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The Core of the Clash of Civilizations.

Religious nationalism as an alternative to the secular West – Mark Jurgensmeyer's thoughts and their context[1]

Ondřej Liška

In Sri Lanka, India, Iran, Egypt, Algeria, Afghanistan, Mongolia, Central Asia, Eastern Europe and other areas, where independent nations are experimenting with nationalism of a religious nature, there is much more than a mere revival of archaic ideas of religious domination. A new phenomenon is occurring: the synthesis between religion and the secular state, the permeation of cultural identities and the legitimacy of old religiously defined monarchies with a democratic spirit and the organizational unity of a modern industrial society.

M. Juergensmeyer

Time and Place

The change in the global situation, caused by the breakdown of the bipolar order at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, drew the attention of two very well-known academics from American intellectual circles, the political scientist Francis Fukuyama and Samuel Huntington, professor of international relations at Harvard university. Fukuyama's essay, "The End of History?"[2] was written in mid 1989, when Communism, the greatest enemy of the liberal democracies, was drawing to a close. The theme of the aforementioned essay was later developed into a book.[3] Fukuyama claimed that liberal ideals within the sphere of democracy, the market and human rights had finally *de iure* triumphed. With the title "The End of History?" he implied that a fundamental consensus on the values, upon which society is based, had been reached.

However, Huntington's response, which was published four years later, under the title "The Clash of Civilizations?"[4] reflected a considerab-

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1   Mark Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism confronts the secular state*, Berkeley – Los Angeles: University of California Press 1993, ix-xiv, 292 s.

2   Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?", *The National Interest*, Summer 1989.

3   Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York: Harmondsworth 1992.

4   Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?", *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 72/3, Summer 1993. He clarified his concept in his book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, 1996.

le change in geo-political relations. In his opinion, the end of the bipolar confrontation would pave the way for a new type of conflict – in which there would be no longer only two protagonists but between a number of competing civilizations, which can be identified by the existence of mutually non-transferable cultural patterns. Whilst Japanese and Russian civilizations have much in common with Euro-Atlantic societies and there is no real threat of acute conflict, it is necessary to be aware of possible acute conflicts with Islamic and Confucian cultural spheres. In Huntington's opinion it is precisely Islamic countries that pose and will pose the greatest threat. As we have seen a number of conflicts have taken place along the borders of the Muslim territory, for example in Bosnia, in the Middle East and in Central Asia.

Huntington ended the title of his work with a question mark. This implies that the author put forward the themes in his book as ongoing analysis, a study of future perspectives or a call to provocation. However, the American sociologist failed to create an ongoing study. He has often been criticised for his interpretation of history and his essentialist view of cultural groups. It would be a mistake to reduce the struggle of Bosnian Muslims or Palestinian Arabs to a mere religious conflict or a clash of civilizations. Thus one would simply ignore a number of actual and very sound causes. Huntington's rhetoric, which implies amongst other things homogeneity and a static nature of cultures is consistent with American neoconservatism with its "fundamentalist" tendencies, which environment is Huntington occasionally put into relation with.

Huntington's ideas gained an extraordinary amount of publicity, due to the striking marketing slogan, which was the title of his article and later, the book of the same name. It was clear from the wide response to his work that the Harvard academic concurred with grave concerns regarding the global political order, and its radical difference to the previous decade, which were circling at the time. One has to be careful with the performative impact of theoretical constructions and shallow slogans found frequently in the media's simplification of ideas regarding culture clashes. Totalitarian regimes like China, for example, can then obligingly refer to the fundamental cultural differences of their 'Confucian civilization' to the secular West if denounced for human rights abuse. Even Czech newsreaders are guilty of drawing comparisons between bombings carried out by Islamic fundamentalists, the problems in multiethnic Bosnia and events in Central Asia and lumping them together under the title oriental studies, in a bid to inform the public that what is happening *is really a clash of civilizations, as US academic Samuel Huntington claims.*

The reaction

Although, the theories mentioned are discussed from time to time in Czech universities and institutes, unlike in the West answers are rarely proffered. Gilles Kepel's book "God's Revenge",[5] which has been translated into Czech, can also be added amongst the well-known works of Fukuyama and Huntington. Kepel's work attempts to synoptically follow the so-called fundamentalist movements in contemporary Islam, Christianity and Judaism and place them into their specific political context. Although, it contains a great many facts it does not provide a consistent methodological framework within which to make comparisons, which in turn makes some conclusions questionable.[6]

The most well known and widely used writing which negatively answers Huntington's question is the work of Islamologist, John L. Esposito, and in particular *The Islamic Threat – Myth or Reality?* (1992). In this work he convincingly illustrates the extremely wide spectrum of Islamic movements and refuzes the distorted notion of a rigid and homogeneous Muslim society. Sharing Esposito's opinion are the accomplished works of two domestic Orientalists, Luboš Kropáček and Miloš Mendel.[7]

The Californian professor of Sociology, Mark Juergensmeyer also has an interesting slant on the subject, in his book *The New Cold War? Religious nationalism confronts the secular state* (1993). To a degree, the author accepts Huntington's definition of religious nationalism as a potentially destructive weapon in world politics. However, Juergensmeyer in contrast to Huntington, carried out field research in the areas discussed in his book. The book's originality stems from the fact that he applies theoretical interpretations to numerous authentic interviews conducted with Sikhs in explosive Punjab, militant Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka, Hindu nationalists in India, religious activists in Egypt, Iran, Israel, Israeli occupied Palestine, Mongolia and Central Asia amongst others. Despite efforts to remain neutral, Professor Juergensmeyer has received some criticism. His position can be characterised as middle of the road. Huntington draws certain conclusions, which show his fear of a fundamental conflict, especially in questions of the coexistence of a secular and religious order.

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5 Gilles Kepel, *Boží pomsta. Křesťané, židé a muslimové znovu dobývají svět*, Brno: Atlantis 1996.

6 For a criticism of the book by Gilles Kepel see Pavel Barša, „Soumrak osvícenství. Francouzský pohled na posilování role náboženství v současné politice", *Politologický časopis* 1997, č. 3.

7 See, for example Miloš Mendel, *Islámská výzva. Z dějin a současnosti politického islámu*, Brno: Atlantis 1994; Luboš Kropáček, *Islámský fundamentalismus*, Praha: Vyšehrad 1996. For a summary and introduction to the theme see Luboš Kropáček, „O islámském radikalismu vícestranně a rozvážně", *Nový Orient* 1996, 4, 121-124.

Juergensmeyer's book is written in three closely interrelated parts. The first refers to nationalism and its confrontation with the religion. A study of examples of conflict forms the second part. Juergensmeyer examines the use of violence by religious nationalists and their stance towards democracy and Western rhetoric on human rights in the last part. The conclusion is dedicated to the coexistence of secular and religious nationalism.

Who are Religious Nationalists

The New World Order that has replaced the bipolar status of the Cold War, is not, according to Juergensmeyer, characterised by the rise of new economic powers, the fall of old empires, the fall of communism, but also by the rise of parochial identities based on ethnic and religious affiliations. Religious nationalists are more than religious fanatics. They are political activists that are attempting to reform the modern language of politics and bring about a new basis for the nation state. In their opinion, both western types of state – communist and democratic – have failed. For this reason they believe that a religious basis offers an alternative that can bring forth social change and a base for criticism. According to Juergensmeyer, the protagonists of this new nationalism are capable of creating a conflict with the secular West that would result in a new Cold War.

Juergensmeyer's definition of religious nationalists is very close to what others call religious *fundamentalism*. The author refuses to use this term due to its vagueness. He prefers to use the term *antimodernism*, whose root, modernism, allows the author to distinguish between those who are *modern* (they accept modern society) and *modernists* (who go further and believe in a secular ideology). The term *fundamentalism* also implies that it is a purely religious stance. These religious activists are, however, deeply interested in the social problems of their community. Therefore if they connect their religious perspective with a political and social perspective it is necessary to speak of religious nationalists.

Secular Nationalism and Religion –
Competing Ideologies of Order

The administrative scope of political centres was, until the 18th century so limited that it cannot be referred to as that of a modern state. It was the development of communications, market, and mass education, which enabled generations to become part of a homogenous society, which entailed the birth of parliamentary democracy and the rise of the nation state. The link that fuelled the rise of the nation state was the idea of nationalism that individuals are naturally connected to the population and the place of the-

ir birth (or of adoptive homelands such as the USA), which is economically and politically the same as a nation state. Secular nationalism was considered as not only natural but also as universal and morally correct. Even though the division of mankind into nations was seen as almost a process of Natural Law, it was not regarded as God' s wish or part of nature, but as a demonstration of the wishes of the citizens. It was a manifestation of an enlightened view on the human species.

The retreating colonial powers left borders and political institutions behind them. The borders of the "Third World" kept this continuity, despite the fact that they often did not respect the borders of ethnic and linguistic communities. The leaders of these new national entities, in for example Egypt or India, adopted the principles of secular nationalism as part of a legitimisation process. As a result the inhabitants began to regard their secular national identity as powerful as their traditional religious identity. According to Juergensmeyer this process resulted in nationalism becoming an *over-religion* to which society turned regardless of religious persuasion. Already in 1955, Hans Kohn the American nationalist historian was convinced that secular nationalism had replaced religion.

> To understand nationalism and its implications for the modern world is as fundamental as to understand the role of Christianity in the 13th century.

The similarity between secular nationalism and religion is obvious in Juergensmeyer's opinion. Arlie Hoover spoke of this closeness with regard to the "doctrine of fate" that both systems contain. Ninian Smart specified six criteria where secular nationalism and religion have common ground – doctrine, myth, ethics, ritual, experiences and social organization. Juergensmeyer refers to a new concept that connects the foundations of secular nationalism and religion – *The ideology of order.* When he speaks of ideology he uses the term in the same sense as Clifford Geertz, who speaks of ideology as a cultural system, which entails political and religious systems as well as other systems that do not fit into either category. Both *Ideologies of Order* – secular nationalism and religion – define the individual's method of existence and his relation to society. This conceptual similarity gives Juergensmeyer the space to regard religion and secular nationalism as potential rivals.

The Rejection of Secular Nationalism

Secular nationalism is a product of western civilization. Its construction as an ideology has been rid of the holy aura and brought a clear division, not only in European thought, but also in Christianity between matters that pertain to God and matters that pertain to people.

Christianisation and secularisation are connected by a dialectic relationship, as Juergensmeyer quotes A. T van Leeuwen, the theologian. This means that when secular nationalism is transferred to a different environment it still retains a cultural content, which is indivisible from European tradition.

Secular nationalism registered great growth in at the end of the colonisation period, not due to its universal validity, but due to the fact that it was consciously adapted to particular situations. The new state leaders utilised it as a means for legitimacy for the emerging political regimes.

Leeuwen's words are confirmed by the statements of religious and political leaders from formerly colonies countries. Juergensmeyer quotes Islamic leaders that view secular nationalism as a type of faith as in their opinion it fills the same needs as religion – as Islam in Muslim societies and as Hinduism and Sikhism in Indian society. The aforementioned leaders believe that this new ideology should be referred to as Christian or European cultural nationalism. One of the Islamic leaders noted that the West is not as secular as it claims due to the fact that many countries have Christian governments i.e. the governing parties have the word Christian in their name.[8]

The fact that secular nationalism does not have a culturally indifferent content has formed the opinions of politically engaged religious activists. The statements of Iranian leaders are often mentioned in that the reason behind the Islamic revolution was not purely political liberation, but also to liberate themselves from the Western way of thinking.[9] Certain religious nationalists believe in a global conspiracy against religion instigated by the United States. As a result certain Islamic groups in Egypt revoked their initial condemnation on the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait after the USA sent thousands of soldiers.

An extreme example of this is the satanisation of Western leaders. The Palestinian Islamic movement Hamas labelled George Bush as "The leader of the forces of evil and false gods" during the Gulf War. Jimmy Carter was similarly called Jazid by the Ayatollah Khomeini, i.e. the messenger

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8   There are other attempts to describe the ideological (religious) base of secular national communities e.g. France or the USA. The concept of "civic religion" of Americans and the French was developed chiefly by the sociologist Robert Bellah. He states that the addition of religious elements into the vocabulary of secular national identification, stops religion assuming an anti-national character, enables religious legitimacy of the state and gives nationalism a religious aura.

9   The Persian word gharbzadegi has been used in this context, "westoxification" or "westomania" in English. The term comes from an essay by Jalál Ál-e Ahmad in 1962 and it defines customs, dress, opinions, which symbolise Western civilization and Islamic society should rid itself of. The "decolonisation of the soul", which should follow the political and economic decolonisation was mentioned by Francois Burgat in *L'islamisme en face,* Paris: La Découverte 1995.

of Satan. This probe into the vocabulary of religious nationalists is the final point made by Juergensmeyer when ascertaining the political competitive strength of religious and secular political systems. This illustrates that secular nationalism is seen and described in religious terms by the other side and therefore perceived as a religious phenomenon.

Case Study: Jewish Israel and Muslim Palestine

As was already mentioned the contribution of Juergensmeyer's study is in its appropriate ratio of theoretical and empirical sequences of text. The first part of the book mentions several concrete examples of conflicts between religious activists and the secular state. The middle part is dedicated to case studies. In order to illustrate the dialectics of the confrontation between religious and secular nationalists, let us take a short look at the Middle East as viewed by Juergensmeyer.

Theodor Herzl, at first Zionist congress in 1897, put forward the idea that a modern national community should be set up for cultural and historic legacy of the Jewish nation. The original idea was not to recreate Israel in its biblical form. Herzl's opponents, Merkaz, Ruhani and Mizrahi formed nationalist groups who demanded that the creation of the state of Israel be carried out according to the principles of the Torah. Apart from these two movements there was also a group of Orthodox Jews – Agudat Israel – which supported the resettling of Palestine, but not the creation of a Jewish state. This was meant to come later when the Temple in Jerusalem would be rebuilt and a new King David would assume the throne.

Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak ha-Kohen Kuk (Kook) the former High Rabbi under the British Protectorate of Palestine advocated the view that the new secular state was a preliminary to a religious state that would come when the territory of Palestine was religiously cleansed, enabling the Messiah to come. The obstacle of Palestinian Arabs would be dealt with either by peaceful or other means. Rabbi Kahane a Jewish political activist from Brooklyn, who settled in Israel in 1971, held even more radical views. Three years later he founded a political party know as Kach, whose goal it was to run the state strictly according to religious law. The Kach party was banned in 1988 for its racist and anti-democratic views. Rabbi Kahane was labelled the "Jewish Nazi" by the American media as many of his statements about Palestinians were similar to those made by Hitler on the Jews.

Israeli state leaders and the Palestine Liberation Organization reached a partial agreement in 1993. Simultaneously, Jewish and Muslim nationalists began rioting in protest of each other's groups and at their own secular leaders. The most unified underground force on the Palestinian side was Hamas, whose ideological leader is regarded as Sheikh Ahmed Yasin.

In an interview with Juergensmeyer he stated, "After the liberation of Palestine the people will decide whether or not to set up and Islamic state". In anonymous communiqués, Hamas describe the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis as *a battle between good and evil.*

Juergensmeyer analysed the vocabulary used by religious nationalists and discusses to what degree they marginalise themselves from the existing secular state. At this point one could criticise the author as he compares religious movements in the Middle East, Sri Lanka and India with the rhetoric of religious institutions of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The author fails to mention that the resistance of religious leaders to the communist system was done in the name of human rights and not as a method to create a holy state and that often leaders of various religious and political groups often co-operated. Juergensmeyer has seemingly overlooked that in the vocabulary of the religious nationalists a primary demand is that a regime be set up according to Holy Law. One must also ask whether there are other factors to the conflict such as political, racial or economic discrimination. It also necessary to say that religion is an effective method how to identify, conceptually analyse and delegitimise opponents – for example the secular state.

Theocracy or Democracy?

What is the political alternative that religious nationalists offer? Juergensmeyer maintains that the rejection of secular nationalism does not necessarily mean the rejection of democratic principles. A majority of religious leaders regard democracy as a necessity for a modern state. For example, the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran or the political platform of the Indian Popular Party both bear great similarity to Western political ideals. It is however, necessary to ask to what degree these political ideals are adhered to. It seems that religious nationalists accept the idea of democracy, but reject certain specific procedures. The TRUTH is above all democratic mechanisms as Rabbi Kahane states, "You can't vote about the truth". The use of democracy is often for specific goals. The leader of the Egyptian Muslim brotherhood stated, "if 80% of Egypt's inhabitants are Muslim then Egypt should be a Muslim state". So democracy is seen here as a method of putting forward the wishes of the majority. The leading positions in religious nationalist movements are in certain cases carried out by spiritual leaders, mullahs, sheikhs, rabbis or gurus, however the majority are laymen. Juergensmeyer maintains that the voting process as a method of choice of leader in revolutionary religious movements has become standard practise. If this is a label of democracy then religious nationalists are as democratic as secular politicians. The point where religious nationalism has a conflict with the theory of democracy is

whether the democratic system can legitimise itself – which they natural-ly reject. The secular state is missing a proper moral code. As one activist stated: "A democratic gang of crooks is still a gang of crooks."

The main difference between the secular and religious understanding of the political system is in the concept of law. So even though the Iranian constitution and the programmes of religious activists include the rights of minorities, freedom of speech etc. they do not see these as a right of an in-dividual in regard to the state, but more as list of responsibilities that binds the individual to society. They all present emphasis on the communal as-pect of the political system to the detriment of the individual.

Can we co-exist with religious nationalism?

In a time of changes in the global political system, local cultures have reached for their roots and identities, which naturally entail religion as one of the constants in a world of political and economic insecurities. The ma-terial expectations accompanied by secular nationalism often led to frust-ration as they could not be fulfilled within one lifetime. The expectations offered in religious ideologies cannot lead to frustration in the same way, as their fulfilment will not take place on this world. Will this confrontation between secular and religious nationalism lead to a Cold War? Juergensmeyer leaves this possibility open in his conclusion. He does not conclude with Huntington's sceptical view but mentions several points, which will need to be addressed in the future.

He argues for greater foresight than was practised in the Cold War with the communist ideology. It will be necessary to make distinction between various movements and to realise with which it will be possible to co-exist and with which it will not. He categorically rejects tolerance to de-magogy and dictatorship, violence and hatred. The author believes that certain phenomena can leads to co-existence and the challenge will be to take a new look at nationalism and the communal values of religious so-cieties.

Juergensmeyer's conclusion is not far from the model formed by Albert Hirschman,[10] who differentiates between two types of conflict, the "more or less" conflict and the "either / or" conflict, whereas Huntington works in "either / or" conflicts. Hirschman appeals for a move towards the "mo-re or less" conflict with destructive forces. It is only in this type of con-flict that a solution can be attained.

Hirschman mentions another point that those who have "power to defi-ne" will not have any interest in converting the conflict into a "more or

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10 Albert O. Hirschman, "Comment", in: *Wieviel Gemeinsinn braucht die liberale Gesellschaft?* Hamburg: Bergedorfer Gesprächskreis 1993.

less" conflict. On the contrary, there is a threat that the winning definition will become the "all or nothing" stance, because this is the most simple and does not require the time consuming process of finding a solution. Therefore it is necessary to be certain to what degree the interpretation of the conflict is based on fact and how much is based on the ideological base of the author.