Spanish and Portuguese 'explorers'. This led, in the early 16th century, to the establishment of the 'New World' of various European-administered colonies; contemporaneously, territory was also grabbed in the Caribbean and in Asia by Europeans. Inextricably linked to European expansion was the spread of Christianity, which became a major component of an emerging web of global interactions. Later, however, the public role of religion became increasingly marginal to political outcomes as secular states rose to prominence from the 17th century onwards.

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Since the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 (which ended the religious wars in Europe between Catholics and Protestants) the history of the development of the global state system has largely been the history of clashing nationalisms, with each national group aiming for its own state and with religio-derived ideologies very much secondary.

In sum, Christian and Muslim transnational religious communities predated the emergence of centralised secular states. Before the 17th century religious inter-actions were pivotal to the emergence of an international system. Both Christianity and Islam grew to become world religions, conveying their associated civilisations around the world via colonisation, conquest and the expansion of global trade. Contending religious beliefs were the chief motor of international conflicts, the main threat to peace and security. However, the political importance of religion in international politics became increasingly negligible from the 17th century, re-emerging as politically important only in the late 20th century, encouraged by globalisation and the accompanying com-munications revolution.

Transnational civil society

International relations theory has long been premised on the centrality of the state to global interactions. However, from the early 1970s, fuelled by a recognition that some non-state actors—such as the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries—were simply too politically important to be ignored, states were not *automatically* seen as the primary actor in international politics. The growth of transnational relations from this time also pointed to the political and economic significance of various non-state actors, independent of state control, such as transnational corporations and international organisations of miscellaneous kinds. From this time, some analysts began to see the international system as an aggregate of different issue areas, such as trade, finance, energy, human rights, democracy and ecology, where domestic and international policy processes merged. Management of growing global interdependencies was understood to be carried out via processes of bargaining, negotiation and consensus-seeking among both state and non-state actors, rather than through expressions of military force. Order was maintained not by a traditional mechanism—the 'balance of power'—but as a consequence of consensual acceptance of common values, norms and international law. In other words, from the 1970s global political process were seen not only to involve states but also non-state actors.

With the demise of the Cold War in the late 1980s, a new model for under-standing the direction of global events emerged, sometimes known as the 'cosmopolitan worldview', which placed groups of individuals—rather than states—at the centre of analysis.[6] In particular, the cosmopolitan model empha-sised the importance of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs)—whose numbers had grown from just over 2000 in 1972 to more than 5000 two decades later—to international political outcomes. In particular, it saw the primacy of the state in international politics strongly challenged by the growth of transnational civil societies.

From a domestic perspective, the main concern of civil society—the group of

non-state organisations, interest groups and associations such as trade unions, professional associations, further and higher education students, churches and other religious bodies, and the media—is often said to be to maintain a check on the power of the state. To what does the concept of transnational civil society refer? Transnational civil society is defined by Lipschutz as 'the self-conscious constructions of networks of knowledge and action, by decentred, local actors, that cross the reified boundaries of space as though they were not there'.[7] Unlike domestic civil society, transnational civil society is not *territorially* fixed. Rather it is a field of action whose boundaries can change to suit the requirements of new issues and changing circumstances. Transnational civil society is concerned to cultivate regular, expanding interactions across national boundaries when at least one actor is a non-state agent or does not operate on behalf of a national government or an intergovernmental organisation. The sum of such transnational interactions are networks ('civil societies') that cut across national societies, developing linkages between groups in different states.

To Attina, 'social transnationalism' defines itself by the multiple linkages between individuals and groups in different societies that are tied by a shared concern for certain issues. Every country, regardless of how conventionally powerful it is, is penetrated by external actors and forces, helping to create what Attina calls the 'international social layer', that is, the contacts between groups in different societies that underpin the formal world of supposedly independent states. What he calls 'transnational citizen groups' form dedicated cross-border sociopolitical communities pursuing shared goals. But

> transnationalism is not just a matter of individuals and masses who feel conscious of being primary international subjects as they are entitled to civil, political, economic, social and cultural right by positive international law. In the world system these subjects form the international social layer which claims primacy over the diplomatic layer [that is, states and their institutional order]. Today the chances of social transnationalism reside in INGOs whose members cross states and assert 'pan-human' interests such as the promotion of human rights, environmental ecology, [and] international development co-operation.[8]

We might also add religion to the range of 'pan-human' interests that Attina identifies. This leads to an interesting question: to what extent, if at all, do transnational religious interactions threaten state sovereignty?

Transnational religious actors and state sovereignty

The theoretical literature on transnationalism has devoted little concentrated attention to religious phenomena. This is probably because transnational linkages and penetration have usually been studied in the international relations literature primarily to assess their impact on questions of political and economic security. The conventional security bias of much of the transnational literature helps explain the lack of references to religious actors. Until recently, with the rise of radical Islam, religious actors were widely regarded as remote from the central questions that affect states in international politics. The explanation for this relative neglect lies in a key assumption embedded in the social sciences. One

presupposition, especially evident in theories of modernisation and political development, was that the future of the integrated nation-state lay in secular participatory politics. The assumption was that nation-building would be ill-served by allegedly 'obscurantist' beliefs—such as religion—as secular leaders emerged politically dominant in place of previously powerful religious ones. The implication was that, in order successfully to build nation-states, political leaders would have to remain as neutral as possible from the entanglements of particularist claims, including those derived from religion. The connotation was that politics must be separated from religion (and ethnicity) so as to avoid dogmatism and encourage tolerance among citizens. As decades of apparently unstoppable movement towards increasingly secular societies in Western and other 'modernised' parts of the world suggested, over time religion and piety became ever more private matters. The consequence was that religion was relegated to the category of a problem that must not be allowed to intrude on the search for national unity and political stability.

How, then, to explain the recent re-emergence of religious actors with political goals? There is no doubt that religion and religious movements can directly affect the internal politics of states and thus qualify state power, as conventionally understood. For example, North American Evangelical Protestants made a considerable religious and political impact in Guatemala in the 1980s. The outcome was that the Catholic Church there lost a great deal of its traditional institutional importance. Tacit, albeit often unstable, alliances formed between Evangelical Protestants and assorted conservative politicians who shared a goal: to destroy the competitive and socially progressive politics that Catholic liberation theology activists had striven to encourage from the 1960s and 1970s.[9]

Another example comes from Africa. Just as, in the 1980s, American fundamentalist Christians had aided and abetted 'anti-communist' forces in Latin America,[10] contemporaneously in southern Africa right-wing Christians worked to aid rebel movements like Renamo and Unita, whose conflicts with their governments were portrayed to the outside world as a battle against 'communism'. During the Cold War the USA was particularly concerned to control perceived Soviet expansion in Africa. Christian fundamentalists were concerned to confront Satan (that is, communism) and to 'win souls for Christ'. It is by no means clear, however, that their efforts were co-ordinated or funded by the US government or one of its agencies. Nevertheless, one of the clearest examples of the dual religious and anti-communist role of American Christian fundamentalists comes from southern Africa. In 1988 the Mugabe government curtailed proselytising among Mozambican refugees in Zimbabwe by US groups, such as Jimmy Swaggart Ministries, World Vision International and Compassion Ministries. All were suspected of close links with Renamo. Suspicions appeared to be confirmed when a South African, Peter Hammond, of Front Line Fellowship and six American missionaries of the Christian Emergency Relief Teams (CERT) were captured in Tete province by Frelimo soldiers in late 1989.

Front Line Fellowship was founded on a South African military base in Namibia, allegedly by soldiers who wanted to take Bibles into Angola on their raids; in other words, they were soldier-missionaries, virulently anti-communist, mostly drawn from the (former Rhodesian) Selous Scouts and Five Recce, the

South African Special Forces unit which ran Renamo. A local Zimbabwean church, Shekinah Ministries, associated with an American Christian evangelist, Gordon Lindsay, was discovered aiding the Renamo guerrillas in Mozambique in 1987, while in neighbouring Angola the counterproductive nature of the MPLA government's anti-religion policy was evidenced in the Ovimbundu highlands and to the Southeast, where 'a resistant Church of Christ in the Bush developed in tandem with UNITA'.[11] The overall point is that various right-wing Christian individuals and groups worked to aid their anti-communist allies in Mozambique and Angola during the civil wars. However, this does not seem to have been a campaign involving either the hierarchies of the churches themselves or the government of the USA. In sum, these examples highlight the importance of various transnational religious organisations with political goals in Central America and southern Africa during the 1980s.

To pursue this theme further, I focus in the next section on the Roman Catholic Church as an example of a religious transnational community and examine its impact on state sovereignty. Following that, I turn to an assessment of the transnational political importance of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference.

The political significance of the Roman Catholic Church as transnational religious actor

Until recently, the Roman Catholic Church was widely seen as an 'uncompromising opponent of liberalism and democracy'.[12] During the 1920s and 1930s the Church had dealt with the rise of various manifestations of fascism in Europe by giving it at least tacit support. After World War II the Church enjoyed a close relationship with avowedly conservative Christian Democrat parties in Western Europe, as the latter sought to defeat socialism (and those generally advocating socially progressive measures) electorally. It was not until the Second Vatican Council of 1962–65 (known as Vatican II) that the Pope and other senior Catholic figures began publicly to express a concern with human rights and democracy issues.[13] This expression of papal interest came during a momentous period for world politics: the transition from colonial to post-colonial rule in Africa and the aftermath of decolonisation in Asia. It was also the period of the rise of liberation theology in Latin America. But it was not necessarily the case that ordinary Catholics from such 'Third World' regions were forcing the issue against the wishes of the Church's senior figures: in fact, it was often the case that Catholic officials in both Latin America and Africa were strongly opposed to the socially progressive articulations emanating from Vatican II, and, at least initially, did little or nothing concrete to further their progress.[14]

The emergence of an institutional Catholic concern with issues of social justice from the 1960s was followed, in the 1980s and 1990s, by a period of momentous change at the global level, a shift from the 'old' order to a new global one; and the Catholic Church was important in these changes. For example, the Church was heavily involved in the breakdown of communism in Eastern Europe. Despite the communist system's policy of 'cultural strangulation' towards religion, with the aim of choking off its social importance, the Catholic Church was a highly significant actor in the emblematic case of fundamental political

reforms in Poland.[15] In this, a transnational element was crucial, notably in the part played by the Vatican and Pope John Paul II. Encouraged by the Pope's expressions of support, Polish Catholicism increasingly represented both a counter-culture and an alternative social space to the official ideology and channels. This led in 1980 to the creation of the Solidarity movement, which articulated and expressed Catholic social ethics as a counter-statement of those of communism. This reflected not only a significant convergence between national and religious identity in Poland, but also, just as importantly, symbolised the failure of a communist (secular) identity fundamentally to implant itself in the hearts and minds of most Poles, a people whose cultural heritage was firmly based in Christian traditions. Thus the Christian heritage and traditions were a vital resource in helping create and then sustain resistance not only in Poland but in Eastern Europe more widely.

A second example of the Church's transnational political involvement comes from Africa. The Catholic Church is by far the largest in the region, with around 100 million baptised followers. In other words, nearly one-fifth of Africans claim to be Catholics—about 10% of the global total. The Church's well developed institutional structure under the leadership of the Pope makes it, in effect, a transnational edifice with centralised control, a factor that facilitated its recent role in the forefront of Africa's democratic changes. It should be noted, however, that its role in this regard was not restricted to Africa alone. Witte observes that 'twenty-four of the thirty-two new democracies born since 1973 are predomi-nantly Roman Catholic in confession', including those in Brazil, Chile, the Philippines, South Korea, Poland, Hungary, Lithuania and various countries in Central America.[16]

Senior Roman Catholic figures in, *inter alia*, Benin, Congo-Brazzaville, Togo, Gabon, and Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) were centrally involved in processes of democratisation in their countries, to the extent that they were chosen to chair their country's national democracy conferences.[17] The aim of the latter was to reach consensus between government and opposition over the democratic way forward. The involvement of senior African Catholics in democratisation followed the Pope's encyclical of January 1991 (*Redemptoris Missio*) which was centrally concerned with the Church's duty to help 'relieve poverty, counter political oppression and defend human rights'. Why were leaders of the national Catholic churches chosen to chair national democratisation conferences? The short answer is that, despite such figures' often close personal relations with their countries' authoritarian governments, in popular perceptions they were representatives of an important organisation that was not perceived as being in thrall to the government. This was in part because the churches' independent financial positions enabled them to provide welfare—including, educational, health and developmental programmes—to the acclaim of numerous ordinary people.

It might seem, on the face of it, that the Catholic church's involvement in both the anti-Communist revolution in Poland and in the pro-democracy events in Africa was a clear example of a religious organisation seeking to undermine state sovereignty. However, I suggest that, in both cases, the Church's role should be seen *not* as symptomatic of a desire to undermine state sovereignty but rather

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primarily as a reflection of processes of growing globalisation and nationalisation which increasingly affected the Church. The background was that to validate its claims to *catholicity* (that is, universality) the institutional Roman Catholic Church and its leader had to try to resolve two sets of tensions: the first was related to its role as a religious establishment, that is, involving conflict between the Roman, the national, and the increasingly global character of the Church. The second concerned the strain between, on the one hand, national particularities—for example, of the Church in Poland—and the claimed *universality* of Catholic doctrinal principles and moral norms. The importance of both sets of tensions was exacerbated by processes of globalisation which propelled these issues on to national and international agendas.

Looking at Catholicism globally throughout the 20th century and particularly since the 1960s, three interrelated processes in dynamic tension with one another are apparent. First, over time, as a consequence of its transnational growth, there was a global strengthening of papal supremacy, Vatican administrative centralisation, and the Romanisation of Catholicism. One of the most important indications of this process was Vatican II and its result: an ensuing, general *aggiornamento* (liberalisation), producing not only a pronounced trend towards administrative and doctrinal centralisation but also a homogenisation and globalisation of Catholic culture at the elite level throughout the Catholic world.

Second, and occurring simultaneously with the process of Vatican centralisation and Romanisation of Catholicism, was a parallel process of the internationalisation of Roman administrative structures and of globalisation of Catholicism as a set of religious norms and practices. This reflected a 20th century trend: by the 1960s the Roman Catholic Church was no longer principally a Roman and European institution. This was because the number of Catholics had grown globally—from around 600 million in 1960 to nearly one billion by the mid-1990s—with a clear shift in the Catholic population from Europe to North and South America and, more generally, from North to South. As a consequence, the nature of the episcopal and administrative cadres of the Church also underwent modification. The First Vatican Council (1869–70) had been a mainly European event—albeit with 49 prelates from the USA, comprising one-tenth of the assembled bishops; by Vatican II, a century later, Europeans did not form a majority of the 2500 bishops who attended. They came from practically all parts of the world, with 10%—228 individual bishops—coming from Asian and African countries. This was the consequence of three developments: decolonisation, growth in numbers of African and Asian Catholics, and the indigenisation of national churches. The result of the Church's extra-European geographical emphasis was clear: the internationalisation of Catholicism after the middle of the 20th century, no longer inevitably centred on Rome. Instead, there emerged numerous, geographically dispersed, centres of Catholicism, a development helping to facilitate the growth of transnational Catholic networks and exchanges of all kinds. Criss-crossing nations and world regions, they often bypassed Rome.

Third, there was a process of 'nationalisation', that is, a centralisation of Catholic churches, at the national level. After Vatican II, national conferences of bishops were institutionalised in many countries, an evolution which reinforced the dynamics of a process of nationalisation that earlier had been carried out

primarily by different forms of Catholic Action, lay groups that sought to mobilise ordinary Catholics to defend and promote the interests of the Church in the post-World War II era, a time widely perceived as an increasingly hostile, modernised, above all, *secular* environment. The political mobilisation of Catholicism was orientated towards putting pressure on the state, either to resist disestablishment or to counteract state-orientated secularist movements and parties, especially, and obviously, socialist- or communist-orientated ones. However, the Catholic recognition of the principle of religious freedom, together with the Church's gradual change of attitude towards the modern secular environment—increasingly it came to accept developments linked to modernisation, including a trend in many countries towards societal secularisation—served to facilitate significant fundamental transformation of national Catholic churches. They ceased being or aspiring to be state-compulsory institutions and evolved into free religious institutions linked to civil societies. One consequence was that Catholic churches came to dissociate themselves from and entered into conflict with authoritarian regimes, for example, in Poland, in various African countries and throughout much of Latin America. As already noted, this voluntary 'disestablishment' of Catholicism permitted the Church to play a key role in recent transitions to democracy throughout the Catholic world.

Conclusion

Traditionally, the position and attitude of the Catholic church towards political regimes was that of neutrality towards all forms of government. That is, government was seen as 'legitimate': if its policies did not systematically infringe the corporate rights of the Church—to religious freedom and to the exercise of its functions—the Church would not question its general legitimacy. However, as the examples of the Church's recent political involvement in, *inter alia*, Poland and Africa suggest, the Church's view of what comprised a 'legitimate' government has undergone a significant change in recent years. Increasingly, its view was grounded in a recognition that a 'legitimate' government had responsibilities to its citizens: to afford them a clear measure of democracy and a satisfactory array of human rights. In other words, modern forms of democracy were necessary types of polity based normatively on universalist principles of individual freedom and individual rights.

The combination of globalisation, nationalisation, secular involvement and voluntary disestablishment led the Catholic Church to a significant change of orientation, both within and between countries. National churches ceased viewing themselves as 'integrative community cults' of the nation-state, and instead adopted new transnational global identities permitting them to confront the state. As already noted, among the most significant developments of recent decades was the crisis of absolute principles of state sovereignty and *raison d'état* and the increasingly pronounced global dynamics of democratisation. Developments became focused in the decades after the 1970s, and were illustrated by the collapse of the system of socialist states; the (perhaps temporary?) global defeat of national security doctrines; the crisis of the established principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of states; the general disavowal of state-

led models of economic development and modernisation; and the new dynamics of civil society formation—both intra-societally and globally. The transnational Catholic regime reacted to the new challenges by playing a crucial role both in the revitalisation of particular civil societies as well as in the emergence of an identifiable Catholic transnational civil society. In sum, the Catholic Church, which resisted so long the emergence of the modern system of nation-states, responded successfully to the opportunities offered by the crisis of territorial state sovereignty and by the expansion of cross-border civil society, and emerged stronger than before. However, its ability to deal with various crises was not linked to a challenge to state sovereignty.

The Organisation of the Islamic Conference: the spearhead of transnational Islam?

I have argued that Catholic sociopolitical involvement, both within and between countries, has been a notable development in recent years. Paralleling this has been a similar process involving Muslims in many parts of the world, especially the Middle East. Should we understand the growth of transnational Islam as the result of similar processes—that is, globalisation, nationalisation, secular involvement and voluntary disestablishment—to those that led the Catholic Church to a significant change of orientation from nation-state to civil society, both within and between countries?

What is the Organisation of the Islamic Conference?

It is sometimes suggested that, rather like the Roman Catholic Church, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) is a body that seeks to extend the growth and influence of a certain religion at the global level. The OIC was established by the agreement of the participants of Muslim Heads of State at Rabat, Morocco, in 1969. The first conference was convened at Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, in 1970. A relatively unstructured organisation, the body's main institutions is the Conference of Foreign Ministers, although a conference of members' heads of state is held every three years. There is also a Committee for Economic and Trade Cooperation (COMEC), as well as a Secretariat with Political, Cultural, Administrative and Financial divisions, each headed by a deputy secretary general. Various other bodies have been established within the organisation, including the International Islamic Press Agency (1972), the Islamic Development ment Bank (1975), the Islamic Broadcasting Organisation (1975) and the Islamic Solidarity Fund (1977). The OIC has also set up various *ad hoc* bodies to deal with specific issues, including a 'contact group' on the Kashmir question and 'an assistance mobilisation group' charged with generating aid for Bosnia-Herzegovina (a predominantly Muslim state but not a full OIC member).
  For Sardar, the OIC has:

> [the] ability to bring all the nations of the Muslim world, even those who have openly declared war on each other, under one roof, and to promote cooperation and communication between Muslim people that has not been possible in recent history.

> Moreover, it has the potential of becoming a powerful institution capable of articulating Muslim anger and aspiration with clarity and force … The creation of the OIC … indicates that the movement of a return to Islamic roots is a transnational phenomenon. [18]

The suggestion is that the purpose of the OIC is to promote Islamic solidarity and strengthen co-operation among member states in the social, cultural, scientific, political and economic fields.

By the late 1990s, 30 years after its founding, the OIC had 53 members. Although the idea of an organisation for co-ordinating and consolidating the interests of Islamic states originated in 1969 and meetings of the Conference have regularly been held since the 1970s, the OIC only began to attract much Western attention from the early 1980s, following the Islamic revolution in Iran. From the perspective of some Western observers, the OIC encourages 'Islamic fundamentalism' and, as a result, is a serious threat to Western security. Huntington claimed that, after the Cold War, potentially co-ordinated by the OIC, Muslim-majority countries were poised *en masse* to enter into a period of conflict with the West.[19] The US government put much effort into opposing radical Islamic groups as they appeared to threaten the stability of friendly regional states in the Middle East, and tried to isolate 'rogue states' such as Libya and Iraq. The governments of such countries, it argued, were committed to state terrorism and might seek to use the OIC as a vehicle for their aspirations.

There is a fundamental flaw in the perception that the OIC is an important institutional sponsor of radical Islamic groups: its members are frequently at each other's throats. Much attention in the Conference since 1980 has been focused on wars involving member countries, including, *inter alia*, those between Iran and Iraq, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and the conflict in Afghanistan. Such was the lack of concord between OIC members that the sixth summit, held in Dakar, Senegal in December 1991, was attended by fewer than half of the members' heads of state. This not only reflected the Conference's long-standing ineffectiveness but also continued cleavages within the Islamic community. Discord between the OIC's members led to fears that the organisation would fade from the international political scene because of its failure to generate genuine Islamic solidarity.

By the mid-1990s the OIC was concerned about the global image of Islam. The 1994 summit sought to create a code of conduct regarding terrorism and religious extremism in order to try to deal with the 'misconceptions' that had associated Islam with violence in some Western minds. Among other things, OIC governments agreed not to allow their territories to be used for terrorist activities. In addition, none of them would support 'morally or financially' any Muslim 'terrorists' opposed to member governments. However, with states such as Iran and Sudan (both charged with supporting extremist Islamic groups in other nations) signing the OIC statement, some observers described the document as a 'face-saving' measure that masked continuing deep divisions on the issue. The point is that the OIC has never managed to function as an organisation with clear goals because of divisions between member states. Some among the latter have sought to cultivate transnational links with radical Islamic groups primarily as a

means to further their own influence; but this is old fashioned *Realpolitik* rather than an aspect of a campaign co-ordinated by the Conference.

The chief rivals for superiority in the OIC have been Iran and Saudi Arabia, states that have used some of their oil wealth to try aggressively to expand international influence. Post-revolutionary Iran developed two linked foreign policy objectives: first, to proselytise its Shiite version of Islam and, second, to increase state influence in what its government perceives as a Western—especially American-dominated—international system. Iran's government was linked with radical Shiite groups, for example, in Lebanon, Bahrain and Iraq, while also seeking to develop links with other radical Muslims in parts of Africa, especially Nigeria. During the 1980s Iran's diplomatic representatives in Lagos were accused of distributing posters of the late Ayatollah Khomeini and radical Islamic literature which the chief Imam of Lagos Central mosque, Ibrahim Laidi, criticised as perilous for the religious peace of the country. The Nigerian government also criticised the activities of some Iranian embassy staff who, it claimed, tried to introduce what it referred to as fundamentalist and revolutionary doctrines in order to 'corrupt' Nigerian Islamic culture and forms of worship.[20]

The Iranian attempt to target Nigeria in order to help it achieve its foreign policy objectives should be seen in the context of its rivalry with Saudi Arabia. The Iranian government wished to create pockets of influence in Africa as the first step in a campaign to achieve a much higher profile in the region than hitherto. In February 1986 Iran's spiritual leader, Sayyid Ali Khameini, stated that Iran 'will survive, defend and protect our revolution and help others in the same cause of Islam to establish the rule of God wherever they are in the world'.[21] A symptom of Iran's growing influence in Africa was exemplified by its close alliance with the Islamic rulers of Sudan. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, until the 1990–91 Gulf War the latter's main ally, lost much of its influence there following its friendship with the USA. Saudi Arabia, like Iran, utilised Islam as a foreign policy tool—when it suited it. During Ethiopia's civil war, Saudi Arabia's support for the Eritreans remained constant despite the leadership of the main guerrilla groups passing from Muslims to Marxist–Leninists and Christians in the mid-1980s. What this brief discussion of the foreign policies of Iran and Saudi Arabia in sub-Saharan Africa has shown is that both states use religion to help them to pursue national interest goals, targeting putative allies among local Muslims to help them.

In conclusion, both Iran and Saudi Arabia pursue Islamic-orientated foreign policies with religious objectives which underpin national interest goals. However, their role as *agents provocateurs* in the eruption of Islamically inspired social protest is a complex one. On the one hand, there are often localised reasons behind the outbreak of Islamic opposition, perhaps economically or ethnically inspired, while, on the other, there are also often foreign interests at work among the already disaffected. Two decades of strong oil revenues gave various states, including Iran and Saudi Arabia, the financial ability to prosecute aggressive foreign policies in which a separation of political, diplomatic and religious goals was difficult to make. Iran's biggest drawback—that it is predominantly a Shiite country when most African Muslims are Sunni—was partially offset for some African Muslim radicals—for example, in Nigeria—by its *bona fide* revo-

lutionary credentials. Some ambitious African Muslim radicals allowed themselves to be seduced by Iran's revolutionary message for two reasons: it gave them an immediately recognisable radical programme for their own societies' politically marginalised and alienated; and, second, it offered such Muslim radicals a political platform from which to launch attacks on incumbent Muslim elites associated with the championing of an often unwelcome religious orthodoxy and social conservatism. Saudi Arabia's concerns, on the other hand, were less revolutionary in orientation: to aid alternative groups of Muslims to build a Saudi-style Islamic state by stages over time.[22]

This suggests that the rise if radical Islam was not in response to encouragement from the OIC but the culmination of decades of Western hegemony and accompanying modernisation, encouraged by a small Westernised elite. From the 1960s, throughout the Muslim world, secular-orientated governments sought to impose Western rather than Islamic values. Via such ruling elites secularism, socialism and nationalism all made inroads, while traditional forms of community and civility were undermined. But by the early 1970s this form of modernisation was in crisis, leading to social and cultural dysfunctions and, in many cases, fast declining state legitimacy. The official response to growing popular discontent was slow to emerge and, when it did, it primarily took the form of attempted economic reforms, rather than those rooted in sociopolitical or cultural changes. In many countries, popular demands for change stemmed from a rapidly growing recourse to Islamic values and teachings that sought to fill the vacuum left by vacuous attempts to modernise using the Western template. And, as the state's ability to deliver development faded as a result of economic contractions, popular Islamic organisations stepped in, providing welfare, education and health care which the state could or would no longer provide.

The Islamic revival was generated primarily in an urban setting among technical, professional as well as clerical strata. The key issue was: what could Islam do for Muslims in the modern world? Could it rescue them from decline, purify society, combat both internal and external forces of corruption? For many Islamic radicals the triumphant moment was the Iranian Revolution of 1979. This epochal event enabled political and religious authority in Iran to enforce *sharia* law as the law of the land, to pursue social justice and roll back Western economic and cultural influence. Despite Western fears, while the Iranian success widely energised Islamic radicals in the Middle East and elsewhere, there was no general revolutionary wave. Instead, Muslim majority states typically responded to the radical Islamic threat by a variable mixture of state-controlled re-Islamicisation, reform and coercion. In response, a popular radical Islamic movement began to emphasise local social struggles. The aim was re-Islamicisation 'from below', focusing on the requirement for personal and social behaviour to be 'authentic', in line with tradition. Violence was not eschewed, if judged necessary for a community's 'purification'. Individual movements focused within countries were supported by the development of transnational networks difficult for states to control, resulting in a condition of endemic instability within many societies.

An interesting example comes from Algeria. There was much Western paranoia in the early 1990s as it appeared that Algeria was about to be taken over by

radical Muslims. This fear led the governments of France and the USA to support a successful military *coup d'état* in early 1992 which prevented this outcome. The assumption was that if the radical Muslims achieved power they would summarily close down Algeria's newly refreshed democratic institutions and political system as they had done in Iran. Following the coup, the main Islamist organisations were banned, and thousands of their leaders and supporters incarcerated. A civil war followed, during which an estimated 100 000 people died.

While the political rise of radical Islam in Algeria had domestic roots, it was undoubtedly strengthened by financial support from patrons such as the government of Saudi Arabia. In addition, there were the mobilising experiences of Algerian *mujahidin*, who had served in Afghanistan during the anti-USSR war of the 1980s and, on returning home, were no longer content to put up with what was regarded as un-Islamic government. There was also a large cadre of (mostly secondary) school teachers from Egypt working in Algeria. Presumably influenced by the ideas of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood or its radical offshoots, they were thought to have introduced similar radical ideas to Algerian youth. These transnational links were not, however, supported by OIC member states; rather, they were transnational popular movements whose struggles were primarily against their own rulers rather than against the West *per se*.

This development was not new. Since the beginning of Islam over 1000 years ago, Muslim critics of the status quo have periodically emerged in opposition to what they perceive as unjust rule. Contemporary Islamic radicals are the most recent example, characterising themselves as the 'just' involved in struggle against the 'unjust'. The dichotomy between 'just' and 'unjust' in the promotion of social change throughout Islamic history parallels the historic tension in the West between 'state' and 'civil society'. The implication is that the 'unjust' inhabit the state while the 'just' look in from the outside, aching to perform the corrupt system. Historically, the goal of the Islamically 'just' has been to form popular consultative mechanisms in line with the idea that Muslim rulers are open to popular pressure and would seek to settle problems brought by their subjects. This concept—*shura* (consultation)—should not be equated with the Western notion of popular sovereignty, because in Islam sovereignty resides with God alone. Instead, *shura* is a way of ensuring unanimity within the community of Muslims, 'which allows for no legitimate minority position. The goal of the "just" is an Islamically based society.'[23]

The point is that the rise of radical Islam within numerous countries is primarily a result of the failure of modernisation to deliver on its promises. Etienne and Tozy argue that Islamic resurgence carries within it 'the disillusionment with progress and the disenchantments of the first 20 years of independence'.[24] Faced with state power which seeks to destroy or control the former communitarian structures and to replace them with an idea of a national citizenry based on the link between state and individual, popular (as opposed to state-controlled) Islam emerges as a vehicle of political aspirations. The Muslim awakening should be seen primarily in relation to its *domestic* capacity to oppose the state: 'It is primarily in civil society that one sees Islam at work'.[25]

Conclusion

I earlier posed the following question: should we understand the growth of trans-national Islamic groups as the result of similar processes—globalisation, nationalisation, secular involvement and voluntary establishment—that led the Catholic Church to a significant change of orientation from nation-state to civil society, both within and between countries? The global Muslim community, the *umma*, is a good example of a transnational civil society (the Roman Catholic Church is another), which, containing within it the seeds of both domination and dissent, has responded to pressures from globalisation and nationalisation. Shared beliefs, relating especially to culture, sentiments and identity, link Muslims, but they are fundamentally divided by various doctrinal issues, especially the schism between Sunni and Shia interpretations of the faith. While the rise of radical Islam was stimulated by the Iranian revolution, the fact that it was a *Shia* revolution meant that it was often difficult for Sunnis to relate to it. On the other hand, a combination of poor government, growing unemployment and generalised social crisis encouraged radical Islamic movements throughout the Muslim world to the extent that, in some cases, although they exist in a Sunni country, they nevertheless may look to *Shia* Iran for support and guidance. The failure of the OIC to provide leadership not only reflects this division within Islam but considerably undermines the extent to which the OIC is a threat to state sovereignty.

Like Islam, the Roman Catholic Church has developed extensive transnational links which have important ramifications for the development of local and inter-state religious–political cultures. Global networks of religious activists exist who communicate with each other, feed off each other's ideas, collectively develop religious ideologies with political significance, perhaps aid each other with funds, and, in effect, form transnational groups whose main intellectual referent derives from religious dogma which is of much greater relevance to them than the traditional ideological mobilisers, such as nationalism, communism, fascism or liberal democracy. Their goal is the creation of communities of believers where God's will is supreme and temporal government downgraded or replaced. Over the last few decades, interpersonal communications have been greatly facilitated by the mass use of the telegraph, telephone, personal computer, email, and fax machine. This communications revolution helped stimulate a globalisation of ideas which governments could not control, such as the importance of human rights and democracy. Like Islamic radicals, the Catholic Church was influential in some national contexts in helping undermine the hegemony of authoritarian governments but this should not be seen as a more general threat to state sovereignty.

Notes

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2 Weigel, quoted in S Huntington, 'The clash of civilizations?', *Foreign Affairs*, 72(3), 1993, p 26.

[3] P Beyer, *Religion and Globalization*, London, Sage, 1994, p 1.

[4] S Rudolph & J Piscatori (eds), *Transnational Religion and Fading States*, Boulder, CO, Westview Press, 1997; J Piscatori, 'Religious transnationalism and global order, with particular consideration of Islam', in J Esposito & M Watson (eds), *Religion and Global Order*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2000.

[5] F Bealey, *The Blackwell Dictionary of Political Science*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1999, p 306.

[6] C Bretherton, 'Universal human rights', in C Bretherton & G Ponton (eds), *Global Politics. An Introduction*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1996, pp 243–268.

[7] R Lipschutz, 'Reconstructing world politics: the emergence of global civil society', *Millennium*, 21(3), 1992, p 390.

[8] F Attina, 'The study of international relations in Italy', in H Dyer & L Mangasarian (eds), *The Study of International Relations. The State of the Art*, London, Macmillan, 1989, pp 350–351.

[9] J Haynes, *Religion in Global Politics*, London, Longman, 1998, pp 56–59.

[10] M d'Antonio, *Fall from Grace. The Failed Crusade of the Christian Right*, London, Deutsch, 1990.

[11] J Haynes, *Religion and Politics in Africa*, London, Zed, 1996, p 91.

[12] D Rueschemeyer, E Stephens & J Stephens, *Capitalist Development and Democracy*, Cambridge, Polity, 1992, p 281.

[13] A Hastings, *A History of African Christianity, 1950–75*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979, p 173.

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[15] Haynes, *Religion in Global Politics*, pp 93–94.

[16] J Witte, Jr, 'Introduction' in Witte (ed), *Christianity and Democracy in Global Context*, Westview, CO, Boulder, 1993, p 11.

[17] P Gifford, 'Some recent developments in African Christianity', *African Affairs*, 93(373), 1994, pp 513–534.

[18] Z Sardar, *Islamic Futures. The Shape of Ideas to Come*, London, Mansell, 1985, pp 51–52.

[19] Huntington, 'The clash of civilizations?'.

[20] Haynes, *Religion in Global Politics*, p 221.

[21] *Sunday Triumph* (Lagos), 23 February 1986.

[22] J Haynes, *Religion in Third World Politics*, Buckingham, Open University Press, 1993, pp 122–144.

[23] S Dorr, 'Democratization in the Middle East', in R Slater, B Schutz & S Dorr (eds), *Global Transformation and the Third World*, Boulder, CO, Lynne Rienner, 1993, p 151.

[24] B Etienne & M Tozy, 'Le glissement des obligations islamiques vers le phénomène associatif à Casablanca', in Centre de Recherches et d'Etudes sur les Sociétés Mediterranéennes, *Les Maghreb Musulman en 1979*, Paris, CNRS, p 251, quoted in C Coulon, *Les Musulmans et le Pouvoir en Afrique Noire*, Paris, Karthala, p 48.

[25] Coulon, *Les Musulmans et le Pouvoir en Afrique Noire*, p 49.