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Proselytizing and the Limits of Religious Pluralism in Contemporary Asia

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Preface and Acknowledgments

Most mornings, a small group of Falun Gong practitioners sits under the Esplanade Bridge in Singapore's city center. They meditate, study, and practice the slow-moving *qigong* exercises for which they are known. They distribute pamphlets in both Chinese and English, and they're usually gone before the lunch crowds arrive. These activities might not surprise many observers, but as I jog by these six or seven practitioners every morning, I think about another Falun Gong practitioner who was sent to jail in Singapore in November 2010 for harassment. To be sure, Huang Caihua had some different ideas about advancing the cause. By carrying a poster in front of the Chinese embassy in Singapore, she had pushed past the limits of what the government deems "acceptable" proselytizing, and she had been punished accordingly.

The Singaporean government's different treatment of these two examples of proselytizing—one quiet and discreet, the other loud and unavoidably public—poses some challenging questions about the freedoms of religion and speech in contemporary Asia. On the one hand are the quiet and unobtrusive Falun Gong proselytizers without big signs, but no less interested in pressing their religion on a curious passerby. On the other hand is an in-your-face proselytizer who refuses to be ignored in her quest to advocate for a minority group's religious freedom in a way that engages highly public expressions of religious identity in addition to individual ones. The coexistence of these two different instances of Falun Gong proselytization in contemporary Singapore highlights some critical points around which the state determines the limits to acceptable proselytizing in its multi-religious society. Like Singapore, many other contemporary Asian states similarly frame issues of proselytizing in terms of a choice between allowing for individual religious freedom and/or maintaining religious harmony. Singapore tends to favor religious harmony over religious freedom, and thus highly visible acts of proselytizing are forbidden. But this is not the only metric, as surely the practitioners at the Esplanade would not fare so well if they attempted to distribute literature to Muslims or children, both of whom constitute "vulnerable populations," toward whom the Singapore state takes an active role as "protector." Falun Gong members advocate peace, but what if they promoted a more exclusivist message? What if the group were not part

of a transnational network that had antagonized an emerging global superpower? And what if Huang Caihua had carried a smaller banner?

As my co-editor, Michael Feener, and I were conceiving this volume, we could think of many such examples that highlight the uneven ways governments seek to establish and enforce limits to acceptable religious proselytizing. We could also think of many examples of the unpredictable ways religious practitioners seek to navigate this complicated terrain. Proselytizing—or the attempts by a group or individual to encourage the conversion of others—tests the limits of religious pluralism, as it is a practice that exists on the border of tolerance and intolerance. "I have a right to the free exercise of my religion," as José Casanova has articulated this tension at the heart of proselytizing, "but this right will inevitably clash with the right of others to the free exercise of their religion(s)" (Casanova 2010). The practice of proselytizing presupposes not only that people are freely choosing agents and that religion itself is an issue of individual preference, but also that the choice one makes to adhere to a particular religion is one that can be clearly evaluated as being "right" or "wrong." As such, conversations about religious responses to "others" in the global era have largely focused on groups that embrace an intolerant fundamentalism on the one hand or those that embrace a much more tolerant religious pluralism on the other. Yet a wide range of newly emergent religious groups and institutions occupy a grey area in between these two extreme positions. This volume brings together a range of focused studies that explore this grey area through a consideration of diverse cases of proselytizing and responses to it in contemporary Asia. While comprehensive coverage of this large and complex area is impossible, the studies collected here use concrete case studies to highlight important aspects of broader dynamics at work across the region.

In contemporary Asian contexts of hyperdiversity, questions about the limits of acceptable proselytization take on added urgency, both because of unprecedented situations of diversity and because of Asia's legacy of European Christian missionary activity. Religious groups—both new religious groups, as well as traditional religious groups that take new globalized and transnational forms—respond to *global* processes through adopting new and creative ways of reaching out to non-member "others" and encouraging their conversion. Many invoke global human rights discourses to frame their claims to the freedom of religious belief and practice, and many more invoke this same language to argue for their freedom to be left alone. And yet, it is an assumption of this volume that governments retain singularly important roles in establishing and policing the contours of the *national* landscapes on which religious groups practice. The controversy that erupted in Sri Lanka over tsunami relief efforts by Christian groups reflects tensions felt across Asia and beyond, fueled as it was by the threat of an imperial bundle of values that are simultaneously Western, Christian, and capitalist. It is also a deeply national controversy, as much about accepting badly needed aid as it is about Sri Lanka's identity and about the country's position on religious freedom and religious harmony. Malaysian practitioners of the Buddhist new religion Soka Gakkai in Kuala Lumpur find it nearly impossible to be granted permits for interfaith events because of government fears that such events mask efforts at proselytizing. Chinese Buddhists

in the People's Republic of China accept government funds to build and restore temples, while gamely accepting the inevitability that these temples will become more like museums and tourist attractions than sites of religious practice.

Religion and religiosity "on the ground" take on new and complex forms in the contemporary world, whether we describe that world as secular, post-secular, modern, or global. The boundaries and interfaces among and within different religious groups seem simultaneously more blurry and more fixed, and what it means to reach across these boundaries—peacefully or coercively—is a source of contestation across Asia. Of course, "the ground" itself has also shifted in the global era. Nation-states reckon with new sources of authority as they mold the contours of these religious landscapes and manage these boundaries and interfaces. Contributors to this volume explore these contours—and fault lines—across a range of diverse settings by drawing them into the larger social, political, and legal context of lived religion in contemporary Asia.

While it is beyond the scope of this volume to consider whether there is something essentially "Asian" about the contemporary Asian context, a few words are in order about our decision to focus these studies in Asia. On one level, considering proselytizing in Asia is, descriptively speaking, interesting in its own right given the rapidity of social and political change across the continent and the reorganization of religious authority that has come alongside these changes. On a more profound level, the decision to focus on Asia acknowledges that Asian nations are relative newcomers to discussions about the limits of proselytizing, at least in the ways we've grown to recognize these discussions in the United States and Europe. The contemporary valorization of the *inalienable rights* to freedom of conscience and freedom of religion is rooted in the wars of religion in early modern Europe. The genealogy is familiar; it traces a path through Europe's colonization of America and then the colonization of much of Asia and Africa. The same belief in the inalienable right of an individual to religious self-determination led the colonists to seek religious freedom in the New World and led missionaries to fan out in search of new converts in Asia and Africa. At a national level in Europe and the United States, regulatory regimes developed on the premise that religion is a matter of personal choice about which—ideally—governments should be neutral.

These genealogies are somewhat different in Asia—a difference that arises as much from the fact that Asian countries have been on the receiving end of colonial projects as from a continuing deep suspicion of Christian missionaries and other religious outsiders. These histories form a crucial context in which debates over proselytizing take place today. And yet, Asian nations are at the vanguard of forming new frameworks to regulate what Michael Feener describes as the "points of friction and rupture" that characterize these situations of religious diversity, frameworks in which it might not be contradictory for a government to be "democratic" while simultaneously favoring a specific religious tradition. These emergent regulatory frameworks are situated in a broader international context in which sovereign nations commonly invoke the common language of rights and law to justify their national regimes. At the same time that they invoke the language of universal rights, they question a primary assumption about proselytizing that is carried in this very

language—namely, that the world has been constituted primarily by self-determining and discrete religious actors since the fifteenth century. Believers in China and Japan may give famously convoluted answers to the question, "What religion do you adhere to?" But it is not only they for whom religious communities are more than merely voluntary associations. Situating these studies in Asia, then, is not a conclusion as much as it is another way of asking these questions from a different vantage point.

We approach these questions about proselytizing and religious pluralism at a number of different levels, bringing to bear a range of disciplinary backgrounds on these pressing questions about religious freedom, religious self-determination, and religious expression—and their limits—in increasingly crowded public spaces in Asia. The essays collected in this volume are organized thematically around the central theme of proselytizing and cover a broad range of national and confessional contexts across Asia. In general, we have tried to work our way from the most macro-level papers, that is, papers that engage these questions at the level of government and legal frameworks, to the most intimate micro-level, that is, papers focused on the practitioners and in which the state is a spectral presence. Thus we start with Michael Feener's introductory essay, which serves as an overview of the main tensions and fault lines in these debates across Asia and offers a critical intervention in theoretical conversations about proselytizing in the global age. At the same time, we recognize the organization of the volume's contributions is somewhat artificial, as all papers engage a common set of questions and concerns about proselytizing—both in terms of the practice of proselytizing and in terms of the contours of the national landscapes upon which proselytizers act. Thus we encourage readers to read the essays—which are not subdivided into separate sections—in the spirit of these common questions.

After Feener's introductory essay, we have another set of essays whose primary focus is these broader contexts. Melissa Crouch explores state-level dynamics in Indonesia through the lens of democratic legal reforms that make it an offense to proselytize children through dishonest means. Crouch uses the example of the "Proselytization Case," in which three teachers were found guilty of this offense, to explore these legal dynamics. She concludes the chapter with a consideration of the extent to which the state and the courts are responding to conservative Muslim demands for greater regulation of proselytization activities, potentially narrowing the limits of pluralism, and argues that it is unclear whether limitations on proselytization in Indonesia—the largest Muslim-majority democratic country in the world—have led to the promotion of pluralism while still ensuring protection for religious minorities.

Sophie Lemière explores similar dynamics in Malaysia, where the free exercise of religion is protected, even as severe restrictions exist when it comes to proselytizing the state's Muslim majority. Because "religion" is an ethnic label in Malaysia, Malays *are* and *must remain* Muslims, by definition. Christians as well as other missionary groups are seen as a threat to the Muslim community by most Islamic or Muslim groups. As is true in Indonesia, the state has an interest not just in preserving social harmony, but also in maintaining the religious and political dominance of

the Muslim majority. By exploring the management of religious diversity by the government, Lemière ultimately concludes that both the political regulation and social perception of proselytizing are sources of recurrent tensions between religious groups, and are jeopardizing the social balance of this plural society.

Exercising control over the legal definition of "religion" is a significant way states seek to regulate religious practice. Francesca Tarocco explores some of these regulatory strategies in China, where the government exerts tight ideological and administrative control over the religious sphere in its quest to create a "harmonious society" (*hexie shehui*/和谐社会). In spite of strict regulation and occasional government crackdowns, religious groups in many parts of China have been actively reassembling networks of practitioners and reconstructing religious sites over the past 25 years. Tarocco argues that contemporary practices must be seen in the context of earlier Buddhist attempts to recontextualize cultural heritage in the face of nation-builders. Having acquainted themselves with the emerging modern vocabulary of religion, elite Buddhist activists negotiate a legitimate place for Buddhist practices and worldviews in relation to proselytizing in the context of the prevailing secular and nationalist agendas in China.

The Singapore context offers many examples of the struggle on the part of the government to seize control of the signifier "religion" and codify it into legally enforceable regulatory frameworks. Like Tarocco, Daniel Goh also shows that describing a governmental regime as "secular" with respect to proselytizing often obscures as much as it illuminates. Goh analyzes the contemporary struggle of evangelical Christians in Singapore in order to explore the imbrication of secularism with religious pluralism in the making of this postcolonial, capitalist society. While Christians—and especially Evangelical Protestants—constitute the fastest-growing religion in contemporary Singapore, they still face two main obstacles to further growth: state regulation and religious pluralism. In response, evangelicals attempt to Christianize the secular public sphere and bolster flagging revivalism by redefining—or "displacing"—the boundary markers between the secular and the religious. Singapore's Evangelicals have effectuated these displacements in the arenas of the mass media, capitalist markets, and civil society, and have faltered against the state-enforced, self-regulating secularity in these public spheres.

Rodney Sebastian's chapter presents an in-depth study of how Singapore's government regulates the religious practice of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness—a group more commonly referred to as the Hare Krishnas—through denying the group legal status as a religion. In arguing that ISKCON has adjusted its proselytization methods to gain acceptance in Singapore, Sebastian argues that religious groups in Singapore that do not enjoy the favor of the state have limited fluidity and religious freedom. The Yiguan Dao discussed by Francis Lim has also adjusted its incursions into Singaporean public space in order to effectively proselytize. Unlike ISKCON and Evangelical Christians in Singapore, however, the Yiguan Dao has moved inward in an attempt to secure the freedom to practice. The group has utilized the modern social distinction between the "private" and "public" spheres to effectively propagate itself through the establishment of "house temples." This strategy minimizes competition with other religions in "public" spaces while

at the same time ensuring close surveillance of its members. It also serves to reassert the group's religious character to its members, while presenting itself as a spiritual group to outsiders.

Another way in which religious groups challenge governmental regulatory strategies is through the elision of the "cultural" and the "religious," as discussed in my study of the Soka Gakkai in Singapore. Members of this lay new Buddhist group embrace a "both/and" approach to proselytizing, in which they promote pluralist values about religious tolerance while gently encouraging the conversion of others. They do this in part through their commitment to interreligious dialogue, though they have redefined "dialogue" in a Buddhist light. The line between "religion" and "culture" in Asian contexts is similarly blurry in the case of Tzu Chi, another Buddhist new religious movement that is the focus of C. Julia Huang's chapter. Tzu Chi operates with a strong mission of international humanitarianism and local social welfare, two main avenues by which it has sought to develop beyond the Chinese diaspora. The group maintains its policy of not deliberately missionizing and at the same time emphatically features proselytization of non-Chinese in its media. This reorientation of its proselytizing efforts comes as members redefine the appropriate means and targets of proselytizing through these extensive service projects, which facilitate initial and significant encounters of non-members with devotees.

The cases of Soka Gakkai and Tzu Chi show that proselytizing has important religious dimensions to practitioners, a dynamic highlighted also by Samia Huq. Huq's chapter focuses on Bangladeshi Muslim women who actively cultivate piety by coming together in religious discussion circles to engage in *da`wa*, or inviting others to the "correct" way of life. These women see *da`wa* as a meaningful way to take their piety beyond the confines of the private realm. These women articulate the relevance of *da`wa* in their lives by employing different approaches towards different groups of Muslim and non-Muslim targets, thereby showing how *da`wa*, when understood as a type of proselytizing, straddles a fine line between the tolerance of different ideas and practices and the need to have others espouse a standardized faith.

While Huq and Huang focus on the ways in which practitioners have understood the importance of proselytizing for their own religiosity, Neena Mahadev and Farish Noor instead focus primarily on the ways in which non-members have responded to proselytizing. In particular, the studies presented by both Mahadev and Noor are marked by outsiders' fear of being proselytized. In his study, Noor explores the proselytizing strategies of the transnational lay missionary movement Tablighi Jama`at in West Papua. The group has been remarkably consistent in its proselytizing strategies across the world, and this constancy has resulted in its making few inroads among the ethnic population in West Papua. However, Noor suggests that the fear that Christians will be more successful at proselytizing tribal peoples may force a reorientation, or at least may encourage the Tabligh to embrace a kind of "politically correct" respect for religious pluralism.

Neena Mahadev also highlights fears of being proselytized, especially by Christians, in her chapter on post-tsunami relief efforts by international faith-based charities. Christian organizations conducting relief work in predominantly Buddhist

areas raised suspicions among many nationalist politicians and Buddhist religious authorities that Christians were facilitating "unethical conversions" of vulnerable Sri Lankans through charity. Unlike the Tabligh in West Papua, the Sri Lankan Christians have developed practices that are seen as unfairly "attractive" to potential converts. By focusing on the ways in which outsiders appraise these efforts, Mahadev explores the criteria by which proselytizing is deemed ethical or unethical. Though these struggles take place in a range of everyday settings, Buddhist nationalists and Christian evangelists see their respective religious legacies on the island as the work of salvational missions, albeit ones of dramatically different sorts.

As a whole, this volume demonstrates that focused empirical studies are crucial for understanding how these complicated practices and ideas operate in contemporary societies. Tad Stahnke has argued that there are no "general solutions" to the problem of proselytizing (Stahnke 1999). We might claim that it would be just as true to say that there are few generalizations we can make about the nature of the problem itself. The efflorescence of religious propagation on the ground in Asia exceeds categorization, as it is not clear that "proselytizing" refers to a single, mutually agreed-upon category of behavior. Is it fair to similarly describe the distribution of aid in Sri Lanka and the building of a church in Indonesia as both types of proselytizing? And if so, what are the implications for a government's ability to regulate these practices? Rosalind Hackett's useful definition of proselytizing—"propagation of one's religion with the intent to convert others"—is one starting point (Hackett 2008). Yet even this inclusive definition does not reflect the entire range of behaviors associated with proselytization across Asia today—as, for example, in the case of the ruling by a special commission of India's supreme court to differentiate the act of "conversion" from the right to "propagation".[1] Regardless of the multivalent nature of the term, however, "proselytizing" continues to have strongly normative overtones, both among scholars and among religious practitioners. We cannot but help having an opinion on proselytizing.

At stake in these conversations is a global concern about the proper place for religion in rapidly changing public spheres. As legal scholar John Witte claims, proselytizing is "one of the great ironies of the democratic revolution of the modern world" (Witte 2001). Religious pluralism in a secular context is not a mere descriptor of empirical diversity. Rather it is a normative claim about the kind of harmonious coexistence among diverse religious groups that secularism is intended to make possible. Like proselytizing, religious pluralism in this normative sense is also something that one can be "for" or "against," as the cases in this volume make clear. Contemporary Asian contexts complicate the situation even further, as talk about secularism is often bundled with a host of other values, including liberalism, humanism, democracy, modernization and, often, Westernization. The ways in which these projects of religious pluralism are instantiated in Asia makes clear that projects of religious pluralism do not always carry all the values in the bundle. In offering these

[1] The context of this distinction is discussed in Michael Feener's contribution to this volume.

focused empirical studies, we hope our volume can contribute to vibrant discussion of these globally important questions about the dynamics of religious proselytizing at the limits of religious pluralism in contemporary societies.

Michael and I are grateful for the patience and commitment of the many contributors who have worked so hard both on their individual essays and also in conceiving of the volume as a whole. The groundwork for this volume was laid at a conference we held at the National University of Singapore in September 2010, which was generously funded by the Asia Research Institute with support of Director Lily Kong. Alyson Rozells, Sharon Ong, Valerie Yeo, and the ARI staff offered material, logistical, and emotional support in too many ways to count. The chapters in this volume have been enriched by the conversations we had at the workshop, and we thank all those who attended the workshop and participated in these lively discussions, including in particular Gerry Larson, Sadek Hamid, and Yohan Yoo. We are thankful for Sheena Kumari, Andrew Yeo, and Hongyan Li's careful editorial eyes on early drafts of the papers, and also for the many thoughtful comments and reflections of our reviewers. While this book would not have been possible without the contributions of a great many people, Michael and I take responsibility for any errors contained within.

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Contents

Chapter 1
Official Religions, State Secularisms, and the Structures of Religious Pluralism

R. Michael Feener

Lia Aminuddin married the Archangel Gabriel, and with the divine insights received from that union she founded a new religious movement, the Holy Kingdom of Eden (*Tahta Suci Kerajaan Eden*).[1] In 2006, and again in 2009, she was arrested and convicted under Indonesia's 1965 Law on the Prevention of Blasphemy and the Abuse of Religion.[2] The case was brought up again in 2010 as part of the testimony of the Muslim scholar Luthfi Assyaukanie at a hearing for the review of the law in Indonesia's then recently established Constitutional Court (*Mahkamah Konstitusi*).[3] There he provocatively remarked that, "Some people think she is crazy and even persecute her, just like the Prophet Muhammad in the beginning." This comment immediately sparked shouts of outrage from the gallery, packed as it was with supporters of hard-line Islamic groups including the Islamic Defender's Front (*Front Pembela Islam*/FPI) (Haryanto 2010).

[1] For a brief introduction to Lia Aminuddin and her movement, see: Önnerfors (2008).

[2] *Undang-Undang Nomor* 1/PNPS/*Tahun* 1965 *tentang Pencegahan Penyalahgunaan dan/atau Penodaan Agama.* The various charges against Lia (Eden) Aminuddin are discussed in: Crouch (2011) and Makin (2011).

[3] Indonesia's Constitutional Court (*Mahkamah Konstitusi*) was established with the passing of *Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor* 24 *Tahun* 2003. Its establishment reflected not only the new social and political ideals of Indonesia's post-Suharto period of "*Reformasi*," but also a global trend toward the proliferation of such courts worldwide at the turn of the twenty-first century. These legal developments have had a significant impact upon the state management of religious difference in diverse societies and deserve further exploration in future studies. For more on these broader international developments in the global proliferation of constitutional courts, see: Harding et al. (2008).

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The case had been brought to the court by a group of NGOs that claimed the 1965 Blasphemy Law had been frequently used to intimidate adherents of minority religions. This, the plaintiffs argued, was in violation of Article 28(E) of the Indonesian constitution, which declares that:

(1) Every person shall be free to choose and to practice the religion of his/her choice, to choose one's education, to choose one's employment, to choose one's citizenship, and to choose one's place of residence within the state territory, to leave it and to subsequently return to it.
(2) Every person shall have the right to the freedom to believe his/her faith (*kepercayaan*), and to express his/her views and thoughts, in accordance with his/her conscience.
(3) Every person shall have the right to the freedom to associate, to assemble and to express opinions.[4]

Choiral Anam, the lawyer representing the plaintiffs, argued in broad and unambiguous terms that this law, "which gives the government the power to intervene in religious matters must be annulled" (Lee and Soeriaatmadja 2010).

This argument was, however, stridently opposed by a coalition of Islamic groups, as well as the Indonesian Minister for Religious Affairs, Suryadharma Ali, and the Minister for Justice and Human Rights, Patrialis Akbar.[5] The latter argued against annulling the Law on Blasphemy, testifying in court that, "[social] friction would increase if people were allowed to make their own loose interpretations of religion," and that without the law nothing would prevent an explosion of "new religions" across the country (Rayda 2010). In the end, the Constitutional Court upheld the Blasphemy Law by an overwhelming majority, just as it had struck down an earlier challenge to another law that opponents had charged allowed for the harassment of individuals and minority groups by members of hard-line Islamic organizations.[6] In announcing the decision, Justice Muhammad Alim emphasized the importance of protecting religious teachings and the role of the state in guaranteeing religious harmony, proclaiming that, "Human Rights aren't without their limits" (Pasandaran 2010).

[4]This is the English translation of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, as amended by the First Amendment of 1999, the Second Amendment of 2000, the Third Amendment of 2001, and the Fourth Amendment of 2002, available online at: http://www.indonesia-ottawa.org/indonesia/constitution/fourth_amendment_const.pdf. Accessed June 23, 2011. The original Indonesian reads: (1) *Setiap orang bebas memeluk agama dan beribadat menurut agamanya, memilih pendidikan dan pengajaran, memilih pekerjaan, memilih kewarganegaraan, memilih tempat tinggal di wilayah negara dan meninggalkannya, serta berhak kembal.* (2) *Setiap orang berhak atas kebebasan meyakini kepercayaan, menyatakan pikiran dan sikap, sesuai dengan hati nuraninya*. (3) *Setiap orang berhak atas kebebasan berserikat, berkumpul, dan mengeluarkan pendapat.*

[5]The 322-page decision of the Constitutional Court includes digests of the remarks presented at the case from a wide range of some of Indonesia's most influential public figures and Muslim intellectuals. See: *Putusan Mahkhamah Konstitusi Nomor* 140/PUU-VII/2009. I would like to thank Mark Cammack for making this and other documents related to the case available to me.

[6]That is in the Constitutional Court's decision on Indonesia's recently passed "Anti-Pornography" Law (UU No.44/2008) of March 2010. For more on the debates surrounding this controversial law, see: Pausacker (2008, 2009, 122–124).

These Constitutional Court debates on the nature and limits of "religious freedom" in contemporary Indonesia are of critical importance to the ways in which official constructions of religious pluralism are expressed, and this in turn defines the contours of potential proselytizing activities in both their inter- and intra-religious dimensions.[7] Opposition to the move to annul the Law on Blasphemy was led by a coalition of Islamic groups that elaborated their arguments against a backdrop of fear of a threat of "Christianization" on one hand, and the prospect of losing nominal Muslims to heretical movements and "deviant teachings" on the other.[8] This Indonesian case raises a number of compelling issues for discussion and calls attention to the tensions between modern conceptions of religious freedom expressed in terms of rights, and the ways in which this discourse is differentially deployed in discussions of proselytization and religious pluralism in contemporary Asian societies. Proselytization and pluralism are linked to each other in complex ways and diversely configured in different national contexts.[9]

One major factor that has framed these disparate developments in contemporary Asian societies has been the development of global discourses on Human Rights (Witte 2007). Rosalind Hackett's important work on contemporary global processes of proselytization has emphasized the significant challenge that the politics of proselytization poses to Western-derived notions of secularism and their emphasis on the regulatory restriction of religious expression to the private sphere. In the introduction to her recent edited volume on the subject, she notes that, "proselytization often functions as the thorn in the flesh of the secular state" (Hackett 2008, 14). At the same time, however, it should be acknowledged that contemporary dynamics of proselytization are also framed within and enabled by the contours of particular governmental policies aimed at the management of religious diversity—and thus secular models of state-regulated religious pluralism actually help make proselytization possible in the first place. This tension creates its own dynamics, and when proselytization comes to be perceived as a threat to social order, then the state tends to then take new action to ensure the continuation of established (and/or desired) models of religion in society. Official restrictions on proselytization have taken diverse forms in a number of contemporary Asian nations, including Bhutan, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Uzbekistan, and Indonesia—ranging from outright bans on all proselytization to more specific

[7] A preliminary discussion of the case can be found in: Crouch (2011, 269–273).

[8] For more on this, see: Mujiburrahman (2006). On the earlier roots of these developments in Java: Ricklefs (2007, 105–125).

[9] This is evidenced, for example, in the development of regulations to manage religious diversity through such measures as the state's monitoring and control of the construction of houses of worship in local communities. For a critical review of these regulations, see: Crouch (2007). In Indonesian public discourse, debates over formal permission to build a house of worship are often conflated with broader issues of the freedom of religious practice. See, for example: Suwarni (2010).

prohibitions on the targeting of adherents of the nation's majority or official religion for conversion to another faith.[10]

Proselytization and the Limits of Religious Pluralism

Pluralism has long been a topic of extensive academic discussion, as well as an important issue of civic debate in the public sphere. The general direction of these conversations has, however, taken a significant turn over recent decades—away from more "theologizing" conversations of philosophers and scholars of comparative religions to more socially engaged discussions of negotiating difference in the public sphere and the management of diverse populations by the legal and administrative institutions of the state.[11] The social reality of religious pluralism provides the context in which diverse religious groups in a given society interact with each other on various levels. In the elaboration of conceptions of this sphere of interactions among adherents of different religious traditions, pluralism has come to mark not just an empirical acknowledgment of the religiously heterogeneous nature of society, but it also represents a set of normative ideals about how to manage the peaceful coexistence of diverse religious communities.[12]

Such public discourses on religious pluralism are, however, opposed by some religious groups, and this opposition is often elaborated with reference to the contested dynamics of religious propagation and conversion. As Bagir and Cholil have described the situation in twenty-first century Indonesia:

> Pluralism, just like liberalization and secularization, is considered a threat to the solidity or unity of the Islamic community. It is also a threat to Islamic communalism and politics. Pluralism discourse is seen as a discourse that destroys the *da`wa* (mission) movements, and the theological pillars of beliefs and the *Sharia*.[13]

This sort of reaction led the Indonesia National Council of Ulama (MUI) to issue a fatwa in 2005 condemning the evils of "secularism, pluralism and liberalism."[14]

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[10] Temperman (2010, 216–220). I would like to thank Melissa Crouch for calling this source to my attention.

[11] A brief overview of the transition in this literature can be found in: Bagir and Cholil (2008).

[12] In a number of contemporary Asian societies, including Singapore, official statements endorsing religious pluralism have been deployed specifically to counter the potential for destabilization characteristic of aggressive proselytizing. For an overview of such developments under the regulatory mechanisms of the Singapore state, see: Hill (2004).

[13] Bagir and Cholil (2008, 12).

[14] *Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia* Nomor: 7/MUNAS VII/MUI/11/2005—in which the terms are defined thusly:

1. *Pluralisme agama adalah suatu paham yang mengajarkan bahwa semua agama adalah sama dan karenanya kebenaran setiap agama adalah relatif; oleh sebab itu, setiap pemeluk agama tidak boleh mengklaim bahwa hanya agamanya saja yang benar sedangkan agama yang lain salah. Pluralisme agama juga mengajarkan bahwa semua pemeluk agama akan masuk dan hidup berdampingan di surga.*

The official clarification (*Penjelasan*) of this decision by the MUI emphasizes that its stand on pluralism was taken to defend the Muslim community from the dangers of "relativism" in the context of the current "thought war" in Indonesia.[15]

This volume presents a preliminary sketch of some of the major contours of a complex landscape, mapping diverse views on the possibilities and perils of proselytization in contemporary Asian contexts of diversity within the boundaries of particular nation-states. Proselytization is both enabled by, and simultaneously tests the limits of, religious pluralism. Proselytization assumes a situation of diversity in which individuals have the potential to change their religious identities and affiliations, while at the same time harboring ultimate goals of overcoming that diversity through the eventual conversion of the rest of society to one's own religion. It is here that we begin to discern the fault lines that emerge between claims to the right to proselytize and the simultaneous appeals for protection from proselytization by others that have defined points of friction and rupture within a number of plural societies in modern Asia. Both sides stake their claims on conceptions of what is variously (and problematically) referred to in terms of the related but not identical concepts of "religious liberty," "freedom of religion," and "freedom of conscience." Within these entangled discourses, some parties invoke these concepts to preserve their own rights to remain different and distinct, while others do so to claim their right to be able to share their truths with others. What for one side is about protecting individual rights is seen by the other as a threat to the very foundations of the community.

As anxieties over the relative weighting of the possibilities and perils presented by religious pluralism have become amplified, a range of locally situated public discourses have emerged in which proselytization as a right to express one's religion in the public sphere has been diversely reconfigured in relation (to various degrees) to understandings of "conversion." These discourses are marked by a clear trend of restrictions on conversion being advocated by members of groups who feel under threat in the pluralist public sphere. The ways in which social processes of conversion interact with the dynamics of state power are important to bear in mind for our discussions here. This is particularly crucial as the situation in many modern Asian nation-states is even further complicated by the earlier experience of European colonialism, and how that legacy has shaped particular conceptions of religious propagation and conversion that have complex associations with Christian missionary movements.

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2. *Pluralitas agama adalah sebuah kenyataan bahwa di negara atau daerah tertentu terdapat berbagai pemeluk agama yang hidup secara berdampingan.*
3. *Liberalisme agama adalah memahami nash-nash agama (Al-Qur'an & Sunnah) dengan menggunakan akal pikiran yangg bebas; dan hanya menerima doktrin-doktrin agama yang sesuai dengan akal pikiran semata.*
4. *Sekularisme agama adalah memisahkan urusan dunia dari agama; agama hanya digunakan untuk mengatur hubungan pribadi dengan Tuhan, sedangkan hubungan sesama manusia diatur hanya dengan berdasarkan kesepakatan sosial.*

[15] This official clarification can be obtained online at: http://www.mui.or.id/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_details&gid=32&Itemid=84. Accessed June 23, 2011.

Proselytization in Asian Contexts of Pluralism

Proselytization poses particular problems for many contemporary Asian nation-states. Asian societies have long been spaces of considerable religious diversity. In earlier periods, local communities and regional imperial powers worked out a range of dynamic modes of managing this diversity that was challenged and eventually disrupted by social transformations stimulated by contact with the modernizing West.[16] Colonialism brought with it new models of the plural state.[17] At the same time the expansion of Western economic and political interests in the nineteenth century also facilitated the entrance of new kinds of Christian missionary organizations into various parts of Asia. Of course, the connections between colonization and Christian mission were complex and variable over time and space—and in a number of cases, such as that of the Netherlands East Indies, European officials were less than fully supportive of the work of Christian missionaries in the territories they controlled, particularly among local Muslim populations.[18]

The influence of European missionaries in Asia was not, however, limited merely to actual conversions to Christianity. In fact, in many Asian societies the number of Christian converts remained small even after more than a century of Christian missionary presence. In such cases, ranging from Japan to India, the major impact of this encounter was outside the church, particularly in the spheres of education, publication, and social welfare programs. The modern models of religious organization and social activism introduced to Asian societies by Christian missionaries facilitated the transformation of earlier models of religious pluralism into new spaces of competitive proselytization. Among Muslims in British India, for example, the Deobandis drew actively upon the modern organizational models of colonial missionary societies and schools, including the use of the printing press to spread their own visions of Islam (Metcalf 1982, 235–238).

Similar developments took place in the Netherlands East Indies and elsewhere, often driven by new modern styles of religious reformism by groups such as Muhammadiyah and the *Persatuan Islam* (PERSIS), which actively engaged in polemics with all whom they viewed as opponents of their interpretation of "true" Islam, including Communists and Christians. These polemics were carried out in a number of fora, including well-publicized and attended public debates between PERSIS' leading spokesman A. Hassan and representatives of opposing groups.

[16]For example the Ottoman *millet* system and the imperial structures for managing religious institutions and orders in pre-modern China. For brief overviews of these systems, see: Braude (1982) and Yang (1961).

[17]A classic statement of models of colonial pluralism can be found in the work of Furnivall (1948). The importance of Furnivall's work for understanding the colonial background to contemporary issues of pluralism in Asia has been stressed by Robert Hefner (2001).

[18]For an overview of Christian missions under Dutch colonialism in the Indies, see: Aritonang and Steenbrink (2008). For more on the complexities of the relationships between Christian missionaries and the administration of Muslim subjects in Netherlands Indië, see: Laffan (2011).

The dominant tone in these debates was one that cast "Islam" as something under threat and thus demanding aggressive "defensive" measures to be taken—as reflected in the very title of PERSIS' flagship magazine, *Pembela Islam* ("Defender of Islam").[19] The interreligious tensions exacerbated by these developments became a problem inherited by the newly independent nation-state of Indonesia, and we can trace analogous developments all across Asia since the mid-twentieth century. We are still living with their legacy in the form of various groups of self-appointed defenders of particular visions of religion in what they perceive to be a hostile world.

Beyond the impact of modern missionary societies in redefining "religion" and its place in a new kind of contested public sphere, colonial states themselves introduced other dynamics into the religious landscapes of Asian societies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, particularly through the new administrative and legal frameworks introduced to manage their diverse religious populations (Benton 2002). These histories inform complex contexts for subsequent elaborations of governmental policies on religion in terms of modern secularism and "official state religions." Since 1990, most Asian states have tended to strengthen their regulatory mechanisms for dealing with religion, with an emphasis on controlling religious organizations (Fox 2008, 181–217).

In their attempts to deal with issues of religious identity and communitarianism, a number of modern Asian nations have provided stipulations concerning an "official religion" within their state constitutions. This is something most frequently commented upon in discussions of the religious politics of Muslim-majority nations such as Pakistan and Malaysia. However, this is by no means something unique to Islam in the modern world as, for example, Buddhism has also been designated the official or state-privileged religion in the current constitutions of Cambodia and Sri Lanka, as well as in Bhutan. Moreover, the power of the idea of an established official religion for the nation appears to have been exercising increasing appeal in many Asian societies over the past two decades with the rise of movements to establish an official religion even in formerly "secular" states. In 1988 Bangladesh passed a constitutional amendment making Islam the official state religion. In 2007 an attempt was also made to add an official provision for Buddhism in the constitution of Thailand. When this last measure failed to receive the support of the Constitutional Assembly, Buddhist monks and Thai political activists took to the streets in protest.

Despite the recent upswing of such movements for the establishment of "official" religions, "secular"—or at least non-confessional—constitutions with little or no specific provisions for "religion" were much more common when many Asian nation-states were formed in the mid-twentieth century. The forms that such state secularism have taken are extremely diverse, ranging from the forced abandonment of state Shinto in the American-modeled constitution of postwar Japan to the ideological framework of *Pancasila*, which stipulates "belief in God" as a founding principle but

[19]For more on this, see Feener (2007, 26–28).

refrains from establishing any single religion in the Indonesian constitution. And then there are those models of state secularism established in communist states with their own more aggressive agendas for the containment and/or marginalization of religion from the public sphere in places like Vietnam and North Korea.

Legislative and social processes of secularization were diversely configured across these new nations. Academic definitions of secularization have likewise been myriad.[20] The debates on the subject range about issues relating to various processes that are often uncritically confounded in both popular and academic discussions—particularly those involving de-institutionalization and disenchantment. In many Asian societies, the promulgation of secular state constitutions did not mean that the populations of these countries abandoned religious beliefs and practices. In fact, as Martin Riesebrodt has recently emphasized, "religion" can, in these contexts, come to take on increasing importance in relation to a now more clearly delineated and autonomous "religious sphere" within a broader "secularized" system.[21]

Developments all across Asia and the broader world since the late twentieth century have made it abundantly clear that processes of modernization have not carried with them any monolithic impact upon religious life in contemporary societies in ways that clearly confound the kinds of naïve narratives of secularization that had long characterized the work of many sociologists. The particular ways in which such developments have reflected the dynamics of secularization and religious revival are, furthermore, complex and diversely configured across different Asian societies. Abdullahi A. An-Na'im has noted, for example, "a strong association between religious radicalism and economic globalization" (An-Na'im 2006, 27). The specific case remarked upon by An-Na'im here was the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in contemporary India—a country that presents one of the most complex and hotly contested contemporary debates about the meaning of secularism in contemporary Asia.

Debating Proselytization in Modern India

At the establishment of Indian independence, a secular constitution was adopted by the government of a society with a history of great diversity in religious expression. Shifting constellations of notions of state secularism and religious pluralism have come to frame fierce disputes over the issues of proselytization and conversion in India ever since. The country's constitution regards the freedom to "profess,

[20] See, for example: Martin (2005), Casanova (1994), and Asad (2003). The back and forth between these last two major figures in the field can be found in: Scott and Hirschkind (2006).

[21] Riesebrodt (2010, 175–177) argues for conceiving of secularization in a more limited way: "solely to the process of institutional differentiation through which secular spheres—that is social spheres free of religious premises and norms—emerge." It refers, in other words, to "a transformation of social orders, namely to the process of freeing social institutions from religious control."

practice and propagate religion" as a fundamental right (Article 25, Section I). With the rise of the Hindutva movement and mounting religious communalism over the past three decades, however, the right to "propagate" has become the subject of intense public polemic, as Hindu religious parties including the BJP came to see the very idea of religious conversion as "constituting a threat to Hinduism" (Rajan and Needham 2007, 29). Such concerns are linked to political projects aimed at creating and maintaining a birth-based political majority—"understanding fully the importance of numbers for a modern politics of Hindutva. Hence their ever-increasing horror stories about galloping Muslim and Christian populations" (Menon 2007, 129). Beyond illuminating the fragile fault lines of the immediate Indian political context, they also reflect contemporary global trends in which majority populations in many countries are increasingly voicing concerns about being displaced by "minorities" and respond by staking out new claims to territory in what Appadurai has described as a "geography of anger" (Appadurai 2006).

Fears of vulnerability to a loss of political power as religious communities eroded under outward conversion have been a recurrent social reality in India since its establishment as a modern nation-state. In 1954, a special commission was established by the Supreme Court to examine issues raised by the presence of foreign Christian missionaries. Faced with seemingly intractable discrepancies between the explicit statement of the right to propagate one's religion in the Indian constitution and the forceful assertion of a politics of communal identity based on religion, the Commission's final report attempted to differentiate "conversion" from the right to "propagation" guaranteed by the constitution (Viswanathan 2007, 336ff). In this, we see attempts to further problematize understandings of proselytization with relation to the social realities of one of the largest nations in Asia. Within these contexts, the idea of religious proselytization has become linked to diverse discourses of "protection" in relation to India's state secularism, variously configured. These include diverse agendas that focus on: (1) protection of individual rights, (2) protection of the rights of minority groups, and (3) protection of an established religion. The dominant understandings of secularism in India have, however, tended to focus on the issue of group rights (Baxi 2007, 268). The dynamics of "group" versus "individual" orientations to rights discourse play out in equally complex ways in other countries of contemporary Asia, including an area more central to my own research: Indonesia.

Polemics on Proselytization in Plural Indonesia

Indonesia's constitution does not invoke conceptions of secularism in anything like that of India. It does, however, establish a framework for state-managed religious pluralism designed to mitigate the potential for communitarian conflict. In June 1945, the nine members of Soekarno's Advisory Council came to a compromise on a draft for the Preamble to the Constitution that came to be known as the "Jakarta

Charter" (*Piagam Jakarta*).[22] This document included the controversial pronouncement that the Republic was founded on a set of principles, the first of which being: "the belief in God, with the obligations for adherents of Islam to practice Islamic law." The second clause in this phrase was later struck from the preamble, reportedly as a concession to the Christian populations of the eastern archipelago.[23] This move was viewed by some Muslim Indonesians as a betrayal of their aspirations for independence and an ungracious recompense for their participation in the struggles that led to it.

As resentment mounted in some sectors of the Indonesian Muslim community over the wording of the final version of the preamble to the constitution, as well as to the Nationalists' stance toward organized Islamic religious and political groups more generally, the government of the new Republic realized that certain compromises would have to be made. One of the most significant of these was the establishment of an Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs in January 1946.[24] The organization of this ministry grew out of the Office for Religious Affairs established under the Japanese occupational government.[25] While the movement for its continuation and incorporation into the state structure of independent Indonesia was rejected at first by the "secular" nationalists, mounting pressure from some sectors of the Muslim community eventually convinced the government to grant a major concession to Muslim interests in the form of a full government ministry.[26]

Like the proponents of Hindutva in India, Indonesia's Islamist activists have also framed their appeals for special consideration of their religious ideals within discourses of "rights" and "protection" from the dual dangers of "secularization" and "Christianization." The latter has been a particularly charged trope in Indonesian Islamist rhetoric, reflecting a widely held belief that the Muslim community faces a constant threat of "Christianization" (*Kristenisasi*).[27] One of the most

[22]The following discussion of the views of Indonesian Islamists on the establishment of Islam as the official state religion in relation to populist rhetoric on the imminent danger of conversion to Christianity draws upon some of my earlier work, published in chapter five of Feener (2007).

[23]"*ke-Tuhanan, dengan kewadjiban mendjalankan sjari`at Islam bagi pemeluk-pemeluknja…*" Yamin (1959–1960). See also: Boland (1982). This phrase came to be referred to as the "Seven Words" in later constitutional debates.

[24]See: Noer (1978) and Boland (1982, 105–112). For more on the subsequent development of this Indonesian bureaucracy for state-managed religious pluralism, see: Moch (2006).

[25]Although the Ministry of Religious Affairs was established primarily in consideration of Muslim interests, in later years its official structure also came to include separate sections addressing the needs of Indonesia's various religious communities: Muslims, Catholics, Protestant Christians, Hindus, and Buddhists. Nonetheless, perhaps even more than its demographic qualifications would dictate, to this day the Muslim section dominates all others and generally controls the Ministry itself.

[26]Despite these concessions, the Islamists never succeeded in their ultimate aim of establishing Islam as the official religion of Indonesia. For more on the development of Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs, see: Moch (2006).

[27]For detailed discussion of these developments, see: Mujiburrahman (2006).

prolific Indonesian exponents of this view has been Muhammad Natsir (d. 1993).[28] A recurrent theme throughout Natsir's many writings on this subject is the assertion that Muslims were being "forced" (*terpaksa*) to convert to Christianity through "enticements and monetary incentives" (*bujuk dan dana*). Such complaints about the influence of international Christian organizations in funding such means for missionizing were often cast within the mode of a narrative of victimization centered on the Muslim community. These tropes recur with increasing frequency across Indonesian discourse over the past several decades, such as in the arguments in the case Melissa Crouch examines in her contribution to this volume (Chap. 2).[29]

In response to the perceived threats of Christian proselytization, Natsir and other Indonesian Islamists campaigned aggressively for government intervention to clamp down on Christian missionary activity in predominantly Muslim areas of the country. Despite a number of government concessions to such demands, the rhetoric of fear in the face of impending Christianization has not subsided. In fact, communal tensions around the issue have escalated to considerable levels of violence at various points over the past four decades, as some Muslims took matters into their own hands in the form of church burnings and personal assaults on Christians. These actions have in turn sparked violent reprisals from some Christian groups in various parts of the country.

In the face of such conflict, Indonesian Islamist leaders have argued that national harmony could only be achieved if each religious community protects its own "identity" (*identitas*).[30] Along these lines, for example, Natsir had developed arguments that Christian proselytization in Indonesia had to be restricted so that, "the *identitas* of Muslims is not disturbed."[31] Again, despite the differences of both religious creed and national context, we see here how in Indonesia, as in India, the issue of proselytization by religious others gives rise to simultaneous but disparate claims to both universal human rights and sectarian religious truths in ways that challenge conventional understandings of "rights" and appeals to their protection in the modern West.[32] Rather than stressing the need to protect the rights of individuals to practice or pursue the religion of their choice, both Hindutva and the Indonesian Islamists elaborate their notion of rights in explicitly communal terms. In both cases as well, the rhetoric of "protection" is often deployed in appeals to both state paternalism and to populist mobilization.

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[28] Many of Natsir's occasional pieces containing his views of the strained relations between Muslims and Christians in Indonesia were collected into a volume first published in 1969. Natsir (1969).

[29] See: Natsir (1980). The arguments expressed in this work parallel in striking ways the rhetoric on "insincere conversion" characteristic of contemporary Hindutva writings on Christian proselytization in India. See: Menon (2007, 128–130).

[30] Natsir (1980, 9–10). Elsewhere in this same text (16), Natsir glosses *identitas* with the Arabic term *sibgha*—the indelible "dye of God" that is described as a mark of believers in the Qur'an 2 (*al-Baqara*): 138.

[31] Natsir (1969, 2).

[32] For a broader discussion of such tensions, elaborated in terms of "conflictive processes of resistance and alternative projects of social organization," see: Castells (2004).

Natsir, for example, framed his model of "Islamic Democracy" in terms of pure majoritarianism, with little, if any, importance placed on guarantees of the rights either of minority communities or individual citizens in a representative system. Majority vote was thus sufficient to confer legitimacy as well as to confirm the agenda—and the legal order—of the statistically largest sector of society. As he wrote in reaction to those who advocated constitutional guarantees of religious liberty to individual Indonesian citizens:

> Those who reject Islamic laws out of consideration of not harming the feelings of non-Muslims harm the Muslims whose number is twenty times greater than those of other groups. For this would mean an encroachment upon the rights of the majority.[33]

Over recent years, claims to the majority's rights to "protection" from secularism, as well as from religious deviance, dissenters, and apostates have emerged with even greater force into the broader Indonesian public sphere. These particular developments are at the same time also increasingly linked to broader global developments in which proselytization has become a flashpoint in conflicts between exponents of two rather different conceptions of "rights": individual and communal.[34]

Regulating Religion in the Public Sphere

After the fall of the authoritarian "New Order" regime in 1998, the freer air of the post-Suharto period of "Reformation" allowed for the emergence of new voices in the Indonesian public sphere, including those of increasingly vocal Islamist groups. The high profile of their public representatives has had wide-ranging effects on the character of public expressions of Islamic religious and communal sentiment over the past decade (Ricklefs 2012, 209ff). In this, these Indonesian developments can also be seen as reflecting contemporary global trends in the dynamics of religious organizations in which, as Steven Tipton has noted, there has been a pronounced trend of "politically oriented parachurch groups," to proliferate and grow more rapidly than established denominational "churches" over recent years (Tipton 2006, 53).

It needs to be recognized, however, that while new and expanding intermediate institutions of this type do function within the public sphere, they do not necessarily contribute to "civil society" (Berger 2006, 12–13). These groups do present alternative voices and facilitate modes of social action alongside—and at times contesting—those of the state. However in doing so, they do not always foster discourses of civic pluralism.[35] Indeed, the prominent public profiles of Islamist groups such as the Islamic Defender's Front (FPI) in the increasingly crowded

[33] Burns (1981, 28)–quoting Natsir, *Capita Selecta* I: 486.

[34] Some of the ways in which these debates have taken shape in Buddhist Sri Lanka are examined in the contribution to this volume by Neena Mahadev.

[35] For a discussion of the ways in which "paramilitarized Islamists did seize the initiative from moderate and prodemocracy Muslims in the months following Soeharto's overthrow," see Hefner (2005).

spaces of Indonesian public discourse bring to the fore fraught issues of rights to free expression for all citizens in the face of forceful demands for the establishment of state privileges for adherents of a particular group.[36] The particulars of Indonesian Islamist activism raise a whole host of critical issues with regard to local social dynamics. Here, however, I would like to turn the discussion more toward broader issues of the legislation of religious diversity and pluralism that this and other cases from contemporary Asia evoke. These issues are at the center of global discourses on religion, secularization and the state that are as familiar in the West as they are across Asia.

Discussions of religious pluralism in contemporary societies give prominent attention to the idea of "religious liberty," often with reference to the development of this concept in the context of modernizing Europe. Anthony Gill's recent work, however, offers a promising new departure in examining the origins of religious liberty in terms of political interests and state regulatory mechanisms, rather than intellectual genealogy.[37] This focus on power dynamics and political contestation brings to light the analytic potential of using law and governmental regulation as identifiable and empirically grounded parameters for gauging the degree of religious liberty in a given society. Gill's work can thus point us in some promising directions by highlighting the potential for empirically based examinations of state systems for managing religious diversity to advance our understandings of such hotly debated issues as "religious liberty" as it is diversely configured in different social and political contexts.

Through a series of historical and contemporary case studies largely centered on the Atlantic world, Gill explores the politics of religious liberty in the colonial and post-colonial periods, highlighting the ways in which religious groups, including religious majorities living under secular regimes, often make appeals to "religious liberty" when they feel that their own rights to "free exercise" are being neglected. As social and political contexts shift and such groups become "established" within or with the support of state structures, however, they often advance their own agendas to have restrictions placed on minority denominations and new religious "start-ups" (Gill 2008, 223). It is an old story, but the well-established pattern of such dynamics in the history of religions maintains its relevance today. For example, Guy Stroumsa has highlighted the ways in which early Christian writers, including Tertullian, constructed elaborate arguments in favor of religious tolerance when they were still struggling to establish the Church in a hostile political climate. With the conversion of Roman imperial elites in the fourth century, "it was the turn of pagan thinkers, now on the defensive, to produce defenses and illustrations of religious tolerance" (Stroumsa 2009, 105). Similar patterns have also been observed,

[36] On the FPI and the aggressive assertion of its particular vision of an Islamic Indonesia, see: Wilson (2006, 2007).

[37] Gill (2008, 8). While Gill's move to set discussions of religious liberty in political rather than intellectual contexts is promising, his work unfortunately places too great a reliance on a problematic application of rational choice theory to religious behavior.

as noted above, among Indonesian Muslims and Indian Hindus over the course of the shifting political dynamics of the modern histories of these two Asian nations.

The tensions between legal and regulatory provisions for "free exercise" and/or the official "establishment" of religion thus frame the broader dynamics of relations between different religious groups, between religious communities and the formal structures of the state, as well as between established religious bodies and individual citizens. José Casanova has argued for the advantages of examining societies comprising different "denominations" for the comparative study of public religions in the modern world—taking as his prime examples the different types of public religion presented by Roman Catholicism and Evangelical Protestantism in the modern West (Casanova 1994, 9). If this is the case for dealing with societies whose menu of religious offerings is largely limited to various flavors of Christianity, then taking into account the ways in which proselytization both flourishes within and simultaneously challenges the limits of religious pluralism in more diverse Asian contexts can serve to move things forward by de-provincializing discussions of these important issues and contribute to a more truly global conversation on the dynamics of religion in contemporary societies.

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Chapter 2
Proselytization, Religious Diversity and the State in Indonesia: The Offense of Deceiving a Child to Change Religion

Melissa Crouch

Since independence in 1945, the Indonesian government has attempted to regulate and control religious diversity. In 1946, a Ministry of Religion was established, and by 1965, a Presidential Decision[1] was passed that is widely understood to have officially sanctioned six religions: Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, although a diverse range of religions and beliefs outside these are permitted to exist.[2] Of these six religions, it is Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism that are recognized in Indonesia as "missionary" religions that aim to proselytize.[3] The Ministry of Religion has the role of overseeing and regulating the religious affairs of these religions, including issuing guidelines or limits on proselytization. This chapter will argue, however, that in reality the regulations that have been created favor the religious majority. These regulations largely target and disadvantage Christians as members of the only other recognized religion in Indonesia, aside from Islam, that is considered to be a "missionary" or "proselytizing" religion.

One of the most recent attempts to regulate "inter-religious harmony," including measures aimed at limiting religious missionary efforts, is the proposal for a Draft Law on Inter-religious Harmony. This was circulated by the Ministry as early as

[1]Presidential Decree No 1/PNPS/1965 on the Prevention of the Misuse/Blasphemy of Religion, which was made into a statute by Law 1/1969. In Indonesia this is referred to as "Undang-Undang Penodaan Agama," or the Blasphemy Law.

[2]In 2010, the Ministry of Religion reported that 88.8% of the population was Muslim, 5.7% Protestant, 3% Catholic, 1.7% Hindu, 0.06% Buddhist, and 0.01% Confucianist (Confucianism was re-recognized as the sixth religion in 2001). Source: Ministry of Religion, "Table 1: Population by Religion 2008," 2010, http://www.depag.go.id.

[3]Ricklefs (1993). In Indonesia, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Hinduism are not considered to be proselytizing religions. In other countries, these religions are considered to be proselytizing religions, such as Confucianism in Korea and Buddhism in Sri Lanka (see chapter by Neena Mahadev).

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1982, then again in 1989, 1997,[4] 2003 and 2011. While it has never received sufficient support in the legislature to be passed as law, it remains on the legislative agenda for 2010–2014.

This chapter will explore the limits of acceptable proselytization and the implications for religious diversity through a legal case study of three Christian teachers accused of deceiving Muslim children to change their religion in Indonesia, which I will refer to as the Proselytization Case. I use the term "proselytization" to refer to all efforts, real or perceived, to convert a person to a religion. The assumption of what counts as proselytization in Indonesia is vigorously contested by Muslims and Christians. My approach in this chapter therefore differs in comparison with other chapters because I proceed on the assumption that proselytization necessarily aims to convert, as is the widely held assumption in Indonesia. The focus of this chapter is on the indigenous church in Indonesia, rather than foreign missionary efforts (see Chap. 11 by Neena Mahadev). My concern is not simply with the fact of diversity within a religion (such as styles of worship), although I will briefly review the diversity within Christianity to demonstrate that it is more often Evangelical and Pentecostal churches that are accused of "Christianization."

In terms of religious pluralism, "pluralism" as a concept has been emphatically rejected by Islamic leaders from the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI), which issued a *fatwa* (Islamic legal opinion) against pluralism, liberalism and secularism in 2005 (see Chap. 1 by Michael Feener). In the explanation of the *fatwa*, MUI appeared to equate pluralism with relativism, that is, the idea that all religions are the same or equal. It denounces this concept as wrong and condemns groups it suggests are proponents of such ideas, singling out the Liberal Islamic Network (Jaringan Islam Liberal, JIL) (Majelis Ulama Indonesia 2005). Given the negative connotations the term "pluralism" now has in some circles in Indonesia, I will use the term "religious diversity" in this chapter. I suggest, however, that the government promotes a narrow view of religious diversity—one that only explicitly recognizes six religions, that excludes or marginalizes local beliefs, and that actively denounces "deviations" from these religions, as illustrated in the Lia Eden (Aminuddin) case (explored in detail in Chap. 1 by Michael Feener).

The Proselytization Case raises three key issues. First, how have the limits of proselytization and religious diversity in Indonesia been debated by religious communities and defined by the state? Answering this question requires an examination of the efforts of the state to contain tensions over the propagation of religion through legal regulations, particularly between Muslims and Christians. Second, in what way do the religious education provisions of the Education Law reflect both the concerns of some Muslims over Christian missionary activities and government concerns to contain religious diversity and maintain the Islamic vote? Here I will look at the issue of religious education in schools and its relation to fears of Christian proselytization. Third, how is the provision on protecting children from being deceived to change their religion in the Child Protection Law being interpreted and enforced in practice? In addressing these questions, I will focus on the extent to

[4] See Aritonang (2004) and Aqsha et al. (1995).

which the state and the courts are responding to conservative Muslim demands for greater regulation of proselytization activities, potentially narrowing the limits of religious diversity and tolerance. I will examine whether limitations on proselytization between world religions (primarily Islam and Christianity) in Indonesia—the largest Muslim-majority democratic country in the world—have led to the promotion of diversity while still ensuring protection for religious minorities.

Case Study: The Proselytization Case

On September 1, 2005, three Christian religious instruction teachers were found guilty on charges of proselytization under the Child Protection Law by the Indramayu District Court, West Java.[5] This case is significant because it is the first incident in which Christians have been charged and found guilty of the criminal act of deceiving Muslim children to change their religion by a court in Indonesia.[6]

This case is related to the passage of the Education Law in July 2003.[7] The Education Law requires both public and private schools to provide religious education for students according to their religion. Since 2000, a Protestant church in Indramayu, affiliated with the National Protestant Council, ran a "Happy Sunday" Christian religious education program for Christian children.[8] The program consisted of Christian songs, games, and Bible study, as well as practical tutoring in reading, writing, and mathematics, and outings to parks and swimming pools. This program was run by three Christian women, Ratna Bangun, Ety Pangesti, and the pastor, Dr. Rebecca Zakaria. In 2003, in order to comply with the Education Law, a primary school in Indramayu approached the church and asked its leaders to report the grades of the Christian students who attended the program. Such requests are common in rural areas in Indonesia, given the shortage of religious education teachers and the lack of funding for religious instruction in public schools.

Up to 40 children attended the program, most of whom were Christians. The program was held on a Sunday (that is, outside of official school hours) and at the home of one of the teachers in a village area. Some Muslim children, as well as some children from mixed marriages (that is, children with one Muslim parent and one Christian parent), occasionally visited the program. The three teachers claim that all the children had the (verbal) consent of their parents to attend the program. Furthermore, some of the Muslim parents had even participated in an outing to the

[5]Law 23/2002 on Child Protection.

[6]The only other court case brought under Article 86 involved two men, Syahroni and Iwan Purwanto, who were accused of attempting to convert Muslim children to the Baha'i religion in East Lampung. The accused were sentenced to five years in jail, and in 2011 their case was on appeal in the Supreme Court. See Human Rights Watch, 2013.

[7]Law 20/2003 on the National Education System.

[8]The National Protestant Council, also known as Persekutuan Gereja-Gereja Indonesia, or PGI, was founded in 1950 to represent the interests of Protestant churches under the Ministry of Religion.

zoo as part of the program, confirmed by photographs taken at the event, which were produced as evidence in court.

In late 2004, Islamic leaders complained to the local Indonesian Ulama Council when some of the Muslim children and children of mixed marriages began singing Christian songs at home.[9] The head of the Indonesian Ulama Council of Haurgeulis consequently reported the case to the police.[10] As a result, the program was forced to close in April 2005. In May 2005, the women were arrested, and in the following month the court trial began.

According to Ruyadi Hutasoit, a colleague of the pastor and the leader of the Peace and Prosperity Party (Partai Damai Sejatera, PDS), the largest Christian political party in Indonesia, his church had attempted to negotiate with religious leaders before the trial and agreed to pay for 30 children to attend a *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school). This agreement was made on the condition that the case against the three women be dropped.[11] Despite allegedly accepting this proposal, the Islamic religious leaders pursued the case against the three women.

On June 30, 2005, the trial began in the local Indramayu District Court.[12] On September 5, 2005, the women were convicted of breaching article 86 of the Child Protection Law. This provision states that:

> Any person who deliberately uses deceit, a series of lies or entices a child to choose another religion not of his/her own will, despite it being known or suspected that the child is not mature and is not yet responsible according to the religion he/she follows, will be liable to a maximum jail sentence of five years and/or fined at least one hundred million rupiah. [approximately US$11,000]

The women were also initially charged with blasphemy under Article 156a of the Criminal Code, although this charge was later dropped. The three women were found guilty under the Child Protection Law and received a 3-year jail sentence. The teachers' appeals to the Bandung Appellate Court and then the Supreme Court were both rejected.[13] After this, Muslim authorities forced Pastor Rebecca's church to close. A number of international advocacy campaigns were initiated utilizing mass media and the Internet to garner support for the release of the three women.[14] On June 12, 2007, after spending over 2 years in prison, the women were granted an early release on parole.

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[9] Known as Majelis Ulama Indonesia, or MUI, the Indonesian Ulama Council was formed in 1976 to represent the interests of the Muslim community through the Ministry of Religion.

[10] *Republika*, "Haurgeulis Jadi Target Kristenisasi," (May 12, 2005), http://www.republika.co.id.

[11] Interview with Ruyadi Hutasoit, November 12, 2009.

[12] The District Court (Pengadilan Negeri) is the lowest court in the mainstream court hierarchy in Indonesia.

[13] Decision of the High District Court of Bandung No 241/Pid/2005/PT.Bdg concerning the Proselytization Case dated November 23, 2005 ("Court Decision 2005b"). Decision of the Supreme Court No 2275/K/Pid/2005 concerning the Proselytization Case dated August 30, 2006 ("Court Decision 2006b").

[14] Christians have also made greater use of the media to raise support in cases of attacks on churches in Indonesia, such as the attacks on the Batak church in West Java, which were featured prominently in the media in 2009–2010. See generally Crouch (2007; 2010).

Religious Freedom, Muslim-Christian Relations and the State

In defending their case, the three teachers claimed that the allegations made against them compromised their right to religious freedom. The Indonesian state protects a limited right to religious freedom. The original Indonesian Constitution of 1945 includes the right to freedom of religion under Article 29. Since 1998, the right to freedom of religion has been reaffirmed by the state.[15] In 2001, in the second amendment to the constitution, Article 28E was inserted as part of a new chapter on human rights. It states that, "Each person is free to profess his/her religion and to worship in accordance with his/her religion…"

Unlike the constitutions of some other countries, such as India, this provision does not include the right to "propagate religion" (see Chap. 1 by Michael Feener). Neither is this right absolute. A constitutional limitation has been placed on the right to freedom of religion that places limits on the enjoyment of citizens' rights based on "morality, religious values, security, and public order in a democratic community" (Art. 28 J (2)). The provision is often referred to by government officials and Islamic religious leaders to justify government policies that regulate religious affairs and set boundaries around religious activities. The legitimacy of state limitations on the right to religious freedom was recently reinforced by the Constitutional Court.[16]

The right to freedom of religion only extends to religion (*agama*), while "mystical beliefs" (*aliran kepercayaan*) are treated as cultural groups which register with the Office for Culture under the local government, rather than with the Ministry of Religion. *Agama* has strong associations in Indonesia with both Islam and Christianity, and suggests notions of power, wealth, political privilege, and literacy, due to the introduction of these religions through trade and colonialism (Monnig-Atkinson 1983). A common phrase used to refer to a person who does not adhere to one of the official religions is *orang yang belum beragama* (person who does not have a religion yet), which also implies that conversion to a religion is inevitable.[17] The Ministry of Religion therefore differentiates between religion, which has been increasingly officially recognized and sanctioned, and mystical beliefs, which are discouraged and sidelined (Steenbrink 1999).

In 1978, the Ministry clarified that *aliran kepercayaan* are not considered by the government to be religions, thereby appeasing Islamic religious leaders who wished to maintain the authority to define and defend orthodox Islam.[18] The definition of *aliran kepercayaan* is wide and may include any group whose authority is based on revelation or a holy book, including religious movements (*gerakan keagamaan*), religious sects (*sekte keagamaan*), or religious mysticism (*mistik keagamaaan*).

[15] This has been affirmed through the introduction of Law 39/1999 on Human Rights, art 22(1).

[16] Decision of the Constitutional Court No 140/PUU-VII/2009 on the Blasphemy Law, dated April 19, 2010. For an analysis of this case see Crouch (2012), "Law and Religion in Indonesia".

[17] Monnig-Atkinson, "Religions in Dialogue," 688–689.

[18] According to Article 1 of the Instruction of the Minister of Religion 4/1978 on the Policy concerning Local Beliefs, *kepercayaan* (beliefs) are not religions: Ministry of Religion (2008).

According to the Attorney General, it may also include mystical beliefs (*aliran kebatinan)*, spiritual beliefs *(aliran kejiwaan*), and a belief in Almighty God (*penghayat kepercayaan terhadap Tuhan Yang Maha Esa*), as well as local ritual specialists, traditional medicine, and paranormal experiences (Agung 1995). The Ministry of Religion has therefore played an important role in managing religious diversity by marginalizing *kepercayaan* in favor of the six world religions.

One of the biggest issues among the officially recognized religions in Indonesia has been the particular attitudes, fears, and suspicions that have developed in relation to proselytization and missionary activities. Between Muslims and Christians, these fears are summed up in the terms "Christianization" (*Kristenisasi*) and "Islamization" (*Islamisasi*).

Muslim concerns over "Christianization" generally refer to concerns over Protestant, Pentecostal, or Evangelical churches. In Indonesia there is a clear distinction between Protestants (*Kristen*) and Catholics (*Katholik*) tracing back to the initial policies of the Dutch government, which distinguished between Protestant and Catholic churches and only permitted one church to work in an area. At the national level, Catholics are represented by the national Bishops' Council of Indonesia.[19] Protestants are represented by the Indonesian Communion of Churches (PGI), which primarily includes Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Calvinist churches.[20] Over the years, however, the Christian community has grown beyond the Protestant/Catholic divide.

From the 1920s until the 1980s, Evangelical[21] and Pentecostal[22] movements began to establish churches across Indonesia. As these new expressions of Christianity emerged, they were generally placed under the broader category of Protestantism, particularly because PGI did not want to lose its privileged position under the Ministry of Religion.[23] This is perhaps in contrast to the development of Christianity in countries such as Sri Lanka and Singapore, where Pentecostal

[19] Kantor Waligereja Indonesia, KWI, was originally known as the High Council of Indonesian Bishops (Majelis Agung Wali Gereja Indonesia, MAWI). For a documented history on Catholics in Indonesia from 1808–1900 and 1903–1942, see Steenbrink (2003, 2007).

[20] PGI was formed as a result of a conference held in May 1950 at the Christian Theological College of Jakarta (Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Jakarta). It was initially known then as the Indonesian Council of Churches (Dewan Gereja-Gereja Indonesia, DGI).

[21] Evangelicalism emphasizes personal conversion, the inerrancy of the Bible, the centrality of the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the need to share the message of the Bible. See generally Freston (2001).

[22] Pentecostalism is a movement that emphasizes the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts such as healing, prophecy, and speaking in tongues. For one account of the history of the Pentecostal movement in Indonesia, see Anonymous (2001). Evidence of their missionary zeal is evident from publications such as Williams (2003). For an analysis of Chinese conversions to "Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity," see Koning (2009). On Pentecostalism in Java, see Robinson (2005, 2011).

[23] Haire (1981). Although there is a national Evangelical council, known as the Indonesian Evangelical Communion of Churches and Institutions (Persekutuan Gereja dan Lembaga Injili Indonesia, PGLII) and a national Pentecostal council, the Communion of Pentecostal Churches in Indonesia (Persekutuan Gereja-gereja Pantekosta di Indonesia, PGPI), these organizations are not recognized by the Ministry of Religion.

churches are more often disowned by, or at least organizationally separate from, mainstream churches (see chapters by Mahadev and Daniel Goh).

One characteristic of Evangelical and Pentecostal churches is that they often have a large number of Indonesian Chinese members.[24] It is more often Evangelical and Pentecostal churches, as opposed to Catholic churches, that are accused of "aggressive" or "unethical" proselytization in Indonesia. Attitudes toward proselytization vary both within and between Islam and Christianity in Indonesia. According to Islam, Muslims engage in religious proselytizing (*da`wa*) (Saeed and Saeed 2004), although the use of force to convert someone to Islam is forbidden, according to the Quran 2:256 ("Let there be no compulsion in the religion"). Most Indonesian Muslims are not necessarily against Christian proselytization. Rather, they contest what kind of proselytization is permissible or acceptable.

Of course, conversion from Islam to another religion is an issue of concern for many Muslims (Saeed and Saeed 2004, 15). Such converts are considered by many Muslims to be apostates (*murtad*). Concerns over apostasy are linked with fears of "Christianization" because conversions from Islam to Christianity are reportedly the most common form of religious conversion in Indonesia (Saeed and Saeed 2004, 115).

The term "Christianization" is generally used by Indonesian Muslims to refer to Christian missionary practices that are considered to be unfair or deceptive because of whom they target and how they target them.[25] That is, some Muslims consider it unreasonable for Christians to target people who already have a religion, that is, people who have listed one of the six religions on their national identity card (particularly Islam).[26] Examples of proselytization methods that some Muslims cite as "deceptive" include the building of Christian hospitals, schools, and churches (particularly in Muslim-majority areas) or giving aid or material assistance to non-Muslims with the aim of converting them to Christianity. This narrative of Christianization has been perpetuated by figures such as Muhammad Natsir (see Chap. 1 by Michael Feener).[27]

According to Abdullah Saeed and Hassan Saeed, these fears of Christianization can partly be attributed to the "Ghost of Christianity," that is, the defeat of Muslims

[24] Teachings against Chinese religion and customs have not plagued Chinese Christianity in Indonesia as they have in countries such as Singapore (see the Chap. 7 by Daniel PS Goh). On the contrary, since 1998 there has been a resurgence of expressions of Chinese culture and language in Christianity.

[25] A recent report by the International Crisis Group (2010), "Christianisation and Intolerance," focused on the efforts of radical Islamic groups to oppose Christian proselytization in Bekasi, West Java.

[26] In Indonesia, every adult must have an identity card, known as "KTP" (*kartu tanda penduduk*). A person must list one of the six recognized religions on his or her card, or leave the "religion" section blank: Law 23/2006 on Civic Administration, Art 64(2).

[27] See Feener (2007) and Natsir (1969, 1980).

in the Crusades, colonial conquests of Muslim nations, and the abolition of the caliphate (Saeed and Saeed 2004, 109). Equally important are connections between a fear of Christianization and the colonial era in Indonesia, when Christians were seen as belonging to the Dutch, or the "other side" (Boland 1982). In the early 1900s, Dutch policies increasingly favored Christians, for example through the provision of financial support for Christian schools. This consciousness of colonial favoritism and past injustices committed by Christians against Muslims was echoed by former Minister of Religion (1993–1998), Tarmizi Taher, who said:

> Throughout history, Muslim and Christian (or Western) relations have been colored by the fierce battles of the Crusades, Western colonial expansion and domination, and bitter rivalry between Christian and Muslim missionaries.[28]

On a separate occasion, Taher linked these fears with the threat of proselytization:

> There has been much concern in the Muslim world about an aggressive campaign to missionize and convert Muslims to Christianity, more so because the campaign was seen as funded and backed by foreign powers and the means and methods used to preach Christianity were hardly Christian.[29]

Unlike in Korea, where Christianity on most islands has removed its label as a "foreign" religion, many conservative Muslims still perceive Christianity in Indonesia as a foreign religion. Fears of Christianization did not abate after independence from colonial rule, partly because of a dramatic increase in reported conversions to Christianity in the late 1960s and early 1970s following the attempted Communist coup in 1965. The growth in Christianity at this time is evident from a comparison of population figures before and after independence. In 1933, there were less than two million Christians in Indonesia, or an estimated 2.8% of the population (Ricklefs 1993, 294). By 1971, this figure had grown to 9.3%, and by 2000 it was almost 10%.[30] Regardless of the reasons for this phenomenon, these mass conversions to Christianity were a major cause of concern for some Muslims (Hefner 1993; Ricklefs 1993, 193).

This fear of conversion to Christianity and of Christianization continues to the present. These feelings are also mutual, with some Christians expressing fears of "Islamization." "Islamization," however, is generally understood by Christians to constitute efforts by some Muslims to make Indonesia an Islamic state under Islamic law, rather than efforts to convert Christians to Islam. It therefore refers to a perceived threat to religious freedom for religious minorities such as Christians. While religious minorities often appeal to the right to religious freedom, those on the other side often refer to the need to protect the right to religious freedom of the

[28] Paper on "Changing the image of Islam and the Muslim World" presented at Harvard University, Boston, USA, November 8, 1995, reprinted in *Aspiring for the Middle Path: Religious Harmony in Indonesia*, ed. Taher Tarmizi (Jakarta: PPIM/Censis, 1997), 66.

[29] Tarmizi, *Aspiring for the Middle Path*, 139.

[30] For a comparison of the 1971 and 2000 census data on religion, see Suryadinata et al. (2003).

Islamic majority. It was largely fear and suspicion of Christianization rather than Islamization that was articulated in government regulations under the New Order to manage religious diversity in a manner that was acceptable to the Islamic majority.

Legal Limits of Proselytization: Managing Diversity or Favoring the Religious Majority?

As a result of the mass conversions to Christianity mentioned above, the Suharto government[31] began to consider the need for guidelines or an agreement on the boundaries of proselytism (Hefner 1993, 113–114; Ricklefs 1993, 193). The government did so because these conversions had a significant influence on Muslim-Christian relations in Indonesia, with some Muslims feeling that people had been converted to Christianity through "unfair" or "deceptive" missionary tactics.

In 1967, partly in response to Muslim concerns over conversions to Christianity, the Ministry of Religion gathered religious leaders in Jakarta with the intention of establishing an inter-religious council and a mutual agreement on the boundaries of religious missionary activities.[32] The meeting was attended by representatives from the major social and political religious organizations at this time (Sairin 1996, 97). In his opening speech, the Minister of Religion identified the reason for the gathering as the perceived need for a response to the "systematic attempts" by some religions to convert Muslims (Sairin 1996, 205). The government had prepared a draft statement that contained a provision that all religions would agree not to try to convert a person who already had a religion.

The draft statement was never signed, however, because of sharp disagreements between Muslim and Christian delegates. The Muslim representatives refused to take part in inter-religious dialogue with Christians, but supported a ban on missionary activities aimed at people who already had a religion (Mudzhar 1996). The Christian representatives agreed to participate in inter-religious dialogue but strongly opposed the limitations proposed on proselytization because, in their opinion, it would compromise the freedom of Christians to practice their faith and propagate their religion. As a result, the conference was considered to be a failure and the blame was directed at Christians. One newspaper reported the outcome as a deadlock and the headline placed the blame on Christians: "Catholics/Protestants reject draft charter" (Sairin 1996, 135).

[31] Suharto was the president of Indonesia from 1966 to May 1998.

[32] For quotations and a discussion of the 1967 conference, see Natsir, *Mencari Modus Vivendi Antar Ummat Beragama:* 11–19; Sairin, *Departemen Agama dan Hubungan Agama-agama di Indonesia*, appendix 2; Hasyim (1979).

In a later statement issued by five Islamic leaders, blame was pointed at Christians for "rejecting the government's idea to stop religious proselytization toward people who already have a religion" (Sairin 1996, 206). This placement of blame was not based on any particular religious or Islamic doctrine, but instead was rooted in the pragmatic stance of government officials and Islamic religious leaders at the time, and these attitudes persist today among some Muslims. Former Vice-Chairperson of PGI, Weinata Sairin, suggests it may also be related to the Islamic concept, "To you be your religion, and to me my religion" (Q 109:6).[33]

The 1970s saw an increase in Muslim concerns that Christians were failing to respect the boundaries of established religious communities. For example, on August 16, 1974, at a commemoration of the Prophet Muhammad's "Night Journey" (*Peringatan Isra*), President Suharto issued the following warning to all religious organizations:

> So that the feelings of other groups are not disturbed, you must be careful not to direct religious proselytization at people who already have a religion (Natsir 1980, 31).

Suharto's statement was clearly a strategic political stance designed to appease Muslims. In September 1975, the Chairperson of the Indonesian Ulama Council met with President Suharto to discuss the issue of Christianization, citing examples such as the expansion of Christian hospitals and events designed to convert Muslims to Christianity in return for food and other material provisions (Mudzar 1996, 231–232). Pursuing this agenda further, in 1976, a decision of the Indonesian Ulama Council highlighted the speeches of several government ministers over the previous few years who had all stated that a person should not try to convert someone who already has a religion by offering economic incentives (Hasyim 1979, 423; Sairin 1996, 207). It emphasized, in particular, the imperative to not exploit the weaknesses of the uneducated, the sick, or children, and to not approach a person in his/her home. It also agreed with an earlier statement by President Suharto that "proselytisation should not be conducted towards people who already have a religion" (Hasyim 1979, 424).

The Minister of Religion responded in two main ways. First, in August 1978, the Minister issued Regulation 70/1978 on the Guidelines for the Propagation of Religion.[34] It aims to preserve harmony among religious groups. Article 2 prohibits the propagation of religion if the propagation:

(a) is directed at people who already have a religion;
(b) employs the use of bribery (such as gifts, money, clothes, food and drink, medicine, etc.) in order to persuade a person to change religion;

[33] Interview with Weinata Sairin, November 1, 2010.

[34] For an English translation, see von Denffer (1987).

(c) involves the distribution of pamphlets, bulletins, magazines, books or other publications to people who already have a religion;
(d) involves approaching the private residences of people who already have a religion.

In practical terms, this means that religious missionary activities can only be conducted among people who follow animistic religions or mystical beliefs (*aliran kepercayaan*). This provision therefore supports the Muslim position as expressed at the 1967 conference. If propagation "destabilises religious groups" or social harmony, then the government can take legal action to ensure compliance with these rules (Article 3). These four limits on proselytization represent particular fears Muslims have of Christians and have given rise to different rules for the religious majority.

First, Article 2(a) relates to fears of apostasy (*riddah*, literally "to turn back"), which is recognized within classical Islam as the desertion of Islam or conversion from Islam to another religion (Saeed and Saeed 2004, 1). Some textual traditions of classical Islamic law stipulate that the penalty for apostasy is death, although some scholars have argued that there is no Quranic authority for this penalty.[35] Only radical Islamic groups in Indonesia, such as the Indonesian Mujahidin Council, have expressed support for the traditional penalty.[36] Although apostasy is not a criminal offense in Indonesia, Article 2(a) addresses concerns over conversions from Islam to Christianity by *only* allowing proselytization efforts to be directed at people who do not have a religion. This also reinforces the notion of a fixed religious identity once a person has converted to a world religion.

Related to the fear of apostasy, as set out in Article 2(b), are concerns over "Christianization," or the fear of conversion through bribery or dishonest missionary activity. As indicated in Article 2(b), allegations of dishonest proselytization are often leveled at Christians. For example, in May 2006, after the earthquake in Bantul, Yogyakarta, a church went to deliver aid to victims, but was prevented from doing so by members of the Prosperous Justice Party (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera, PKS), an Islamic political party, because it was not a "Christian area."

Third, Article 2(c) relates to the fear of spreading false teachings through the distribution of Christian publications. For example, rumors began to circulate in the 1960s of Christian pamphlets that expressed the goal of making Indonesia a Christian nation (Azra 2001). Finally, Article 2(d) relates specifically to the practice by religious groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses to go from house to house

[35] Ibid., 56, 69–87. Saeed and Saeed argue that in the Quran, "Apostasy is a sin for which there is no 'temporal punishment' and that there is strong evidence against the death penalty for apostasy."

[36] For example, in 2002, the Indonesian Mujahidin Council (Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia, MMI) proposed the "Criminal Code for the Republic of Indonesia Adjusted to Accord with Islamic Shari'a." Article 28 includes the offense of apostasy and offenders may be liable for execution unless they repent. This proposal has not been passed as law in Indonesia: see Lindsey and Kingsley (2008).

knocking on doors as a method of proselytization. The 1976 ban on Jehovah's Witnesses was lifted by the government in 2001 although, in theory, Article 2(c) still applies and therefore limits its missionary efforts today.[37]

In addition to Regulation 70/1978, the Minister of Religion issued Regulation 77/1978 on the Guidelines for Overseas Donations to Religious Institutions in Indonesia.[38] The aim was to ensure the government maintains control over which groups receive donations by keeping track of the donations they receive, the amount of the donation, the source of the donations, and the purpose of the donations, to avoid any negative effects of foreign aid. This regulation prohibits overseas donations to religious organizations in Indonesia unless it has the approval of the Minister of Religion (Article 2). Restrictions are placed on foreign missionary workers, who can only engage in religious propagation if they have the consent of the Minister and can do so only for the limited period of 2 years, after which they must be replaced by indigenous workers (Article 3).

These two 1978 regulations were the cause of great concern for Christians (Mujiburrahman 2008). In 1978, on August 24 and again on September 14, the national Protestant and Catholic councils sent a letter to President Suharto requesting the withdrawal of the two regulations in the interests of upholding the right to freedom of religion.[39] As Mudzhar points out (Mudzar 1996, 232), Christians protested because the regulations contradicted their position in the 1967 conference and could potentially severely restrict missionary activities, particularly because many Christian missionary activities in Indonesia depend on international financial support. They considered the regulations to be an unfair restriction on the right to religious freedom. The regulations were branded by some Western media as "anti-mission laws" and led to headlines such as, "Religious freedom crisis hits Indonesian churches."[40] As Karel Steenbrink argues (Steenbrink 2000), "The 1978 Decrees appeared to be a pro-Muslim move of the new Cabinet."

The Ministry responded to these criticisms with another regulation in 1979, which reinforced its position by reiterating almost word for word the key provisions of the 1978 regulations. Again, it stated that religious propagation can only be directed at people who do not have a religion (Article 4).[41]

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[37] For a copy of Decision of Attorney General KEP-129/JA/12/1976 banning the teachings/gathering of Bible students/Jehovah's Witnesses, see Sairin (1996).

[38] Regulation of the Minister of Religion 77/1978 on the Guidelines for Overseas Donations to Religious Institutions in Indonesia. For an English translation, see (von Denffer 1987, 16–19).

[39] See (Sairin 1996, 453–476). For a detailed analysis of Christian responses, see (Mujiburrahman 2008, 83–84).

[40] von Denffer, *Indonesia: Government Decrees on Mission*, 36–41.

[41] (Mujiburrahman 2008, 82). The head of the national Indonesian Ulama Council at the time, Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah, known as Hamka, strongly supported these regulations.

The three 1970s regulations, which are all still in force today, encapsulate the widespread rumors, fears, and suspicions Muslims have of Christian proselytization and government endorsement of limits to contain potential conflict. These three regulations represent attempts by the state to set limits on missionary activities in a way that addresses the concerns of many Muslims regarding Christianization, thereby maintaining political power by attempting to contain potential conflict among religions.

These regulations are essentially a prohibition on conversion from Islam, although such a prohibition on conversion is stated more explicitly in the legislation of other countries such as India, where anti-conversion laws have been subsequently upheld by the Indian Supreme Court (Cole Durham and Scharffs 2010). There have also been no attempts to criminalize conversions in Indonesia, unlike in Sri Lanka, where there have been proposals for a Prohibition of Unethical Conversions Bill in 2004.[42]

These regulations are an important indication of the role of the state in limiting proselytization and maintaining pluralism. The reality is that a law on proselytization has never been passed by the legislature, but has instead been relegated to religious bureaucrats in the Ministry of Religion. The 1978 regulations have inevitably stepped into internal religious debates on proselytization, in particular by overriding the Christian position as first articulated at the 1967 conference that the right to proselytize cannot be limited to a certain group of people. Ongoing concerns over the "boundaries" of proselytization continue to underlie the government's more recent policies on religious education and child protection.

Religious Education and the Risk of Conversion

The status and role of religious education in the national education system has been debated since independence in 1945. Part of the controversy surrounding religious education in Indonesia stems from the history of colonialism and from the establishment of Christian schools, an act often perceived by Muslims as a means of converting Muslim students to Christianity.

Christian education in Indonesia began in the 1540s in the Maluku islands, where Christian teaching was intertwined with missionary activities (Kelabora 1976). During the colonial era, the Dutch government's official policy began as one of neutrality on matters of religion. For example, in 1871, a policy of the Dutch government declared that religion was not to be taught as a subject in government schools.[43] Restrictions on missions continued until the late 1890s, with all missionaries required to obtain the permission of the Governor General to work in a particular area.[44]

[42] See Chap. 11 by Neena Mahadev, this volume. Also see generally, Owens (2006, 2007).

[43] Kelabora, "Religious instruction policy in Indonesia," 233.

[44] Ibid.

The change came in the late nineteenth century when the Dutch government began to support Christian-based education through the provision of funding and subsidies, which were not available in the same proportions for Islamic schools (Noer 1973). The former Minister of Religion (1993–1998), Tarmizi Taher, argued that under the colonial government, policies were introduced that impeded the development of Islamic schools, such as restricting independent Islamic schools and religious teachers that Dutch authorities considered difficult to control.[45] This financial support was also extended to other Christian endeavors, such as the establishment of hospitals, and was perceived by some Muslims as giving Christians an unfair advantage over Muslims in terms of their ability to attract people to Christianity.

This support from the colonial government enabled Christian schools to earn a reputation for high-quality education. As a result, many high-profile Indonesian Muslim parents began sending their children to Christian schools. Some Muslims accused these parents of allowing their children to be converted to Christianity, even though many of the teachers at these schools were Indonesian Muslims (Noer 1973, 7–8). One example of this is Hadji Agus Salim (1884–1954), who played a prominent role in the creation of the 1945 constitution and served as Indonesia's Foreign Minister (1947–1949). When Agus Salim's parents sent him as a child to a Christian school they encountered strong opposition from family and friends because it was thought that he would convert to Christianity. Delia Noer notes that it was also not uncommon for a *kiai* or *ulama* (Islamic religious leader) to issue a *fatwa*[46] declaring it *haram* (forbidden) for Muslim parents to send their children to a Christian school (Noer 1973, 8). Nevertheless, many Muslim parents still send their children to Christian schools today.

In 1950, a law on the education system was passed. This law provided that "religious instruction shall be provided in government schools and parents shall decide whether their children are to attend such instruction" (Article 20(i)). This law made religious education optional and at the discretion of parents. It was generally understood that religious education had to be provided by a public school for at least 2 hours per week if at least ten students of a religion attended the school.[47] This was reinforced by a Decision of the People's Consultative Assembly No II/MPRS/1960, which provided that a child (or the child's parents) can choose not to participate in religious education (Article 2(3)).

In 1966, the government made religious education compulsory for all students through a decision of the Provisional People's Consultative Assembly. This decision specifically deleted the provision of the 1960 decision of the People's Consultative Assembly, which provided that a child (or the child's parents) can

[45] Tarmizi, *Aspiring for the middle path: Religious harmony in Indonesia*, 36.

[46] A *fatwa* is a non-binding pronouncement by a qualified Islamic religious legal scholar on an issue, belief, or practice made in the context of past interpretations.

[47] Tarmizi, *Aspiring for the middle path: Religious harmony in Indonesia*, 60.

choose not to participate in religious education, and replaced it with the sentence "religious education is a compulsory subject in all schools, from primary school through to university." This decision effectively nullified the right of parents to withdraw their child from a religious education class and forced parents to identify their child as "belonging" to one of the six religions. According to Atho Mudzhar, Head of the Department of Research, Ministry of Religion, one of the reasons compulsory religious education was introduced in 1966 was that the government realized it was one way to stop the spread of Communism (considered to be a major threat at that time) and a convenient method of social control.[48]

By the 1980s, almost 20 years after the attempted Communist coup and the introduction of the new religious education policy, some Muslims were still anxious about Christian proselytization in schools. In particular the Minister of Religious Affairs, Munawir Sjadzali (1983–1993) publicly expressed his concern that Muslim parents still preferred to send their children to public schools or private Christian schools rather than Islamic schools.[49] But it was not until 1989 that the policy of the government changed again.

Law 2/1989 required schools to provide religious education (Article 11(1)) to equip students with an understanding of his/her religion (Article 11(6)). The slight change here was that religious education was promoted to equal status in the curriculum alongside the *Pancasila*, the state ideology, and citizenship (Article 39(2)).[50] The implementing regulation, however, clarified that schools based on a particular religion, that is, private schools run by religious groups, were not required to provide religious education for religions other than the religion of that school.[51] This provided an exemption for private, faith-based schools. From the 1950s to 1989, government policy on religious instruction therefore shifted away from an emphasis on the rights of the parents to choose whether their child participates in religious education, to a more sectarian model in which all public schools are obliged to provide religious education to students according to his/her religion.

In 2003, Law 20/2003 on Education was passed as part of the reform process in Indonesia. The law emphasized the implementation of democracy, decentralization, and public accountability in the national education system.[52] There were two main provisions that related to religious education. Article 30 obliges the government to provide religious education. Article 12 requires all schools to provide religious education for children according to their religion. Practically, this means that if a

[48] Mudzhar, "The Council of Indonesian Ulama on Muslims' attendance at Christmas Celebrations," 3, Interview with Atho Mudzhar, October 6, 2010.

[49] *Antara News Bulletin*, "Book Considered as Misleading Muslims, Banned in Central Java" (October 29, 1985).

[50] The Pancasila consists of five elements: Belief in one God, Humanitarianism, Nationalism, Democracy, and Social Justice.

[51] Government Regulation 29/1990 on Secondary School Education, Article 17(2).

[52] The Education Law has since been reinforced by Government Regulation 55/2007 on Religious Education.

Muslim student attends a Christian school, then that school must provide Islamic religious education for that student. The Education Law makes no distinction between public and private schools and therefore remains the cause of intense controversy and criticism. Many private Christian schools have simply refused to implement the Education Law. In the opinion of Professor Jan Aritonang from the Christian Theological Seminary in Jakarta, many Catholic and Protestant schools perceive the Education Law to be a direct burden on Christian schools because, although it is very common for Muslim students to attend Christian schools, Christian students rarely attend Islamic schools in Indonesia.[53] As mentioned earlier, this is mainly because of the reputation of Christian schools for high-quality education. Frans Magnis Suseno, a well-known Catholic scholar, points out that Christian schools also oppose the law because they do not want to bear the cost of providing religious education for their non-Christian pupils.[54]

Aside from the unwillingness of some private, faith-based schools to comply with this religious education policy, Mudzhar, the Head of the Department of Research of the Ministry of Religion, admits that another big issue is a shortage of religious education teachers and a lack of funding.[55] This debate remains unresolved, although the Islamic-oriented Prosperous Justice Party was quick to publicly claim the Education Law as one of its "successful" campaigns (Shihab and Nugroho 2008).

Since 1998, the religious education policy in Indonesia has shifted in favor of Muslims and against private Christian schools. It remains largely unenforced, however, and may not be complied with in practice. In the Proselytization Case, the three Christian religious education teachers were not prosecuted under the Education Law because there is no explicit offense for a teacher who allows a non-Christian child to attend a Christian religious education class. Instead, the three Christian teachers were alleged to have breached the Child Protection Law.

Protecting Children from Deceptive Missionary Practices

Although general guidelines on proselytization have existed since the 1970s, the offense of proselytizing children to change their religion is a relatively new development in Indonesia. Under Suharto, Law 4/1979 on Children's Welfare addressed the need for child protection in Indonesia, although it did not contain a prohibition on proselytization. In 1990, Indonesia became a party to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).[56] Article 14 of this Convention obliges states to

[53] Interview with Professor Jan Aritonang, October 30, 2009.

[54] Interview with Father Franz Magnis Suseno, October 13, 2009.

[55] Interview with Dr. Atho Mudzhar, October 6, 2009.

[56] Presidential Decree 36/1990 on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

respect the rights of children to freedom of religion, although it does not specify whether this includes the right to change religion.[57]

Changes to proselytization laws in Indonesia in favor of Islam have been implemented since 1998 in relation to child protection. In November 1999, the Minister of Human Rights announced that a bill on the protection of children would be drafted by the National Commission for Child Protection.[58] In February 2000, an initial Child Protection Bill was put forward.[59] After further debate, an amended version of the Child Protection Bill was proposed in November 2001.[60] Finally, in October 2002, the Child Protection Law was passed. It set out national standards for the protection of children, with the primary aim of addressing issues such as physical abuse, rape, trafficking, child labor, prostitution, exploitation, the position of children from inter-religious marriages, adoption, guardianship, fostering, and custody, among other issues (Bessell 2007).

In relation to the religion of children, the Child Protection Law protects the right of a child to worship according to his/her religion under the guidance of his/her parents (Article 6). It places a corresponding obligation on a child to practice his/her religion according to the teachings of that religion (Article 6(d)). It forbids the state from discriminating against a child on the basis of religion (Article 21). Foster parents, guardians, and adoptive parents are required to have the same religion as the child under their care (articles 31(4), 33(3) and 39(3)). Furthermore, any religious organization that cares for children, such as an orphanage, must only care for children of the same religion as the organization (Article 37(3)). The Child Protection Law also clarifies that a child must follow the religion of his/her parents until he/she has the maturity to choose a religion (Article 42(2)).

This law was followed by Government Regulation 54/2007 on Child Adoption. This regulation reinforces that foster parents must have the same religion as the foster child (articles 3(1), 13(c)) and that in situations where the religion of the child's biological parents is not known, the child should follow the religion of the majority of the population in that area (Article 3(2)). These laws are in line with the position taken by the Indonesian Ulama Council, as communicated in a *fatwa* from 1984 (Ministry of Religion 2003). In particular, this *fatwa* decided that, "Adopting a child from a birth father and mother is opposed to Islamic *syariah*," which suggests a couple can only adopt orphans. Further, when a child is adopted,

[57] This is the most contentious article, and it was objected to by Islamic delegations because in their opinion, it conflicted with the Quran and their national legislation. The outcome of this debate was that Article 14 does not explicitly mention the right of a child to choose or change his/her religion.

[58] See, "Protection Bill for Children to Be Submitted to DPR," *Jakarta Post* (November 22, 1999).

[59] "Bill Sets Penalties for Crimes against Children," *Jakarta Post* (February 25, 2000).

[60] "Bill on Child Protection Submitted for Deliberation," *Jakarta Post* (November 5, 2001); DPR. "Pembahasan Rancangan Undang-undang Republik Indonesia tentang Perlindungan Anak 2002" (Jakarta: Secretariat General Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat RI, 2004).

"Adoption does not change the status or religion of the child…" This assumes that religious affiliation is conferred at birth and is intended to protect Muslim children from "forced" conversions to Christianity through being adopted by Christian parents.

The Child Protection Law and the Government Regulation are in part a response to situations that arose after natural disasters such as the tsunami in Aceh in 2004. For example, in 2005, an American-based Christian aid group, Worldhelp, was prevented from airlifting 300 Muslim children from Aceh to Jakarta to put them in an orphanage because of fears they would attempt to convert the children to Christianity.[61] There were many allegations that the post-tsunami aid efforts of some organizations, particularly foreign non-Muslim organizations, were exploiting the vulnerability of Muslim orphans. Similar controversies also arose in other areas affected by the 2004 tsunami, such as Sri Lanka (see Chap. 11 by Mahadev).

In the wake of such incidents, the provincial government of Aceh passed Qanun 11/2008 on Child Protection, which in part addresses concerns over Christian proselytization by foreign aid organizations and the exploitation of (Muslim) orphans. This Qanun protects the right of a child to practice the religion of his/her parents (Article 4(1)). A child whose parents are missing must follow the religion of the majority of the population in that area (Article 5(1)), namely Islam. Muslim parents and guardians must provide religious education for their children, including specifically the recitation of the Quran (Article 8(2)). Foster parents must have the same religion or "mission" (*misi*) of the children they care for (Article 9(3)), as do guardians (Article 19(1)). Article 59 contains a prohibition against foster parents or guardians changing the religion of a child, although it does not specify a penalty. Article 59 of the Qanun of Aceh is similar to Article 86 of the national Child Protection Law, which was central to the Proselytization Case. In the Proselytization Case, it was alleged that the three teachers breached Article 86 of the Child Protection Law. The Proselytization Case is the first case in which courts have had to interpret and apply this provision.

The Courts: Determining Religious Doctrine?

The Proselytization Case has added a new chapter in the enforcement of limits on proselytization and religious diversity in Indonesia. It is the first case in which Christian teachers have been charged and found guilty of the criminal act of "Christianizing" Muslim children. No other convictions have been made under this

[61] "Tsunami Orphans won't be sent to Christian Homes," *Human Rights Without Frontiers International* (January 17, 2005), http://www.hrwf.net.

provision since then. The parties in the case disputed the facts of the case, the validity of evidence, the testimony of witnesses, the interpretation of Article 86, and the reliance on *hadith* (sayings of the Prophet).

The Prosecution sought to convince the court that non-Christian children should not be allowed to attend a Christian religious education class: "The Happy Sunday Program is only for Christian children and children who are not Christian should not participate…"[62] The court accepted this argument without providing reasons in the judgment, although the court did not go as far as the prosecution, which referred to the program as a "Christianization" program.[63] The court accepted the prosecution's evidence that consent had not been obtained from the parents—although this was hotly disputed by the defense—and that consent should have been obtained.[64] In the court decision, there was no discussion about what would have amounted to consent, for example, whether oral consent was sufficient or whether written consent was required. Further, the court agreed with the opinion of expert Muslim witness, Syakuri, that the involvement of Muslim children in the Happy Sunday program made the children guilty of the offense of apostasy[65]:

> Muslim children who are invited to participate in a Happy Sunday program and sing Christian songs and pray Christian prayers are apostates (*murtad*).

In this case, the court also stepped into internal religious debates by agreeing with the prosecution's interpretation and application of the following well-known *hadith*[66]:

> All children are born into a religious belief (according to the Islamic faith), so it is the responsibility of their parents to bring them up (the child) Jew (*Yahudi*), Christian (*Nasrani*), Zoroastrian (*Majusi*) (worshipping fire)…(Al-Bakhari) (Indictment, 2005: 2, 4)

According to the chairperson of MUI of Indramayu, KH Ahmad Jamali, it means that a child must follow the religion of his/her parents and he/she cannot change religion without the permission of his/her parents.[67]

Although the decision of the court is questionable given the influence of radical Islamic groups at the trial, the court found that the women had breached the law by allowing Muslim children to attend the Christian education program without the consent of their parents. This decision was supported by the Bandung Appellate Court and then the Supreme Court on appeal.[68] This case led to a request for judicial review of the Child Protection Law.

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[62] Decision of the District Court of Indramayu, No 181/Pid.B/2005/PN.Im on the Proselytization Case dated September 12, 2005 ("Court Decision, 2005a"), 5.

[63] Court Decision, 2005a: 12.

[64] Ibid., 5.

[65] Ibid., 16.

[66] For a thorough examination of the authenticity and classification of *hadith* in Islam, see Kamali, H. (2005). *A textbook of hadith studies: Authenticity, compilation, classification, and criticism of hadith*. Markfield: The Islamic Foundation.

[67] Interview with Jamali, October 19, 2010.

[68] Court decisions 2005b and 2006b.

Judicial Review in the Constitutional Court

The constitutional validity of Article 86 of the Child Protection Law has since been challenged in the Constitutional Court. The Constitutional Court commenced operation in 2003 as the only forum for the review of national legislation.[69] In January 2006, a request for judicial review was filed with the Constitutional Court by Reverend Ruyandi Hutasoit, a colleague of Pastor Rebecca and the leader of the Peace and Prosperity Party, the largest Christian political party in Indonesia. In his request for review, the applicant argued that Article 86 of the Child Protection Law violates Indonesia's constitutional provisions protecting religious freedom.[70] The applicant also cited the Proselytization Case as an example of unlawful restrictions on religious freedom.

The court first considered its authority to hear the case and then the legal standing of the applicant.[71] The court held that Hutasoit lacked standing to challenge the Child Protection Law.[72] Even if he had standing, the court found that Article 86 of the Child Protection Law did not restrict the right to freedom of religion in the constitution, but rather upheld that right by actively seeking to protect the rights of a child.[73] Another case in the Constitutional Court that concerns religion is the judicial review of the Blasphemy Law, which has been discussed by Michael Feener in his introduction to this volume (Chap. 1).

There has been growing concern over the perceived misuse of the Blasphemy Law in Indonesia, particularly against religious minorities or groups considered "deviant" by orthodox Islam. This concern prompted a coalition of non-government organizations headed by Indonesian Legal Aid to file a request for judicial review of the Blasphemy Law. On October 20, 2009, the case was lodged with the Constitutional Court. This case attracted the attention of the government and was attended by the Minister of Religion, the Minister of Law and Human Rights, the director generals of Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism, as well as other staff from the Ministry of Religion. A number of members of parliament also attended the hearings. There were also representatives from all six religions present.

The state demonstrated a keen interest in defending its position on the Blasphemy Law. The government prepared 17 witnesses in defense of the application heard by the court. Another ten community and religious organizations made requests to the court as interested parties opposed to the application. This included the chairperson of the political party PPP, the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), the Interreligious Harmony Forum of the province of Jakarta, and Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia.

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[69] See Butt (2007).

[70] Decision of the Constitutional Court No 018/PUU-III/2005 concerning judicial review of Law 23/2002 on Child Protection dated January 17, 2006 ("Court Decision, 2006a"), 8.

[71] Court Decision 2006a: 6–9.

[72] According to Article 56(1) of Law 24/2003 on the Constitutional Court: Court Decision, 2006a: 9.

[73] Court Decision 2006a: 8.

The judiciary exhibited caution and care in dealing with this sensitive case, calling more than 30 expert witnesses to give their opinions on the case. Never before in Indonesia had the Constitutional Court heard from such a wide range of well-known religious figures and experts on religion in Indonesia. According to Ulil Abshar-Abdullah of the Liberal Islamic Network, one of the witnesses in the case, a positive development that came out of this case, despite the affirmation of the Blasphemy Law, is that it proved that such a debate on a politically sensitive issue such as religion could be argued in court by all sides without threats of violence.[74]

Although not central to the court's decision to uphold the Blasphemy Law, the court affirmed that all schools, both public and private, are obliged (*mewajibkan*) to provide religious education for students according to their religion.[75] In the court's decision, the judges contrast the Indonesian religious education system with the situation in the United States. The court states that since the 1960s, America has forbidden the teaching of religion in public schools because it is considered to be unconstitutional and against the right to freedom of religion and the right to not have a religion.[76] The court went on to emphasize that this is not the case in Indonesia, as in Indonesia everyone has the right to religious education, whether in a public or private school, and this right is not against the right to religious freedom. This recent decision significantly affirms the government's decision to enforce segregated religious education classes in schools. Through its mechanism for judicial review, the Constitutional Court has begun to contribute to the debate on religion in Indonesia, although it has upheld the state's position on the regulation of religion to date.

Regulating Proselytization: Implications for Religious Diversity

The Proselytization Case is the first time in Indonesia that Christians have been convicted for the criminal offense of deceiving Muslim children to change religion. Since 1998, the religious education policy has been widened to mandate that all schools—whether public or private—provide religious education according to the religion of the student. This demonstrates that the focus of the state has shifted to address the perceived need of the Muslim-majority electorate to limit proselytization and mitigate the "risk" of conversion or apostasy. Therefore, the religious education provisions of the Education Law primarily reflect the concerns of some Muslims that Christian schools are stretching the boundaries of "acceptable" proselytization by requiring Muslim students to attend Christian religious education, or simply by failing to provide Islamic religious education for these students.

Another way in which the state has responded to Muslim concerns of Christian proselytization is by further restricting missionary activities through the inclusion

[74] Interview with Ulil Abshar Abdullah, August 26, 2010.

[75] Decision of the Constitutional Court No 140/PUU-VII/2009 on the Blasphemy Law, dated April 19, 2010: 273.

[76] Ibid, 111.

of an offense of deceiving a child to change his/her religion in the national Child Protection Law. This is partly in response to accusations of proselytization leveled at non-Muslim, often "Western," non-government organizations providing aid, such as after the 2004 tsunami in Aceh, which orphaned many children and left them in need of care or adoption. These limitations on proselytization, as defined by the state, continue to fuel fears and provide justification for claims of "Christianization" by Muslims. In addition, the 1970s regulations issued by the Minister of Religion on proselytization are evidence that the perceived need to maintain boundaries for "acceptable" missionary activities is still a crucial concern for many Muslims.

The Proselytization Case demonstrates that the Child Protection Law has been interpreted and enforced at the local level in a manner that favors the local religious majority. These prosecutions only occurred because the Indonesian Ulama Council took the initiative to investigate the incident and report it to the police; the case against the teachers was then supported at trial by radical Islamists. The court decided that allowing a child to attend the religious education class of another religion constituted deceiving a child to change his/her religion. This decision reinforces the government's policy of segregated religious instruction classes in both public and private schools, and was upheld on appeal. The Proselytization Case remains an isolated example to date, however, with no other known prosecutions under Article 86 of the Child Protection Law. There have, however, been other examples of Islamic religious leaders actively investigating and reporting religious minorities for criminal offenses, such as for the offense of blasphemy as discussed in the Lia Eden Case (see Chap. 1 by Michael Feener).

The Constitutional Court entered the debate on the limits of proselytization by affirming the constitutionality of Article 86 of the Child Protection Law as a permissible limitation on the right to religious freedom. More recently, in 2010, its decision to affirm the Blasphemy Law upholds the right of the state to set limitations on religious activities in Indonesia, which effectively favors the religious majority. This suggests that the Constitutional Court has maintained the conservative stance of the government on regulating religious activities. This means that religious minorities may continue to be pursued on criminal charges, either on the grounds of overstepping acceptable limits of proselytization, such as attempting to deceive children, or by insulting or blaspheming one of the six recognized religions.

Government reforms to—and judicial interpretations of—the law since 1998 on issues of religious education and proselytization have therefore validated and further entrenched the fears, stereotypes, and suspicions some Muslims have of Christian missionary activities in Indonesia. These reforms arguably present a challenge to religious diversity in Indonesia and promote a fixed religious identity after conversion to a world religion as a way of managing tensions between Islam and Christianity. They also demonstrate the symbolic value of regulations on proselytization and thereby allow the state to be seen as controlling Christian proselytization. In so doing, the state maintains the support of the Islamic majority.

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Chapter 3
Conversion and Controversy: Reshaping the Boundaries of Malaysian Pluralism

Sophie Lemière

In 1979, the anthropologist Judith Nagata described multicultural Malaysia as a mosaic (Nagata 1979). In her socio-anthropological study of Malaysian identity (–ies), Nagata imagined four possible directions along which the Malaysian State might achieve "national unity": (1) an assimilationist Malay-based nation in which citizens would be encouraged to assimilate to the dominant group; (2) the generation of a hybrid Malaysian culture inclusive of traditional elements of all the major communities; (3) a "pluralistic arrangement" in which cultural and religious communities are juxtaposed and at the same time institutionally separated—the dominant model at the time of Nagata's study; or, (4) a neutral solution of assimilation to a westernized culture that would go beyond the communities' differences.[1] Thirty years later, Malaysia has still not consolidated a sense of national unity, and the established "pluralistic arrangement" has proven to be a source of, rather than a solution to, socio-political tensions.

No consensus over the definition of pluralism exists among social science scholars. In Nagata's words, "almost every plural society seems to be unique."[2] Pluralism is the model of governance adopted by governments since independence, in which religious, ethnic, or cultural communities are juxtaposed and institutionally segregated. This practice of managing diversity has been in place since the colonial era and continued after independence despite the existence of "transethnic solidarities," as studied by Sumit Mandal (2003). This practice also continued in spite of governmental discourse that sought to promote national harmony, and unity like the "One Malaysia Campaign" of the Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak. In practice, however, the Malaysian model has tended to preserve the political and religious dominance of the Malay community. In Malaysia, religion is also used as grounds for discrimination,

[1] Ibid., 219.

[2] Ibid., 259.

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undermining citizens' equality. Malaysian society is institutionally divided into two groups: Muslims and non-Muslims. Switching one's affiliation from one group to the other is rather difficult, despite the fact that the national constitution guarantees equality before the law,[3] freedom of religion,[4] and freedom of expression.[5]

Examples of this differential treatment abound: citizens are required to mention their "race" and "religion" on all official state forms and paperwork. Muslim citizens have the word "Islam" on their ID cards, while no religious affiliation appears on the IDs of non-Muslim citizens. Malaysia has a bicephalous legal system where jurisdictions are shared between Civil Law and Islamic Law (or *Shari`a*). Only Muslims are subject to Islamic Law in matters pertaining to family law. Freedom to profess and practice one's religion is guaranteed by Article 11 of the national constitution, but non-Islamic religious propagation is subject to a range of limitations. Proselytism of all religions is permitted in principle, but non-Islamic proselytism to Muslims in particular is forbidden. Conversion to Islam is encouraged by state institutions and not regulated, while conversion out of Islam is an administrative impossibility and an offense punishable by Islamic law.[6] Conversion to and from Islam is not regulated by civil law, and people who convert out of Islam fall into a jurisdictional gap.

[3] Article 8, as detailed below.

[4] Article 11, as detailed below.

[5] Article 10, as follows:

(1) "Subject to Clauses (2), (3) and (4)—(a) every citizen has the right to freedom of speech and expression; (b) all citizens have the right to assemble peaceably and without arms; (c) all citizens have the right to form associations.
(2) Parliament may by law impose—(a) on the rights conferred by paragraph (a) of Clause (1), such restrictions as it deems necessary or expedient in the interest of the security of the Federation or any part thereof, friendly relations with other countries, public order or morality and restrictions designed to protect the privileges of Parliament or of any Legislative Assembly or to provide against contempt of court, defamation, or incitement to any offence; (b) on the right conferred by paragraph (b) of Clause (1), such restrictions as it deems necessary or expedient in the interest of the security of the Federation or any part thereof, or public order; (c) on the right conferred by paragraph (c) of Clause (1), such restrictions as it deems necessary or expedient in the interest of the security of the Federation or any part thereof, public order or morality.
(3) Restrictions on the right to form associations conferred by paragraph (c) of Clause (1) may also be imposed by any law relating to labor or education.
(4) In imposing restrictions in the interest of the security of the Federation or any part thereof or public order under Clause (2) (a), Parliament may pass law prohibiting the questioning of any matter, right, status, position, privilege, sovereignty or prerogative established or protected by the provisions of Part III, article 152, 153 or 181 otherwise than in relation to the implementation thereof as may be specified in such law."

[6] Islamic law is a state matter (except in the federal territories where it is a federal matter), thus Islamic law has developed differently from one state to another. In most of the states, the Islamic law provides for the creation of three independent authorities: Majlis Agama Islam or Islamic council responsible for all matters concerning the Islamic religion except Islamic law and justice, the *mufti* (the highest religious official), responsible for the determination of Islamic law, and the *syariah* courts responsible for the administration of justice. For a complete description of the administration of Islamic Law, see Hamzah and Bulan (2003).

Malaysia is a diverse country where approximately 60 % of the population is Muslim, and Islam is the official religion of the federation.[7] Malaysia's ethnic distribution is virtually identical to its religious composition (Mess and Pearce 1986). The country is 67.4 % *Bumiputera*,[8] 24.6 % Chinese, 7.3 % Indians, and 0.7 % others,[9] compared with 60.4 % Muslim, 19.2 % Buddhist, 9.1 % Christian, and 2.9 % Confucian, Taoist, and other traditional Chinese religions. Most Muslims are ethnically Malay, thus being a Muslim is commonly identified with being Malay, without consideration of ethnic origins.[10] In the Malaysian context, religion is a marker of identity and a means of communal segregation. Hence, individual religious choices are conditioned by social norms and administrative categories; religion is not a private matter but a public issue provoking political debate and social tension. In a society where social norms are bound to Islamic values, non-Muslims and secular Muslims are often considered immoral, deviant, or are seen as outsiders. Those who convert

[7] Article 3 of the National constitution reads:

(1) "Islam is the religion of the Federation; but other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation.
(2) In every State other than States not having a Ruler the position of the Ruler as the Head of the religion of Islam in his State in the manner and to the extent acknowledge and declared by the Constitution of that State, and, subject to that Constitution, all rights, privileges, prerogatives and powers enjoyed by him as Head of that religion, are unaffected and unimpaired; but in any acts, observances or ceremonies with respect to which the Conference of Rulers has agreed that they should extend to the Federation as a whole each of the other Rulers shall in his capacity of Head of the religion of Islam authorize the Yang di-Pertuan Agong to represent him.
(3) The Constitution of the States of Malacca, Penang, Sabah and Sarawak shall each make provision for conferring on the Yang di-Pertuan Agong the position of Head of the religion of Islam in that State.
(4) Nothing in this Article derogates from any other provision of this Constitution.
(5) Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution the Yang di-Pertuan Agong shall be the Head of the religion of Islam in the Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur, Labuan and Putrajaya; and for this purpose Parliament may by law make provisions for regulating Islamic religious affairs and for constituting a Council to advise the Yang di-Pertuan Agong in matters relating to the religion of Islam."

[8] This category includes Malays and indigenous people considered "sons of the soil" (*Bumi*: earth, *putera*: son), with Malays composing about 50.4 % and indigenous people 11 % in 2000.

[9] Percentage distribution of the population by ethnic group, 2010 in Population and Housing Census Malaysia 2010. http://www.statistics.gov.my/portal/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1215%3Apopulation-distribution-and-basic-demographic-characteristic-report-population-and-housing-census-malaysia-2010-updated-2972011&catid=130%3. Accessed October 18, 2011.

[10] Malays are Muslim as stipulated in Article 160 (2) of the federal constitution: "Malay is a person who professes Islam, (…) and habitually speaks the Malay language.": Here, Islam is the primary marker of Malay identity, and in fact the element of language seems not compulsory. So, the Malay identity is not entrenched into an ethnic identity but in the religious and customary practices, the roots and the language. In that sense any persons who fulfill the four criteria—religion, custom, language and roots—are considered Malay, including new converts, and eligible for the same privileges and laws. In this way, Malay identity and faith are inextricably linked.

out of Islam are considered traitors to the faith and to the entire Muslim community. In practice, then, any citizen considered by the Malaysian state to be a Muslim has no choice but to identify with Islam as his/her religion.

Malaysia has a long history of religious diversity, and the religious conflicts and ethno-religious cleansings that have erupted in other parts of Southeast Asia have not occurred in Malaysia. Most of the ostensibly ethnic clashes that have occurred since independence in 1957, from the racial riots of May 1969 to the demonstrations for Hindu rights in 2006,[11] were the result of social inequalities and political tensions. Nevertheless, the religious factor was often present in the latent tensions between Muslims and non-Muslims. In January 2009, a controversy erupted when a Catholic newspaper weekly *The Herald* used the term "Allah" to refer to God. This controversy led to attacks on churches and mosques, and is a clear example of the potential for minor tensions to rapidly escalate (Lemière 2010a). In a context where Muslims and non-Muslims feel threatened by each other, proselytism is perceived as an act of provocation by both sides.

The government's management of religion in Malaysia is presented as a way of managing religion to maintain a harmonious relationship among religious communities. Conversion, or the act of changing one's religion, and proselytism, or faith propagation, are taken as examples of these interreligious relations. In fact, as this chapter will show, the political articulation and social perception of religion, more specifically of proselytism and conversion, are at the source of recurrent tensions between religious groups, and jeopardize the balance of this plural society. The first part of this chapter will explore the reality of Malaysian religious pluralism from a legal perspective, focusing on the space occupied by Islam in the public sphere, and the management of religious diversity by state institutions and the judiciary. The second part of this chapter will explain the political aspects of faith propagation and conversion. This chapter will show that the tensions and controversies arising from these two issues reveal the ambiguities and, ultimately, the failure of governmental efforts to manage interreligious relations. The fundamental aim of this chapter is to understand the socio-political impact of conversion and proselytism. The mechanics through which faith propagation occurs will not be treated in detail here in the interest of an in-depth study of the political implications of proselytism.

[11] In 2006, state authorities demolished several Hindu temples, including Sri Siva Balamuniswarar (Setapak), Sri Kumaravel (Kampong Medan), Muniswarar temple (Midlands Estate), and Muniswarar (Seremban). Such destruction continued in 2007 despite protests from the Hindu community. On November 25, 2006, one hundred Hindu Rights Action Force (HINDRAF) supporters and members were arrested during one of the biggest demonstrations in Malaysian history, amassing more than 30,000 people in front of the British High Commission. Protesters were repressed by police forces using tear gas and water cannons. On December 12, Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi, gave the order to arrest five leaders of the organization accused of generating racial hatred and having links to a terrorist organization, under the ISA. Lemière (2009a).

Grounds for Discrimination: The Racialist Roots of Pluralist Malaysia

The Malaysian system of governance sustains economic and legal discrimination based on ethnic and religious criteria. Specifically, citizens are divided into administrative categories based on race/ethnicity—*bumiputera* versus non-*bumiputera*—and religion—Muslim versus non-Muslim. First, I would like to clarify some of the main concepts used hereafter. First, my use of the terms "ethnic" and "ethnicity" draws upon the working definition used by Elie Kedourie, which is framed squarely within the context of plural societies:

> The words "ethnicity" and "ethnic" appear to be chosen to denote specific and peculiar characteristics of particular groups living in so-called plural societies–groups which are different in culture, language, or physical characteristics from other, usually majority or dominant, groups in such societies (Kedourie 1988).

Bumiputera is a category that includes Malays, natives of Sabah and Sarawak, as well as indigenous people from the peninsula (*orang asli*). The term *Bumiputera* is based on an interpretation of history according to which Malays are, along with indigenous peoples, the original inhabitants of Malaysia. The rest of the population of Indian, Chinese, and those of other descent are considered non-*bumiputera*. Since independence, Malays and the natives of Sabah and Sarawak have had a special status—often wrongly described as "Malay-rights"—regarding public services, education, land ownership, property acquisition, business, and state leadership positions, as stipulated in Article 153 of the national constitution. The concept of *bumiputera* rights follows the adage, "First come, first served." *Bumiputera* are seen as the first inhabitants of the territory and are considered to be entitled to a larger share of resources.

Malay: An Ethnic Category with Non-ethnic Criteria

Muslims represent the majority of the population and are mostly Malay. As stipulated in Article 160 (2) of the federal constitution: "'Malay' means a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, and conforms to Malay custom."[12] So Malay identity is not defined by ethnic criteria but by religious and customary practices, language, and genealogical roots.[13] In that sense, any

[12]The constitution goes on to further qualify the definition of a Malay as—"(a) was before Merdeka Day, born in the Federation or in Singapore or born of parents one of whom was born in the Federation or in Singapore, or was on that day domiciled in the Federation or in Singapore; or (b) is the issue of such a person."

[13]The person must be born in Malaysia or born from parents who were born in Malaysia or Singapore.

person who fulfills the four criteria—religion, customs, language, and roots—is considered Malay, eligible for the same privileges (*bumiputera* and Malay rights), and subjected to the same laws (Islamic and civil). In theory and in practice, an ethnically non-Malay individual who converts to Islam, follows Malay customs, and eventually speaks Malay will be considered Malay. For instance, a Chinese person who has converted to Islam will be considered Malay and be entitled to the privileges reserved for the *bumiputera*. This means that Islam is the primary marker of Malay identity and, in fact, the main criterion for an individual to be administratively classified as Malay.

These administrative categories, which are based either on loose ethnic or religious concepts, are remnants of a British colonial administrative system. The pro-Malay ruling party, United Malay National Organisation (UMNO), has maintained the racial, and often racist, categories on which the colonial rulers built their economic and political system of governance since independence.[14] The British applied a strategy of "divide and rule" as a part of colonial capitalism, in which each community was to perform a particular economic role. The largest migratory wave of Chinese and Indian immigrants took place during this colonial period. Those migrations, either forced or voluntary, marked the beginning of a stratification of society along racist stereotypes and the start of the "lazy native" myth.[15] The British High Commissioner had the obligation to safeguard the special position of Malays and the legitimate interests of the other communities, as agreed upon by the British rulers and the Malay sultans in the Federation of Malaya Agreement of 1948 (Faruqi 2008).

In the 1950s, on the way to independence, a constitutional bargain was made between UMNO and the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA). The bargain would allow non-Malays to obtain citizenship on the condition that they agreed to support special constitutional provisions for Malays, including Article 3, which established Islam as the religion of the federation and *Bahasa Melayu* as the official language of the country. On this issue of religious freedom in Malaysia, Mohammed Hashim Kamali writes:

> The bargain so reached also included the Chinese acceptance of Islam as the state religion, on condition however, that followers of other religions were granted freedom of belief, practice and propagation.[16] The latter point was agreed to by the Malays as long as the propagation of other religious doctrines was not targeting them. The Malays agreed to accommodate the large numbers of non-Muslims in their midst, however, not at the risk of losing their identity. The non-Malays showed willingness in return to allow "special status" treatment in the matters of language, culture and the position of their Sultans (Kamali 2000).

[14] The United Malay National Organisation (UMNO) led today by Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak has been in power since independence. The party is the main actor in its coalition Barisan Nasional (BN, or National Front), which consists of 14 parties including the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC, an Indian party) and the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA, the Chinese party).

[15] On the myth of the lazy native and colonial racial stereotypes in Southeast Asia, see Alatas (1977).

[16] As stipulated in Article 11.

Following the ethnic riots of May 1969 and the resultant tensions between Malays and Chinese Malaysians, the government implemented a set of rules that enhanced the special position of Malays, who were then considered economically disadvantaged. Those policies were created in order to counter-balance economic inequalities, thus adding on to the existing constitutional provisions for the *bumiputera*. As a result of this affirmative action, Malays have had advantages in getting government positions, university admittance, loans, property, and public contracts for more than 30 years.[17] In fact, Malaysia is one of the rare examples of a state in which affirmative action policies are aimed toward the benefit of a majority rather than a minority group.[18]

Ethnicity and religion are administrative categories and grounds for social, economic, and legal discrimination. Even as Malaysians are unified under the banner of their citizenship, they are in fact institutionally segregated: each community has its own vernacular schools (Chinese, Indian, and Malay), religion (Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Taoist, and others), laws (customary or "*adat*," Islamic, and/or civil), and economic privileges. Citizenship does not grant all Malaysians the same rights and privileges. The Malay and *bumiputera* categories appear as political and social constructions. It is clear that the ambiguities and contradictions in the national constitution and the economic policies implemented by the government since the 1970s entrenched divisions between religious communities and challenge the very principles of pluralism that seek to ensure the peaceful coexistence of diverse religious and ethnic groups within the boundaries of the state.

Official Doctrine and Islamic Norms in the Public Sphere

Islam is the official religion of the federation under the constitution that is the supreme law of the land.[19] The government supports Islamic education, Islamic institutions, and the Islamic judiciary system to facilitate the Islamic way of life. According to Amanda Whiting, UMNO and PAS have both grounded not just their political rhetoric, but also "their political legitimacy and electoral fortunes" in Islamic governance (Whiting 2010). As a result, offers of aid to Muslims from the government have increased since the 1980s. Numerous government initiatives include financial support for pilgrimages, the construction of mosques and *surau* (prayer rooms) in government buildings and public areas, the development of *halal*

[17] New Economy Policy (1971), National Development Policy (1991), and New Economic Model (2010).

[18] Also see the case of South Africa and the broad-based Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), in which South Africans of Chinese descent are now included and officially recognized as black.

[19] Articles 2–3 of the national constitution.

businesses, and so forth. Malaysia is not an Islamic state, yet it is not completely secular either.[20] To quote Shad Saleem Faruqi:

> The implication of adopting Islam as the religion of the federation is that Malaysia is not a full-fledged secular State. Government support to the religion of Islam is permitted. The government is not required to maintain neutrality between religions.[21]

The question of Malaysia's state religious identity continues to be a subject of much debate. In fact, and as explored by Amanda Whiting, the ambiguities in the constitution do have serious implications for legal interpretation and practice.[22] Malays are subject to Islamic law and cannot derogate from it.[23] The constitution does not specify which branch of Islam a Malay must profess, but in fact, the official dogma promoted by the state religious and legal institutions is that Malays should follow Sunni Islam from the *Shafi`i* school of jurisprudence. Other interpretations of Islam are thus considered deviant by the Malaysian Department of Islamic Development, or JAKIM.[24] JAKIM is overseen by the Prime Minister's cabinet and is a federal institution in charge of promoting and regulating Islamic practices as well as implementing Islamic laws and procedures at the state level. Each state branch of JAKIM operates independently from the others. Islamic laws are not harmonized at the federal level, but vary according to each state's legislation. Individual states are authorized by the constitution to legislate on matters pertaining to Islam by way of defining offenses.[25]

The Islamic judiciary system is independent. Since 1988, *shari`a* courts are no longer subordinate to civil courts.[26] Hence, the Islamic judiciary is a parallel system to the civil judiciary, which does not have power over the *shari`a* court jurisdiction. The *shari`a* court jurisdiction is thus protected from review and appeal to the civil justice system.[27] Nevertheless, there are still jurisdictional conflicts, specifically when cases involve Muslim and non-Muslim parties, conversion in and out of Islam, or child custody and divorce.[28]

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[20] For a complete study on the Malaysian constitution see Faruqi, *Document of Destiny.*

[21] Faruqi, *Document of Destiny*, 128.

[22] Whiting, "Secularism, the Islamic State and the Malaysian Legal Profession," 12.

[23] "All Muslims are subjected to Islamic law in matters of succession, testate and intestate, betrothal, marriage, divorce, dower, maintenance, adoption, legitimacy, guardianship, gifts, wakafs, zakat, fitrah, baitulmal or similar Islamic religious revenue. A Muslim cannot opt out of Islamic law (However in many areas Muslims are allowed to have a choice between syariah provisions and ordinary civil laws. Among these areas are banking, trusts, adoption and a whole range of commercial transactions). He/she can be compelled to pay Zakat and Fitrah." Faruqi, *Document of Destiny*, 132

[24] Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), "About Jakim," http://www.islam.gov.my/en/about-jakim. Accessed October 18, 2011.

[25] Within the framework provided by List II of the 9th Schedule.

[26] Act A704, 10.06.1988. See Shuaib (2012, January).

[27] Article 121(1A) and Paragraph 1, List II of the 9th schedule of the national constitution.

[28] Cases for references: *Tongiah Jumali v Kerajaan Johor* [2004] 5 MLJ 41 (conversion out of Islam and Christian marriage), and Saravanan a/l Thangathoray v Subashini a/p Rajasingham [2007] 2 MLJ 705 (involving Muslim and non-Muslim parties).

Freedom of religion is enshrined in the constitution as stipulated in Article 11. It is clear the constitution provides an absolute right to profess, practice, and manage one's religion, although it must be noted that abuses of Article 11 are rampant.[29] Religious propagation is limited when it targets Muslims (Article 11, clause 4).[30] Article 12 also prevents religious discrimination and coercion to practice any other religion than one's own: "There shall be no discrimination against any citizen on the grounds of religion, race and descent (…)."[31] If we look at articles 11 and 12, several law enactments and articles within the constitution, as well as government policies economically favoring the Malay community are ambiguous, if not contradictory.

The constitution does not outline any law regarding the act of changing one's religion, whereas Islamic law does. Nevertheless, Faruqi observes that:

> '[R]eligion' in article 12(3) and elsewhere in the Constitution seems, at least in the case of Muslims, to refer to "the formal religion one is born into." Individuals born into a religion seem to have no choice to choose cults or systems of belief other than those approved by the official religious authorities. That is why there is punishment for 'deviants.'[32]

[29] See: Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM) (2011).

[30] (1) "Every person has the right to profess and practice his religion and, subject to Clause (4), to propagate it.
(2) No person shall be compelled to pay any tax, the proceeds of which are specially allocated in whole or in part for the purposes of a religion other than his own.
(3) Every religious group has the right—(a) to manage its own religious affairs; (b) to establish and maintain institutions for religious or charitable purposes; and (c) to acquire and own property and hold and administer it in accordance with law.
(4) State law and in respect of the Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur, Labuan and Putrajaya, federal law may control or restrict the propagation of any religious doctrine or belief among persons professing the religion of Islam.
(5) This Article does not authorize any act contrary to any general law relating to public order, public health or morality."

[31] (1) "Without prejudice to the generality of Article 8, there shall be no discrimination against any citizen on the grounds only of religion, race, descent or place of birth—(a) in the administration of any educational institution maintained by a public authority, and, in particular, the admission of pupils or students or the payment of fees; or (b) in providing out of the funds of a public authority financial aid for the maintenance or education of pupils or students in any educational institution (whether or not maintained by a public authority and whether within or outside the Federation).
(2) Every religious group has the right to establish and maintain institutions for the education of children in its own religion, and there shall be no discrimination on the ground only of religion in any law relating to such institutions or in the administration of any such law; but it shall be lawful for the Federation or a State to establish or maintain or assist in establishing or maintaining Islamic institutions or provide or assist in providing instruction in the religion of Islam and incur such expenditure as may be necessary for the purpose.
(3) No person shall be required to receive instruction in or take part in any ceremony or act of worship of a religion other than his own.
(4) For the purposes of Clause (3) the religion of a person under the age of eighteen years shall be decided by his parent or guardian."

[32] Faruqi, *Document of Destiny*, 330.

The sentences for apostasy, hereafter referred to as *murtad* laws, differ from one state to another. Islamic law in Malaysia is interpreted differently in each of the 13 states and the federal territories. State assemblies are responsible for defining offenses against Islamic norms and rituals, and their punishments.

We can observe four different approaches—neutral or permissive, consensual and conservative:

Murtad Laws in Malaysia[33]

State	Legal Approach	Type of offense	Penalty/sentence
Federal Territories, Perlis, Kedah, Penang, Selangor, and Sarawak	Neutral or Permissive	None	None
Negeri Sembilan	Consensual	Criminal offense	Counseling and other procedures for a prescribed duration
Sabah, Malacca and Kelantan	Conservative	Criminal offense	Detention in a rehabilitation center (from 3 to 36 months)
Perak, Pahang, Terengganu and Malacca	Conservative	Criminal offense	Fine, imprisonment and whipping (up to 6 strokes)[34]

Historically, Malaysian states allowed for the conversion of Muslims to other religions by a simple registration process, but Islamization policies caused the radicalization of the Islamic judiciary. Since 1988, civil courts have tended to be very cautious regarding cases involving religious issues pertaining to Islam,[35] and have refused to take positions that would go against Islamic norms. Islamic courts have mostly refused to accept and certify conversion out of Islam, except in rare cases where Muslims reverted to their previous faiths after having converted to Islam for marriage.[36] As Shuaib explains, the issue arises over freedom of religion for Muslims: the conflict regarding court jurisdiction in the case of the renunciation of Islam, and whether the law on apostasy itself is against the freedom of religion guaranteed under the federal constitution, has yet to be resolved.[37]

[33] Ibid., 345.

[34] In Perak, Muslim apostasy is punishable with RM 2000 fine (about USD 650) or 2 years imprisonment. Since 1992, four apostates have been imprisoned and "rehabilitated" in Kelantan. Faruqi, *Document of Destiny*, 345.

[35] Such as the Lina Joy case.

[36] Siti Fatimah Tan is one of the rare cases where a Muslim convert has been able to revert to her original faith (Buddhism). Tan Ean Huang converted to Islam in 1998 in order to marry an Iranian man in 2004. After her husband left her, she filed a renunciation of Islam to the Penang Shari`a High Court. Her Muslim status was canceled in May 2009 by the *shari`a* court on the grounds that she never practiced the Islamic faith.

[37] Shuaib, "The Islamic Judicial Structure in Malaysia," 14.

Malaysian Muslims are not allowed to deviate from the official dogma, and both the religious and legal systems have been set up to prevent any deviation. Working in tandem with one another are the Department of Religious Affairs, an Islamic religious court system, and "moral agents." [38] In practice, each State Islamic Department has the right to arrest and detain individuals for offenses regarding the practice of Islam with a warrant granted by the *shari`a* court.[39] Since the Islamic court system is not provided with an enforcement agency, the police—a federal agency—will assist *shari`a* court officers or mosque delegates. The role and powers conferred to the Islamic religious authority in Malaysia emphasize the hybrid nature of the Malaysian state as neither completely Islamic nor completely secular. "Moral agents" are individuals, either from the mosque committee or the enforcement unit of the religious department, who work in collaboration with the police to initiate raids on bars, hotel, clubs, and public places. The relationship between the police and the religious authority is loose and operates on a case-by-case basis. In a way, Muslims are protected (or isolated, according to one's perspective) from other religious influences. Sunni Islam from the Shafi`i school of law is the only form of Islam promoted by official religious institutions in Malaysia, and Shi`a and other Sunni non-Shafi`i sects are forbidden and even listed as "deviant" by the Department of Religious Affairs.[40] Malaysian Muslims must conform to the norms that are defined and promoted by the Department, and thus in matters pertaining to Islam, individual rights to freedom of religion are subordinated to the dictates of the state. This distortion of legal interpretation emphasizes the ambiguities of constitutional interpretation and the virtually unlimited power held by the state religious administration over Muslim citizens. Apostasy *(murtad)* laws as enforced in Malaysia go against fundamental liberties provided by the national constitution (articles 3, 8, 10, and 11). The fact that in most cases the civil courts refuse to opine on matters relating to Islamic belief and practice has directly expanded the power of Islamic courts, such that they can disregard the limitations of Islamic courts as stated in the Constitution. Although civil courts do take a soft approach on apostasy, maintaining that a Muslim has the right to convert to another religion, the decision

[38] The role and powers conferred to the religious authority in Malaysia emphasize the hybrid nature of the Malaysian State as neither fully Islamic, nor completely secular. The existence of a moral police preventing moral crimes potentially committed by both Muslims and non-Muslims reinforces the virtual power of the state over Muslims and, surprisingly, over non-Muslims as well. It is interesting to note that the religious police have been targeting Malaysian Muslims as well as non-Muslims and Muslim foreigners. On September 15, 2009, Nazarudin Kamaruddin, 46, an Indonesian citizen, became the first person to be caned for consuming alcohol in Pahang state in central Malaysia. A few months earlier, Kartika Sukarno was condemned by the same judge to whipping and a fine for consuming beer in a club. See Lemière (2009b). For an example of harassment of a mixed couple by the moral police see Sharon Shah, "'Is Chinese Penis Really That Good?'" The Nut Graph, June 14, 2010. http://www.thenutgraph.com/%E2%80%9Cis-chinese-penis-really-that-good%E2%80%9D/. Accessed October 19, 2011.

[39] Shuaib, "The Islamic Judicial Structure in Malaysia," 19.

[40] Lemière, "Entre flagellation et exclusion."

to do so cannot be unilateral; civil courts require a certificate of renunciation from the Islamic court. This has proved impossible in numerous cases, such as the Lina Joy[41] and Revathi Masoosai cases.[42] Malaysia has not ratified the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, but as a member of the Islamic Conference since 1969, Malaysia has ratified the Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in Islam (CDHRI). Article 10 of the CDHRI stipulates: "Islam is the religion of unspoiled nature. It is prohibited to exercise any form of compulsion on man or to exploit his poverty or ignorance in order to convert him to another religion or to atheism."

Conversion and Proselytism: A Political Perspective

In Malaysia, *da`wa* refers to two different concepts that are linked to each other. First, *da`wa* literally means "call." It is the duty of Muslims to propagate the Islamic faith to the non-Muslim community (an invitation to conversion) and to Muslims (a call for return to the fundamentals). In that sense, *da`wa* can be understood broadly as proselytism to Muslims or non-Muslims. Second, the "*da`wa* movement" refers to a movement that emerged in the late 1970s following the Iranian revolution.[43]

The Islamization program initiated by the government to contain the Islamic movement by answering its demands started in the Mahathir era (1981), when the Parliament passed laws extending the application of Islamic law beyond family

[41] Lina Joy is the Christian name of a Malaysian Muslim who converted to Christianity in 1998 and subsequently married a Christian. Following her conversion, Joy, formerly known as Azlina Jailani, requested the National Registration Department to revise the designation of "Islam" on her ID card, which would have implied a change of administrative status from Muslim to non-Muslim. The National Registration Department (NRD) accepted her change of identity but not of her religious status: Lina Joy would remain a Muslim, unless she obtained a certificate from the Islamic court certifying her renunciation of Islam. In 1999, Joy sued the NRD and at the same time applied for a certificate of conversion out of Islam to her state's *shari`a* court. In 2007, after 9 years of legal procedures in both civil and Islamic court defended by her lawyers and human rights activists Malik Imtiaz and Haris Ibrahim, Joy has still not been successful in obtaining her new status and thus is still considered a Muslim by Malaysian authorities. In order to practice the religion of her choice, she now lives in Australia.

[42] Masoosai (formerly Siti Fatima), an Indian-born Muslim, was raised by her Hindu paternal grandmother, and she subsequently converted to Hinduism, and married a Hindu in 2004. Her conversion came to light after she gave birth to a girl, Dyvia Darshini, and declared her birth to the administration. Masoosai was convicted for apostasy by the Islamic court of Malacca and was sent to a faith rehabilitation center in Ulu Yam (in the Kuala Lumpur area) for 180 days. Her 15-month-old daughter was removed from her father's care, and custody was given to her Muslim maternal grandparents, as Malaysian law does not recognize marriage between Muslims and non-Muslims. See Claudia Teophilius (2007).

[43] About the history of the *da`wa* movement and its political consequences see Mess and Pearce, "Dakwah Islamiah," 196–220 (Abdul Fauzi Abdul Hamid 2000).

matters.[44] The Islamization program initiated by the Mahathir government and designed by Anwar Ibrahim[45] sought to counter the *da`wa* movement and PAS by complying with some of the expectations of Islamic non-governmental organizations (INGOs). The government strengthened the position of Islam in the public sphere by Islamizing state institutions and creating Islamic agencies to reinforce the application of Islamic law and norms, and in this way, entrenched Islamic principles in modern Malaysian society (Othman 2004).

Each declaration and political move Mahathir made toward Islamization during his years in power was a strategy to counter the Islamist Party and the Islamic movements embodied by INGOs. At that time, several major organizations were banned, such as Darul Arqam.[46] In 1988, during the last stages of his move towards Islamization, Mahathir decided to expand the power of the *shari`a* courts as explained earlier, bringing Muslims and non-Muslims into a war of words and stoking fears of Islamization in the minds of non-Muslim and secular Muslim citizens.

On September 29, 2001, following the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York, Mahathir announced that Malaysia was an Islamic state at the Gerakan Party's 30th national delegate's conference.[47]

> UMNO wishes to state loudly that Malaysia is an Islamic country. This is based on the opinion of ulamaks (sic.) [religious scholars] who had clarified what constituted an Islamic country. If Malaysia is not an Islamic country it is because it does not implement the hudud, but then there are no Islamic countries in the world. If UMNO says that Malaysia is an Islamic country, it is because in an Islamic country non-Muslims have specific rights. This is in line with the teachings of Islam. There is no compulsion in Islam. And Islam does not like chaos that may come about if Islamic laws are enforced on non-Muslims (Thomas 2005).

This seemed to be the final attempt to demonstrate to its constituencies that the PAS discourse was unjustified and outdated, while PAS strongly opposed the statement by claiming that Malaysia was still a secular state. Despite Mahathir's declaration asserting the non-compulsory character of Islam, the fear of Islamization became stronger in non-Muslim communities. These communities saw the reshaping of the Malaysian public sphere along Islamic norms as undermining the pluralist social contract formed during independence. Among the side effects of

[44] Islamic Banking Act of 1983, Government Investment Act of 1983, and Islamic Insurance Act of 1984.

[45] About the relationship between Anwar Ibrahim and Mahathir Mohamad, see Wain (2009).

[46] Ashaari Muhammad founded Darul Arqam in 1968 in order to establish an Islamic society. The leader was critical of the lack of involvement of the government in the public domain. The organization managed to develop a large network of Islamic businesses and educational, social, and economic projects. The organization became very popular within the government and education sectors, and claimed to have more than 7,000 members in public institutions. Darul Arqam owned a business empire estimated at 300 million RM (approximately equivalent to 65 million Euros) that involved supermarkets, information technology, cosmetic, and video production. The organization was banned in 1994 and the leaders were extradited from hiding in Thailand. They were jailed under the ISA. Later the organization was dissolved.

[47] Gerakan belongs to the ruling coalition, Barisan Nasional.

Islamization were the growing interest in religion among Malay youth, the normalization of wearing the *tudung* (*hijab*, or Islamic headscarf), a larger offering of religious programs on television, and a "growth in *dakwah* (*da`wa*) organizations that emphasized proselytization for non-Muslims and communications among Muslims."[48]

State Proselytism: When a Non-theocratic State Encourages Conversion

The Malaysian state controls the most active and powerful *da`wa* bodies in Malaysia. The involvement of the state in proselytism and conversion activities demonstrates the fact that the Malaysian state does not hold a neutral position towards religion, and thus cannot be considered a truly "secular" state. Conversion to Islam is encouraged and supported by the state via its own institutions, including the federal and state-level Religious Department and its *da`wa* organizations, including the Muslim Welfare Organization of Malaysia (PERKIM) and the Islamic *Dakwah* (YADIM). Non-governmental organizations do play important roles in religious propagation and conversion, but the state is at the forefront of such efforts.

The state's religious institutions control the propagation of the Islamic faith in Malaysia through several governmental or semi-governmental bodies. PERKIM was the first governmental *da`wa* organization, created in 1960 by Tun Abdul Razak, Malaysia's prime minister from 1970 to 1976, who remained the organization's president until 1989.[49] PERKIM has a branch in every state of the federation except Sabah and hosts three main activities to fulfill its mission supporting "the propagation of Islamic faith," *da`wah*, religious education (via the Internet or in the branch office), and publications (in Malay, Chinese, Tamil, and English). PERKIM is a direct partner with the Department of Religion for each state, and has a strong history of interaction with government leaders and institutions.

YADIM is a state institution founded in 1974 "*to support the advancement of the Ummah, and enhance the understanding of Islam.*"[50] Its mission is to organize *da`wa* activities, promote Islam, encourage conversion, and train Islamic missionaries. PERKIM and YADIM are both state institutions that hold a monopoly on conversion to Islam in Malaysia. In fact numerous Islamic organizations, both governmental and non-governmental bodies, conduct missionary activities targeted at Muslims and non-Muslims. The goals are to spread the message of Islam, encourage Muslims to become more pious and adhere to Islamic principles more rigorously, and to promote Islam and encourage conversion amongst non-Muslims. In

[48] Ibid.

[49] PERKIM (Pertubahan Kebajikan Islam Malaysia, or Muslim Welfare Organization Malaysia), http://www.perkim.net.my. Accessed July 4, 2011.

[50] YADIM, http://www.yadim.com.my. Accessed July 4, 2011.

most cases, the act of conversion itself will be officially held and registered within governmental organizations, such as YADIM or PERKIM.

Non-governmental Proselytism: *Da`wa* and Gospel

In Malaysia, Islam and Christianity are recognized as the only proselytizing monotheistic religions. Faith propagation is in both cases a follower's duty. For Muslims, *da`wa* is seen as a rewarding action; for Christians, and more specifically for evangelists, faith propagation or gospel (spreading the good news) is a requirement. INGOs operate as independent *da`wa* organizations. Most of the Muslim organizations in Malaysia do have an Islamist agenda; to them *da`wa* and conversion constitute a path toward the establishment of an Islamic state. Non-governmental *da`wa* organizations, such as ABIM, Pertubahan Jama'ah Islah Malaysia (JIM),[51] and the Malaysian Chinese Muslim Association (MACMA)[52] aim to convert non-Muslims to Islam and encourage Muslims to return to a pure practice of Islam at the root of their "Islamic identity." *Da`wa*, when it refers to conversion, is specifically directed toward two communities: the Chinese and the indigenous Malaysians. Most conversions of Chinese Malaysians are made through MACMA branches, which primarily target non-Muslim Chinese and whose members are mostly converted Muslims (as opposed to having been born Muslim). According to MACMA's president:

> We, the Malaysian Chinese Muslims, inspired by the spirit of Islam and the need to propagate the Islamic faith through the promotion of religious, social, educational, economic and welfare aspects of life in accordance with the teachings of the Holy Qur'an and the Hadith, humbly relying on the Blessings of Almighty Allah, dedicate ourselves to create awareness of the need, as well as to realize the building of a Malaysian Chinese Muslim Ummah in Malaysia.[53]

Due to restrictions on religious propagation, the primary targets of most Christian proselytizing groups are non-Muslim Chinese and Indian Malaysians, as well as foreign workers from the Philippines and Sri Lanka. As explained earlier, the

[51] Pertubahan Jamaah Islah Malaysia (JIM) can be seen in the Malaysian context as a modern organization bringing together highly educated individuals and emphasizing leadership training. The main aim of the organization is "to reform and mobilize society towards the establishment of truth and universal justice." See: JIM, http://www.jim.org.my. Accessed July 4, 2011.

[52] The Malaysian Chinese Muslim Association (MACMA) is oriented toward the Malaysian Chinese community. MACMA was created in 1994 and today has about 1,600 members, all of whom are Malaysian Chinese Muslims. Based in Kuala Lumpur, the organization has 14 branches around the country. MACMA aims to bring together all the Chinese Muslims of Malaysia, estimated at around 57,000 individuals. The organization is well organized and offers a good support network to Chinese entrepreneurs involved in the *halal* business.

[53] Interview with Dato' Haji Mustapha MA, President, May 2006.

conversion process is very difficult for Malays and preaching to Muslims is illegal, and Malays who convert from Islam to another religion generally do not reveal their new religious beliefs. According to a Malaysian evangelical pastor based in the State of Johor, Malays who convert to Christianity either migrate to neighboring countries (as did Lina Joy) or practice their rituals in Singapore.[54] According to other sources, groups of Malay converts organize secret meetings to share their experiences and pray together.[55] The official number of conversions to Christianity is not officially reported by the states and can be found only by consulting the records of every independent church. The phenomenon of conversion to Christianity occurs mainly in urban or semi-urban areas, where the exposure to other faiths is more common and where the act of conversion can remain anonymous, if needed.

Malaysia is a "protected religious market" in which official Muslim proselytizing groups have an advantage. In fact, non-Muslim and unauthorized Muslim proselytizing groups can face legal consequences for their missionary activity. Since non-Muslims are not subject to Islamic law, the cases fall under the jurisdiction of the civil court. The religious offerings in Malaysia are diverse despite these restrictions, and it is up to missionaries to act within the legal framework of the "religious market." The number of conversions to Islam is generally officially recorded by the state religious institutions, but the number of conversions from Islam remains uncertain. Clearly, the controversy surrounding apostasy in Malaysia when it involves Muslim converts is in inverse proportion to the number of cases. Apostasy cases are rare. Nevertheless, the possibility of the Christianization of the Muslim community is a fear shared by many Malays and is often used to unite Muslims in defense of their community as showed by the recent rally that was organized by the Himpun movement in October 2011.

Himpun is a coalition of Malay NGOs led by Mohd Azmi Abdul Hamid, president of TERAS,[56] and Asri Mohammed, former president of ABIM, who organized a rally on October 22, 2011, aimed at "preserving the faith of the community" from evangelization and its resultant rising number of conversions of Muslims to Christianity.[57] In his declaration to the press, Azmi referred to the existence of a Christian plan to evangelize the Muslims of Malaysia by capitalizing on the weakness of governmental institutions' liberal attitudes and their failure to implement the Islamic teachings.[58] The organizers had hoped for the gathering to be joined by

[54] Interviewed in 2008, the name and exact location remain anonymous so as to not compromise the interlocutor.

[55] Interview with a Malay woman who unofficially converted to Buddhism and whose sister converted to Christianity, Kuala Lumpur 2008. The existence of underground meetings of Malays who have converted to Christianity has been mentioned by several other sources but not observed by the author.

[56] Teras Pengupayaan Melayu (TERAS) is a rural Islamist NGO based in Merbok (Kedah) created in the 1990s by its president, Mohd Azmi Abdul Hamid. The NGO has 3,000 members and maintains branches in most of Malaysian states. See Lemière (2010b).

[57] The organizers claimed more than 250,000 conversions from Islam to Christianity since 2008.

[58] See "Rally organizers denies link to Ezam or Perkasa," *Malaysiakini*, October 18, 2011. http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/178955. Accessed October 18, 2011.

one million Muslims, and thus titled the event, "Sejuta Himpunan Umat," or "the Gathering of One Million." The rally was held in Shah Alam Stadium with a police permit, but only 5,000 supporters showed up. The failure to attract the numbers aimed for by the event's organizers should, however, not be merely interpreted as a weakness of this pro-Malay, anti-apostasy movement. For seen as part of an on-going political strategy by Malay groups as an "ethno-religious lobby," the attention that the event attracted was still considered to be a "media coup."[59]

Social and Political Significance of Conversion

As a result of Islamization policies, the religious bureaucracy has gained power in Malaysia since the early 1980s. Under Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (2003–2008), state institutions managing religious affairs gained greater independence in a context where the government seemed to be avoiding asserting itself in any religious debate for fear of losing its Malay constituencies. It was also desperately trying to promote "civilizational Islam," or *Islam Hadhari.* As conceived by Abdullah Badawi, Islam Hadhari is not a new "school of Islam" but a practical way of interpreting Islam, as explained in ten major points to help Muslims adhere to Islamic teachings in modern times.[60] This artificial concept, which looked more like a political party program, was rejected by conservative Muslims and only adopted by the international community.[61] Consequently, religious debates entered into the public arena and controversies pertaining to religious issues arose, thereby reinforcing the division between conservative Muslims and secular Malaysians (including non-Muslims and Muslims). Following several controversial conversion cases, the failure to establish an Inter-Religious Council initiated by civil society groups,[62] and

[59] On the media coup strategy, see Lemière (2007).

[60] "1. Faith and piety in Allah; 2. A just and trustworthy government; 3. A free and independent people; 4. A vigorous pursuit and mastery of knowledge; 5. A balanced and comprehensive economic development; 6. A good quality of life for the people; 7. The protection of the rights of minority groups and women; 8. Cultural and moral integrity; 9. The safeguarding of natural resources and the environment; and 10. Strong defence capabilities." In Badawi 2006.

[61] From a lecture by Abdullah Badawi, Sydney Australia, April 2005, available online at: http://asiasociety.org/countries-history/religions-philosophies/Islam-hadhari-a-multi-racial-society. Accessed June 30, 2011.

[62] In early 2001, the Bar Council initiated the formation of a Pro-tem Committee to steer the formation of a statutory body to be called the Inter-Religious Council. The Interfaith commission (IFC) included The Bar Council; the International Movement for a Just World (JUST); HAKAM; ABIM; SIS; The Malaysian Consultative Body on Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism (MCCBCHS); Institut Kefahman Islam Malaysia (IKIM); Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM); Jabatan Agama Islam Selangor (JAIS); Insaf; SUARAM; Forum IQRA; ALIRAN; Research and Information on Islam (RICOI); Pure Life Society; and JIM. The Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) and representatives from the Ministry of National Unity and Social Development were also invited to join the committee. See: Konrad Adenauer Foundation, *The Initiative for the Formation of an Interfaith Commission—A Documentation* (Malaysia, July 6, 2007).

the radicalization of Islamist party discourse regarding the implementation of *hudud* laws in Kelantan,[63] the tensions over the debate on freedom of religion reached their peak in 2006. At this time, Article 11's coalition forum for freedom of religion was interrupted by the police and opponents from Islamist NGOs.[64] The issue of proselytization and conversion of Muslims to other religions has been recently raised again by Himpun.

So far, interreligious dialogue has been made nearly impossible in Malaysia. Islamist and conservative Muslim and pro-Malay groups see inter-religious interactions as potentially risky situations for Muslims "to get confused" and that such confusion could lead to apostasy. Recently, some religious officers from JAIS (*Jabatan Agama Islam Selangor* or the Selangor Religious Department)[65] interrupted an interfaith dinner organized by a Catholic church, accusing the organizers of trying to convert the Malay individuals sitting in the audience.[66]

Almost every attempt to create an official body to facilitate religious debate has been strongly opposed by a coalition of Malaysian Islamic NGOs and JAKIM, called the "Allied Committee of Coordinated Islamic NGOs," or ACCIN. ACCIN is a front organization created by these Islamic NGOs to coordinate their actions, with the stated goal of returning dignity to Islam. ACCIN aims to use a common voice to counter "anti-Islamic initiatives" in the country and support the implementation of *shari`a*. ACCIN has played a major role in every moral or religious controversy, from apostasy issues to the ban on the religious movement Ahmadiyya to the "Allah controversy."[67]

The Inter-faith Council Project was abandoned in 2005 after ABIM left the discussion table, and subsequent attempts to revive the project were aborted.[68] A coalition of 13 NGOs called "Article 11" emerged as an answer to the fear of Islamization shared by both secular Muslims and non-Muslims.[69] It was created "to ensure a Malaysia that: upholds the supremacy of the Federal Constitution; protects every person equally regardless of religion, race, descent, and place of birth or gender; and

[63] The debate started in 1991 and the bill was passed in November 1993 by the State Legislative Council of Kelantan, a state governed by PAS. The bill, which outlines punishments exceeding the limits of Shari`a Courts as authorized by the constitution (List 2 of the 9th schedule), has not been enforced.

[64] Lemière, "Apostasy and Islamic Civil Society in Malaysia," 46–47.

[65] http://www.jais.gov.my. Accessed October 29, 2011.

[66] See Teoh (2011).

[67] The Ahmadiyya movement claims to be a branch of Islam, though it is considered deviant by mainstream Muslims. In April 2009, Ahmadis were forbidden to use their places of worship by MAIS, the religious authorities in Selangor. There are about 1,500 Ahmadis in Malaysia. See Shanon Shah, "MAIS forbids Ahmaddiya worship," April 28, 2009, *The Nut Graph*, http://www.thenutgraph.com/mais-forbids-ahmadiyya-worship/. See also the movement's website at: http://www.islam-ahmadiyya.org/.

[68] See Imtiaz (2005).

[69] The coalition includes AWAM, The Bar Council, SIS, SUARAM, MCCLBHS, MCLS, WAO, and HAKAM.

is based on the rule of law."[70] In 2004, Article 11 embarked on a series of public forums throughout the country, with the goal of informing citizens of their constitutional rights in the midst of tensions aroused by several cases of apostasy. They were quickly opposed by conservative Muslims from ACCIN and Badai, an anti-IFC group. By the end of 2006, pressure from the police and government forced Article 11 to put an end to its actions.[71] ACCIN remains a key player in religious and moral controversies, and each of its members can be found in the Himpun movement.

Beyond a Religious Call: A Political Strategy

Although INGOs and *da`wa* organizations claim to be neutral, non-partisan, and apolitical, they play an active role in the contemporary political scene. INGOs can be seen as non-traditional political actors influencing traditional political actors, including political parties, members of government, and constituencies.[72] INGOs are well entrenched in Malaysian society and occupy a strategic position that is in direct contact with potential voters in both rural and urban areas without wearing the banner of any political party. They must be seen as independent, if partisan, political agents with social and educational programs—specifically those involving civil education, or "citizen awareness"— that directly benefit the parties they support.

In Malaysia, Islamic civil society is not neutral but instead is divided between government supporters and opposition supporters, and, to a certain extent, between UMNO supporters and PAS supporters. Thanks to their educational and welfare activities, Islamic organizations are firmly rooted in urban and rural Muslim communities. The INGO organizations have the potential to create political support within their own internally diverse bases. Furthermore, because of their access to media and political leaders, they are an effective political agent and relay point.

According to national figures recorded by JAKIM and *Pusat Islam*, most of the conversions to Islam between 1980 and 2001 occurred in the states of Sabah and Sarawak. During those two decades, nearly 50 % of the converts were from East Malaysia (19,485 out of 43,305), predominantly from Sabah (10,290). A large increase in the number of conversions since 1992 occurred during the years when Islamization policies were enacted (from 660 in 1990 to 1,380 in 1997). If we look at the ethnic backgrounds of Muslim converts in West Malaysia from 1985 to 1995, we observe that nearly 50 % of Muslim converts are of Chinese descent (7,191 out of 14,442). Two conclusions can be drawn here. First, Chinese and indigenous people are religiously more mobile than other communities due to the more flexible legal framework that applies to them regarding proselytism and conversion. Second,

[70] "The Coalition Called Article 11: Myth and Fact," *Aliran*, March 27, 2007, http://aliran.com/282.html.

[71] Lemière, "Apostasy and Islamic Civil Society in Malaysia," 46–47.

[72] Lemière, "Dakwah and Politics."

these populations represent a specific target for *da`wa* organizations willing to proselytize to people from the biggest minority group (Chinese) and from non-Muslim *bumiputera*. And finally, Islamization policies did have an effect on the conversion of non-Muslims to Islam.

The indigenous populations of East and West Malaysia, who traditionally practice polytheistic traditional religions, represent a clear target for proselytizing groups. In August 2010, Al Jazeera reported stories of *orang asli* from inland East Malaysia who were encouraged, if not forced, by the local administration to convert to Islam in exchange for better infrastructure in their villages.[73] The report juxtaposed houses made of concrete offered to "Muslims on paper" with the huts of people who had "yet to convert." Similar stories have been reported in the local and international press.

Borneo has long been considered fertile ground for proselytism, and most Christian and Muslim proselytizing organizations consider it a strategic area. In 1922, the publishers of *With the Wild Men of Borneo*, a narrative by missionary pastor Mershon's wife Elizabeth, introduced the memoir by explaining the region's receptiveness to faith propagation: "The North and West Coast are now under British rule, and in this district the most successful missionary efforts have been conducted. The work of Pastor Mershon and his capable wife in British Borneo [today Sabah and Sarawak] shows what the gospel can accomplish in changing the hearts and lives of such unpromising people as are found in these far-off regions" (Mershon 1922).

The constitution of the state of Sabah was amended in 1973 to make Islam the state religion. In so doing, the process of Islamization, which included the migration of Malays from peninsular Malaysia and the conversion of the indigenous population to Islam, was encouraged. During the period of emergency rule following the racial riots of 1969, the opportunity was taken to expel Christian missionary groups (in March and December 1970).[74] More recently, the director of the religious department of the state of Sabah, Datuk Amri A. Suratman, declared the intention of the state to enforce the apostasy law regarding Muslim converts who do not practice Islamic rituals and who either maintain their animist practices or convert to Christianity. This measure comes with the construction of a faith rehabilitation center in Kinarut. The leaders of the Catholic Church of Sabah, which has expanded over the years from one to three dioceses, expressed their concerns that this decision, in the aftermath of the Allah controversy and the cases of arson on churches in the area, would enhance the climate of fear.[75]

In a context where religion has been so politicized, it should come as no surprise that *da`wa* has political implications. According to Regina Lim, the Islamization of indigenous populations in Sabah has represented a clear political target for political parties and the government since the state joined the federation in 1963. In her study

[73] "Malay Ethnic Tribes Forced to Convert," *Al Jazeera*, August 2010.

[74] See Lemière, "Dakwah and Politics."

[75] Lemière, "*Allah Molotov*."

on the ethnic and religious configuration of politics in Sabah, she affirmed that, "The diversity of ethnic groups in Sabah meant that religion, at least for Muslim groups, proved a stronger political bond than ethnicity. With a high proportion of the indigenous population practicing neither Islam nor Christianity, stakes were high for conversion" (Lim 2008).

Religious affiliation does play a role in electoral behavior. As observed by Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, the secularization process that occurred in Western Europe in the postwar era did affect the support given to religious political parties. This phenomenon is not evident in many recently developed countries in Asia, where there seems to be no evidence of a decline in religiosity or of a lessening of the role of religion in politics. According to Norris and Inglehart, the decline of religion and the dissociation of religious practice and electoral behavior is a phenomenon limited to industrial and post-industrial society, with the exception of the United States and Austria (Norris and Inglehart 2004). In the Malaysian context, *da`wa* must be seen as a political practice on the part of a section of the Malay community, as the enlargement of the Malay-Muslim community helps to secure the political majority and gain votes. *Da`wa* indirectly benefits both political parties, UMNO and PAS, depending on which organizations are involved and the nature of their political discourse and preferences. The majority of JIM and TERAS members, for example, tend to vote for PAS, the sole purely religious party of the country. It is assumed that people converted through state bodies and remaining active in its organizations will be more inclined to vote for the ruling party, UMNO.

Thus, in Malaysia, Islam can be seen as an instrument of a political process, one of whose aims is conversion. The position and role given to Islam and the use and abuse of its interpretations in order to serve political agendas, have given rise to changes in the ways in which Malays perceive the various ethnic groups in their country. This process of "*ethnicization du religieux*" as conceptualized by Olivier Roy is not a recent phenomenon in Malaysia. The identification of an ethnic group by its religion is based on a general assumption regarding the relationship between religion and culture, in which the former takes precedence over the latter (Roy 2008). This dynamic is evident in Malaysia, where Malays are Muslim, Indians are Hindu, and Chinese are Buddhist, Taoist, or Christian. Thus, with religion as the primary marker of identity, conversion is perceived as a denial of one's ethnic origins and/or a betrayal of one's community.[76]

Proselytizing and related changes of the religious affiliations of individuals is a challenge to social and institutional boundaries. Converts or "apostates" blur the margins of clearly defined ethno-religious groups.[77] In the eyes of the community, the apostate is a traitor to his/her own kind. To the administration, he/she is an error or an aberration. Conversion, when it is an act based on free will, represents a challenge to Malaysia's discriminatory system of governance. It is a sign of mobility across groups, and of ethnic and religious mixing. At the same time, conversion is a

[76] On the historicity of the construction of Malay identity and its markers, see Andaya (2008).

[77] Lemière, "Apostasy and Islamic Civil Society in Malaysia," 46–47.

political tool used by the state and non-governmental actors to achieve their own political agendas. The expansion of their groups is necessary to maintain or gain votes, and to secure Malay dominance. Thus conversion out of Islam is perceived as a threat to the identity of the majority, a cause of potential losses among the electorate, and a destabilizing force in the maintenance of political power.

Conclusion: Cracks in the Mosaic

In Malaysia, Muslims are entitled to special privileges and are subjected to a dual legal system of Islamic and "secular" (or civil) courts. On one hand, Muslims are granted a special status and thus receive more attention and support from state institutions. On the other, being Muslim in Malaysia also means it is impossible to shed this "special status" and the concomitant obligation to conform to Islamic norms. As a consequence of a zealous bureaucracy and government policies serving the interests of conservative Muslims and Islamists who aspire for a complete implementation of Islamic law, the amount of space given to Islam in the public sphere has broadened. A breach has opened between Malaysia's Muslims and other communities in the country, widened by the fear of others professing different religious beliefs. In a context where the identity of the majority of the population has been modeled in the interest of the politically dominant, religion has become highly politicized and proselytizing is often viewed as a political stratagem. The state management of religion is a means to secure and expand the dominance of the majority, as well as a way to win votes. The political agendas of UMNO, PAS, and their non-governmental satellites differ as models of governance, but they share much of the same unwillingness to share power with those they consider to be outsiders, variously described as non-Muslim, non-Malays, liberals, seculars, infidels, "squatters," "free-masons," and other such epithets.[78]

Prime Minister Najib Razak, who succeeded Abdullah Badawi in 2009 soon after the HINDRAF riots, understood the urgent need to unify Malaysian society by strengthening the concept of the Malaysian Nation. His "One Malaysia" (*Satu Malaysia*) Campaign has stressed ethnic harmony and national unity, and was applied to every possible area of Malaysian life, with the most unexpected being the implementation of the "One Toilet" campaign on university campuses to reduce the gap between teachers and students by having them use the same lavatories. Beyond some of the caricatured aspects of the campaign, it denoted a genuine effort on the

[78] Ahmad Ismail, the Bukit Bendera UMNO division head, allegedly said Chinese were "squatters" in the country, who were both selfish and unjust, at a *ceramah* on August 24 while trying to buttress support for BN candidate Arif Shah Omar Shah in the by-election contest against opposition icon Anwar Ibrahim. See: Andrew Ong (2008). During field research by the author, several interviews made with members of ethno-nationalist organizations showed that they often consider Chinese and Christians to be members of a global American-Zionist or free-Masonic conspiracy against Malays and Muslims.

part of the prime minister to unite the nation around a common goal, to reshape the basis of the social contract by remodeling Malay rights, and to regain votes from Indians and Chinese in the March 2008 general elections. As a direct consequence of the announcements made by the Prime Minister, formerly repressed ethnonationalist feelings came to light under the banner of newly formed pro-Malay organizations. The discourse of those groups is a radicalized view of identity and citizenship that reinforces the divisions between Malay-Muslims and "others." The space for minorities to express their identities in the public sphere, where Islam has become the social norm, seems to have narrowed as a result.

Malaysian political and religious pluralism is built on shaky foundations, but the ways in which state administrative and judiciary bodies interpret and implement constitutional provisions about communal difference has the potential to balance communal inequalities. In reality, however, they have reinforced them. Religious mobility is limited by laws and social practices, which instead of preserving the diversity of Malaysian identities, have resulted in the denial of individual rights. The legal and administrative systems are in effect preventing religious mobility despite constitutional provisions for the freedom of religion. The present government's intention to maintain the current posture for political purposes is clear. The perpetuation of those laws, whether for political or religious reasons, is a denial of the empirical reality of Malaysia diverse citizens. Although it might be denied by many, ethno-religious *mixité* does exist in Malaysia, and thus represent expressions of pluralism despite the legal and political factors that oppose it. Unless the government is willing and able to reform its sclerotic system, the Malaysian pluralist model will continue to be one of a cracked mosaic.

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Chapter 4
The Tablighi Jama`at in West Papua, Indonesia: The Impact of a Lay Missionary Movement in a Plural Multi-religious and Multi-ethnic Setting

Farish A. Noor

To Boldly Go Where No Man Has Gone Before: The Tablighi Jama`at's Unending Search for New Frontiers

This chapter sets out to examine the short history of the Tablighi Jama`at in West Papua, the easternmost province of present-day Indonesia, and how it managed to expand its network of activities there. The Tabligh is a transnational Islamic missionary movement that has been described as possibly the world's largest transnational Muslim network for faith renewal.[1] In previous publications, I have looked at the development of the Tabligh's vast network of mosques, religious schools, missionary centers, and itinerant missionary networks in Java, Madura, Malaysia, and Thailand.[2] I have noted both the determination and resilience of the movement when

[1] For more on the Tablighi Jama`at and its transnational network, see: Masud (2000), Metcalf (1982), and "Traditionalist Islamic Activism: Deoband, Tablighis and Talibs" (ISIM Papers IV, International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World, Leiden: ISIM, 2002); Dietrich Reetz, "Keeping Busy on the Path of Allah: The Self-Organization (*intizam*) of the Tablighi Jama`at," in *Oriente Moderno*, (No. 2, 2003); Dietrich Reetz, "Sufi Spirituality Fires Reformist Zeal: The Tablighi Jama`at in today's India and Pakistan" (Working Paper, "Modern Adaptations of Sufi Islam," Centre for Modern Orient Studies (Zentrum fur Moderner Orient, ZMO, Berlin, 2003); (Sikand 1998).

[2] For more on the Tabligh's activities across Southeast Asia, see: Noor (2008); "The Arrival and Expansion of the Tablighi Jama`at Network in Madura and its Links with the Islamic Parties," S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS 2009), (Unpublished); "The Tablighi Jama`at in the Southern Provinces of Thailand Today: Networks and Modalities" (Working Paper Series, No. 174, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technical University, Singapore, March 2009); and, "The Spread of the Tablighi Jama`at Across Western, Central and Eastern Java and the Role of the Indian Muslim Diaspora" (Working Paper Series No. 175, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technical University, Singapore, March 2009).

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it comes to expanding the magnitude of its activities across the world with scant regard for geo-political limitations and/or the logic of national territorial loyalties.

The Tabligh arrived in Indonesia via Medan and Jakarta in 1952, after which it rapidly embarked on a grand project of extending the scope of its activities and presence across the entire country. [3] Today the Tabligh is a visible presence across Java, Madura, and Sumatra, and it has expanded its network to the outer island provinces including Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Nusa Tenggara, and the Moluccas. It is possible to say that there is practically no spot left in Indonesia where the Tabligh has not established itself, yet what is remarkable about this process of expansion is how the Tabligh has managed to embed itself successfully in so many places while using the same standardized modalities of conversion, accounting for its unity in dispersion despite local differences in culture, language, ethnicity and histories. This chapter examines how the Tablighi Jama`at has expanded its scope of missionary work in West Papua, which is the easternmost province of Indonesia and remains one of the most remote parts of the archipelago; and to look at the Tabligh's impact on the Muslims there while taking into account the fact that the Muslims of Papua are part of a broader social landscape that is also made up of Christians and Animists. What does the Tabligh hope to gain by extending itself to this part of Indonesia where Christian missionary groups have been active for more than a century? Who are the primary "targets" of their missionary work – transmigrant Muslims, animist Papus, or Christians? And does the Tabligh's presence in West Papua contribute to a heightening of competition between Muslim and Christian groups there? These questions have to be addressed while framing the Tabligh's work against the backdrop of Indonesia's complex plural society.

West Papua: History and Research Conditions

West Papua—or Irian Jaya, as it is sometimes still referred to—is the easternmost part of Indonesia and certainly the most remote by far.[4] Transport and communication across Papua is done by boat or light aircraft as there are no major roads that cut across the territory. The Dutch had planned to cede West Papua to the rest of Papua New Guinea in 1964, but soon after the Dutch departed, Papua was integrated forcibly by the Indonesian army. Under the rule of presidents Sukarno and Suharto, West Papua was opened to foreign capital penetration on a scale that was unprecedented. The Freeport mining zone was created with the collaboration of 15 countries, and Freeport authorities have been given a free hand to exploit the mineral resources of the territory. Agriculture has suffered accordingly, and even during Dutch times, attempts to introduce commercial crops to Papua (rubber, coconut, and palm oil) had by and large failed.

[3] Yusron Razak, "Jamaah Tabligh: Ajaran dan Dakwahnya" (Disertasi dalam bidang Ilmu Agama Islam, Sekolah Pascasarjana, Universiti Islam Negeri (UIN) Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta, 2008).

[4] The name "Irian Jaya" was imposed on the region formerly known as West Papua when the Indonesian army annexed the province after the departure of the Dutch colonial forces in 1964. The name has never been accepted by the ethnic people of Papua themselves, and the province's name of West Papua was restored in 2001 by President Megawati Sukarnoputri.

The indigenous population of West Papua (generally known as Papus) is ethnically similar to their neighbors in Papua New Guinea, and their numbers have been diminished as a result of military conflict as well as poor living conditions.[5] As a result of transmigration programs that were initiated in the 1970s, tens of thousands of Indonesians from Java, Madura, Sulawesi, and other parts of Indonesia have been allowed to settle there. This has reduced the relative numbers of ethnic Papus who feel that they have become a marginalized community in their own land. In addition, there are endemic social and health problems that have been made worse by rapid rural-to-urban migration and changing lifestyles. Alcoholism and HIV/AIDS remain major health problems facing ethnic Papus, with the HIV rate in places like Timika being among the highest in the country.

Resentment by Papus against the government exists as a result of the role Jakarta has played in the uneven development of West Papua. Papus also resent the role of foreign mining companies. This resentment and marginalization contributed to the emergence and rise of the Organisasi Papua Merdeka (OPM, Free Papua Movement) in 1964.[6] Over the past four decades relations between the Papus and the Indonesian central government have been marked by many ups and downs, with occasional periods of sustained systematic violence on the part of the Indonesian armed forces and the OPM. In November 2001, OPM leader Theys Eluay was found murdered in a car close to the capital of Jayapura, and the OPM claimed he had been killed by Indonesian security forces. Several attempts by successive Indonesian presidents have been made toward appeasement, with both Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) and Megawati Sukarnoputri offering limited autonomy to the Papus (save for areas such as economy, the judiciary, and the police force), even though at the same time rejecting all claims for independence. Megawati Sukarnoputri attempted to placate local Papu leaders in late 2001 by offering Papuans 80 % of the revenue earnings from local mining operations to help develop the region further. It was also during her period of rule that Irian Jaya reverted to its original name, West Papua.

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[5] Though of the same Austro-Melanesian genetic stock, the tribes of West Papua are distinct from each other and protective of their cultural and linguistic differences. There are in fact more than two hundred ethnic tribes in the province. Some tribes number in the hundreds while others number in the tens of thousands. Most of the tribes remain in the highland interior or in the swampy deltas, such as the Asmat who live around Agats. Their economy remains rooted in agrarian cut-and-burn practices, and most of the tribes remain semi-nomadic and adhere to their own traditional tribal (*adat*) laws and customs.

[6] The Organisasi Papua Merdeka (OPM, Free Papua Movement) was formed almost as soon as the Indonesian annexation began, and it has focused mainly on the struggle for Papuan independence and the restoration of traditional land and inheritance rights for the ethnic Papus of West Papua. The group describes the annexation of West Papua as an instance of foreign (i.e. Indonesian) imperialism in Papu territory. The Indonesian government has consistently regarded the OPM as a terrorist organization and a threat to national security, insisting that Papua was destined to be part of Indonesia by virtue of the fact that it was under Dutch colonial rule. However, it ought to be noted that historically the only part of West Papua that had any substantial ties with the other kingdoms and principalities of the Indonesian archipelago was Fak Fak, which was bound to the Sultanate of Ternate.

Despite these moves, popular discontent remains a problem and was evident during our period of field research. One week before I began my fieldwork in Papua, the popular leader of the OPM Kelly Kwalik was killed by security forces during an attempt to apprehend him in his home in Timika. The representatives of the Indonesian police centered in Jayapura, however, insisted that the killing of Kwalik was accidental and not planned.[7]

Considering its remote location and distance from the other major population centers of Indonesia—West Papua is located two time zones to the east of Java and the distance between Jakarta and Jayapura is the same as the distance between London and Baghdad, the flight there taking a total of 8 hours—West Papua is the most difficult province to travel to and within. It was therefore necessary to ascertain to what extent the Tablighi Jama`at movement had been able to make its presence felt there, if at all, and what role it had to play in the Islamization of the most obscure part of the republic of Indonesia.

The Arrival of the Tablighi Jama`at and Its Role in the Islamization of West Papua

Islam has never had a strong and highly visible presence in West Papua. Due to the importance of seaborne and riverine transport during colonial times, almost all of the major commercial centers were located along the western coastline of West Papua and centered in places like Pulau Biak and Fak Fak. Historically the western part of West Papua had some links with the Sultanate of Ternate, and it was the Sultan of Ternate who had granted the Dutch VOC authority to colonize the region for commercial purposes.

The only significant center of commercial activity during the Dutch era was Fak Fak, where there remained some houses and stores (*gedung*) dating back to the Dutch colonial era. Fak Fak is also the only place in West Papua where there is a small yet visible presence of Muslims of Indian and Arab stock, most of them being descendants of Indian and Arab Muslim traders who came to the Dutch East Indies and settled there in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. Fak Fak today, however, is very isolated and no longer plays the important role as the premier export zone for

[7] "Dibilang Langgar HAM, KAPOLDA Tidak Bimbang," in *Cendrawasih Pos* (December 21, 2009). The commander (KAPOLDA) of the Indonesian police at Jayapura insisted that there had been no violation of human rights in the case of the killing of Kelly Kwalik, as the police had been ordered to arrest him. The police chief insisted that the police regretted Kwalik's death, if only because they wanted to bring him into custody for further questioning. There was also at least one incident of violent conflict during our stay in West Papua, when two Indonesian police officers were ambushed and killed in the Freeport-Timika area by insurgents. By and large however, the conditions in the towns we visited—Jayapura, Entrop, Sentani, Wamena, and Timika—were safe, if somewhat tense at times. On no occasion, however, were we faced with any problems while doing fieldwork, and we were not asked to apply for travel permits (*Surat Jalan*) while traveling across the region.

products from and to West Papua. As such, the Indian and Arab Muslim community there has diminished in number as well as importance.

Since the mid-1960s when West Papua was annexed by Indonesia, the province has been opened up for foreign capital penetration as well as foreign missionary work, notably by Christian missionaries of both the Catholic as well as Protestant churches. Missionary activity remains visible in West Papua today, as does foreign (particularly Western) NGO activity that focuses on health awareness campaigns targeted primarily at the ethnic Papus who suffer the most from alcoholism and HIV/AIDS.

Islam's presence in West Papua is the result of the massive transmigration program that was initiated in the 1970s in an attempt to deal with the problem of overpopulation in places like Java, Madura, and Sumatra. With the influx of migrants from Java, a majority of whom were Muslims, the urban landscape in the small towns and settlements of West Papua began to change, as did the religious demographic balance. However, the transmigration process initiated and aided by the Indonesian government was not meant to have any Muslim/Islamic missionary agenda, and there is little to suggest any conscious effort to "Islamize" West Papua: There has hardly been any significant development of state-sponsored Islamic educational institutions, such as Indonesia's State Islamic Universities (Universitas Islam Negara, UIN), as there has been in the other provinces. Islam's arrival to West Papua was mainly the result of massive transmigration and the changing social landscape that emerged as a result of the mass settlement of Muslims from other parts of Indonesia.

Compared with the presence and activities of Muslims in West Papua, Christian missionary groups—be they Indonesian or foreign—are far more visible and active. Since the colonial era, efforts have been made by both Catholic and Protestant missionaries to convert the local population of West Papua. These missionaries have had some success, though it has been mainly confined to the few urban settlements that dot the coastline of the island. In the interior of Papua, missionary activities continue. Christian missionaries operate their own flight services (Missionary Air Flight Service, or MAF) that connect the major towns of Papua with the rural hinterlands. Missionary flights by MAF are still the only flights that land at the smaller airstrips deep in interior Papua other than rescue missions flown by the Indonesian armed forces.

The Muslims of Papua on the other hand, have hitherto not been visibly active in their attempts to convert the Papus, though in the urban settlements of Jayapura, Timika, Marauke, and various others, there are small groups of Papus who have also converted to Islam.[8] From the 1960s, Indonesia's major Islamic movements have also made their presence felt in West Papua, with both the Nahdlatlul Ulama (NU) and Muhamadijah (Muhammadiyah) opening branches and schools across the island. The schools, clinics, and branches of the NU and Muhamadijah were focused primarily on Muslims who had *migrated* to West Papua from places like Java,

[8]Interview with Ustaz Imam Abdullah Suparsono, markaz besar Tabligh, Masjid Serambi Mekah, Jalan Sekoci Kelapa 2, Entrop, December 23, 2009.

Madura, and Sulawesi. Again, proselytizing efforts by both the NU and Muhamadijah vis-à-vis the Papus were scant and irregular at best.

The same applies for the internal domestic politics of West Papua, which showed a clear delineation of party political and ideological loyalties between the Papus and transmigrants. While many of the ethnic Papus were either supporters of the OPM or local tribal leaders, the mainstream Indonesian political parties were focused mainly on the transmigrant populations in the urban centers. Until 2008, the most popular party in Papua was the Partai Demokrasi Indonesia-Perjuangan (PDI-P) led by former President Megawati Sukarnoputri. Megawati's concessions to the Papuans, as I have noted above, contributed significantly to the rise of support for the PDI-P in West Papua. As of the elections of 2009, however, the lead position enjoyed by the PDI-P has been taken over by the Partai Demokrat of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, who managed to win over many of the seats formerly held by the PDI-P. By contrast, neither the Muslim nor the Christian parties of Indonesia has managed to score significant gains in the province, and even mainstream Islamic parties such as the Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS) and Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa (PKB), which is affiliated with the NU, have not won a substantial number of votes or seats in the province.

Elsewhere I have written about the arrival and spread of the Tabligh across Java and Madura, and I noted there how the patterns of the Tabligh's expansion have been consistent across Indonesia, as has been the case in Southeast Asia generally (Noor 2009). To some extent, the case of the arrival, development, and expansion of the Tablighi Jama`at across West Papua follows the model of Tabligh expansion elsewhere.

The Tabligh's arrival in West Papua was relatively late, with the first delegation being dispatched from Jakarta to Papua via Ternate by boat.[9] This delegation first stopped at Ternate to do missionary work for two months before arriving in Jayapura in mid-1988. The delegation stayed in Papua for a total period of four months, touring all the major settlements of Papua by boat and air. It was led by Dr. Nur, a member of the Tabligh, who was also a doctor and a lung specialist with his own clinic in Jakarta. The Tabligh's choice of Dr. Nur turned out to be the right one: one of the present-day leaders of the Tabligh, Ustaz Imam Abdullah Suparsono, noted:

> Dr. Nur was a real doctor… He was well respected, a polite and educated man. In those days when a doctor came to Papua, then everyone was impressed, especially when the doctor was an Indonesian. You see, most of the medical staff and personnel here then were missionaries who came from America or Australia, so everyone thought that all doctors were white people! But Dr. Nur was a Javanese, and Indonesian, and so he was very popular with the locals when he arrived. All of the people wanted to see him, they kept asking for "Dr. Nur, Dr. Nur," and they even went to see him when they were not sick! [Laughs] That was how respected he was.[10]

[9] Interview with Ustaz Imam Abdullah Suparsono, markaz besar Tabligh, Masjid Serambi Mekah, Jalan Sekoci Kelapa 2, Entrop, December 23, 2009.

[10] Interview with Ustaz Imam Abdullah Suparsono, Entrop, December 23, 2009.

The Tabligh's first base of operations was the Masjid Agung As-Salihin of Jayapura, a mosque used by Muslims of Jayapura from different political and religious streams. For the members of the Tabligh, this was problematic for the simple reason that the mosque was often crowded, and locals did not understand why the Tablighis—who were new arrivals in Papua and unheard of until then—wished to live and work in a mosque that was meant to be open to all.

One year later, in late 1989, a second delegation was dispatched to West Papua by the Markaz Agong Kebun Jeruk in Jakarta, led by an Indian Muslim by the name of Maulana Imam Nuruddin. The second delegation continued the work of the first, which was to ascertain the extent to which West Papua was fertile (*subur*) for the work of the Tablighi Jama`at there. This second delegation stayed for several months and was made up of 12 Tablighis, who were both local Indonesians and Indian Muslims. As was true of the delegation led by Dr. Nur, the primary task of the second delegation was to recruit new converts and to seek ways to find a permanent base for the Tabligh in the province. Again, the delegation reported the problem of not having a permanent base to call its own, as noted by Imam Abdullah:

> We had another problem because our only base was the Masjid Agung in Jayakarta, which was also the main congregational mosque for the town. And so there were all sorts of people there and from all backgrounds, mixing together. Moreover because it was the only big *Jamaah* mosque for Friday prayers, the people didn't like it when the Tablighis were staying there. So for the first few years our activities were hindered by the fact that we did not have any place where we could live, operate, coordinate our movements and send our delegations to. At times such as during Eid celebrations we were almost forced out of the compound of the Masjid Agung, as the mosque was overcrowded with people who wanted to use it too.[11]

During this initial stage the Tabligh were far from aggressive in their missionary efforts. Most of the time was spent trying to normalize their presence in Jayapura, notably their visible presence as itinerant settlers in the main mosque of the provincial capital.

In time, the Tabligh began to attract a small number of local converts, though as Imam Abdullah noted, almost all of them were employed in other work and duties and as such could not be called upon to serve as full-time committed members of the Tabligh. Almost all of the new converts were themselves transmigrants who had settled in the towns and urban settlements, and they were overwhelmingly of Javanese, Madurese, or Bugis origin. The conversion of ethnic Papus was minimal at best due to the fact that the Tabligh had yet to venture into the hinterland and that the ethnic Papus were a relatively small presence in the newly developed urban centers.

By the 1990s, the Tabligh was present in almost all of the urban settlements of West Papua, but without a base to call its own. The Tabligh's fortunes took a turn for the better when, in 1998, one of the older local members—Haji Baduh Taufik, a transmigrant merchant who had come from Ujung Padang—left to the Tabligh a patch of land in the settlement of Entrop as part of his *waqf*. Haji Baduh's *waqf* land

[11] Ibid.

was then built up by the Tabligh, who used donations from local members to build the first true "headquarters" (*markaz*) of the Tablighi Jama`at in all of West Papua, the Masjid Serambi Mekah on Jalan Sekoci Kelapa Dua, Entrop.

Next to the Masjid Serambi Mekah was built the first Pondok Pesantren of the Tabligh in West Papua, the Pondok Pesantren Darul Ulum.[12] Henceforth all of the Tabligh's activities at the Masjid Agong in Jayapura were transferred to the Masjid Serambi Mekah in Entrop, which came to serve as the Markaz Besar of the Tabligh in the province.

The Masjid Serambi Mekah of Entrop is currently under the guidance and supervision of Ustaz Imam Abdullah Suparsano, himself a transmigrant from Central Java (Magelang) who migrated to Papua in 1974 and who joined the Tabligh as a part-time member in 1988. Ustaz Imam Abdullah is also the head teacher of the Pondok Pesantren Darul Ulum. The mosque and the *pesantren* are at the center of Tabligh activities across the province, and the *pesantren* is served by a small group of younger Tablighis who serve as teachers there, including Ustaz Maulana Abu Bakar, the Director (*Mudir*) of the mosque and *pesantren*, and Ustaz Irfan Ahmad and Ustaz Abdullah Suandy, both of whom are junior teachers and full-time members of the Tabligh.

In terms of its form and appearance, the *markaz* of the Tabligh in Entrop is typical of the other Tablighi centers in Indonesia. The Masjid Serambi Mekah is a modest two-story structure built of cement and brick in a modern Islamic fashion meeting the rudimentary requirements of the Tabligh. Its ground floor is an open space measuring 40-by-60 meters with a cement and tiled floor where the students (*santris*) of the *pesantren* are taught and communal prayers are held. Delegations from other parts of the world arrive and camp on the ground floor, using it as communal space for discussions, readings, and planning. The second floor follows the layout of the ground floor, with two small rooms separated by wooden walls that demarcate spaces for the teachers and the administrators of the mosque. As would be expected, only the most basic essentials are at hand, including fans and lamps. Like in other Tabligh *markaz*, the members sleep on the floor and dine collectively on the floor as well.

Cooking is done outside the mosque in a sheltered communal kitchen that is likewise rudimentary. The kitchen is linked to the modest *pesantren*, which is made up of two bigger blocks of stone structures that house a total of a 100 boys, and a third block that houses a total of 30 girls. In this respect the Pesantren Darul Ulum is somewhat different from its Tabligh counterparts, as it offers accommodation for girls as well as boys, though as expected, there is no direct access to the girls' quarters, which has its own separate exit to the back. Both the *pesantren* and the mosque are encircled by a low cement and brick wall, and the entire mosque and *pesantren* complex does not have any other communal space for larger congregations.

[12]It is interesting to note that the Tabligh *pesantren* was named "Darul Ulum," as the Darul Uloom Deoband Madrasah in India happens to be one of the older, grand madrasahs of North India that is closely linked to the Tablighi Jama`at movement, and many Tablighis who visit India on their tour of the country would stop at the Darul Uloom Madrasah, also on their itinerary.

I estimated that at full capacity the mosque and its modest garden might be able to contain around 400 people in all.

As far as the teaching activities of the *pesantren* are concerned, the Pondok Pesantren Darul Ulum does not differ from other Tablighi-run educational centers I have visited elsewhere in Indonesia. The *santris* vary in age from seven years to their late teens, with teaching conducted regularly in groups in the traditional manner. The courses offered at the *pesantren* are likewise typical of the classes taught at other Tablighi centers of learning, and include:

- Standard courses in Arabic;
- Standard course on the memorization of the Quran for boys and girls;
- Standard reading of the key texts of the Tablighi Jama`at, primarily the translated works of Muhammad Zakariyya al-Khandalawi and Muhammad Yusuf al-Khandalawi

I was also informed that the *pesantren* had sent two of its graduates to Raiwind, Pakistan, to study there with the hope of returning to Entrop after the completion of their studies to teach at the *pesantren*.[13] With the completion of the construction of the Masjid Serambi Mekah and the Pondok Pesantren Darul Ulum as the Markaz Besar of the Tabligh in West Papua, the Tabligh was able to expand its network and intensify its efforts to find other bases across the province.

Today, apart from the main headquarters (*markaz besar*) at Entrop there are two other *markaz* of the Tabligh in Papua—one in Manokwari and one more in Sorong. Imam Abdullah noted that, "Manokwari is a problem for us because they are majority Christian and they made it really difficult for us to move in. The [Christian] missionaries kept building churches and the mission houses everywhere and they were afraid we might convert the local Papus to Islam too."[14] The *markaz* in both Manokwari and Sorong are built on land that is owned and controlled by the Tabligh, thanks to donations received from local members and supporters in the province. As such, the Tabligh in Manokwari and Sorong no longer have to work and live in the more open *Jamaah* mosques in the town centers and have the right to use their mosques as they see fit. A fourth smaller base is found in Marauke, at the Masjid Al-Hikmah on Jalan Mandala Bappel.

In all these cases—Entrop, Jayapura, Sorong, Manokwari and Marauke—the Tabligh has been successful in converting transmigrant Muslims to their cause, but they have had less success in converting ethnic Papus from the tribal areas. As Imam Abdullah noted:

> In the interior we sometimes send delegations also, but only to places where we know there are mosques and where our members will be safe. In the Papu tribal areas, there are hardly any mosques; the only one that we use regularly is the Masjid Agung in Wamena in the Baliem valley. By now we have covered all of West Papua and in every town we have a base–either belonging to us or loaned to us–where we can stay.[15]

[13] Interview with Ustaz Irfan Ahmad and Ustaz Abdullah Suandy, Tabligh main headquarters, Masjid Serambi Mekah, Jalan Sekoci Kelapa 2, Entrop, December 22, 2009.

[14] Interview with Ustaz Imam Abdullah Suparsono, Entrop, December 23, 2009.

[15] Ibid.

In order to ascertain the level of the Tabligh's success among the ethnic Papus in the interior, I moved our research to the Baliem valley in the central highlands of West Papua.

The Activities of the Tablighi Jama`at Among the Ethnic Papu Tribes of the Baliem Valley

The Baliem valley is the starting point for most jungle treks and for the missionary trail into the Papu hinterland, and is accessible only by air. [16] I took a chartered flight from Sentani to Wamena and stayed in the valley for 3 days in December. Wamena itself is the only built-up settlement in the Baliem valley, surrounded by tribal areas dominated by the Dani, Yani, and Yali tribes, which are among the biggest tribes of West Papua. Deeper inland are more remote, smaller tribes.

Wamena is a small two-street settlement that is served by a single airstrip that allows for landing by propeller-driven light aircraft. It is also the only base for the Indonesian armed forces and air force, which flies reconnaissance missions and rescue missions regularly, as well as the missionary flight service of the MAF. Wamena is distinguished by the number of churches and mission centers that have been built by Christian missionaries as well as small offices run by health and social welfare NGOs, both Indonesian and foreign.

The only visible Muslim presence in Wamena is the small Masjid Agung on Jalan Yos Sudarso, the only mosque that serves the irregular delegations sent by the Tablighi Jama`at to the Baliem valley. During our short visit to Wamena, the mosque was practically empty. The Muslims of Wamena are overwhelmingly of transmigrant background, most of them from Java, Madura, Ambon, Ternate, or Sulawesi. Only one local Muslim could be interviewed for the purpose of this chapter, Elias Nur, who claimed knowledge of the Tabligh, but who insisted that he was sympathetic to them but not a regular member. In the words of Elias:

> They [the Tabligh] have tried to send delegations here but they have not been successful in converting any of the Papus because they cannot venture out too far into the jungles without guides who speak the tribal languages. And they are also worried about the reputation of the Papus because they know the Papus eat pork, drink alcohol, have plenty of wives, and often are very sexually active. On top of that they cannot stand the Papus because the Papus smell

[16] We traveled to the Baliem valley in central Papua by plane. Travel to the Asmat region of the south was impossible to due to the lack of time, difficulties in transport (the Asmat region has to be traveled to by boat), and costs. Note that costs in West Papua are higher than anywhere else in Indonesia due to the fact that most foodstuff, petrol, and other necessities have to be imported in by air or sea. For comparison's sake, a cup of tea that would cost 1,000 rupiah in Java costs 15,000 rupiah in a roadside stall (*warung*) in Papua, a plate of plain white rice 10,000 rupiah, and a plate of fried rice around 30 to 40,000 rupiah.

> [A reference to the normal practice among the tribes to smear their bodies with pig fat and grease to insulate themselves against the cold at night]. This makes it difficult for them to be successful because they really don't know how to live in the jungle, unlike the Christian missionaries who are willing to go into the jungle for months and years and maybe not even come back.[17]

As in the case of Jayapura, Timika, Sentani, and Entrop, communication between the transmigrants and ethnic local Papus was cordial, though inter-marriage was less common. In the course of our interviews and discussions with Elias and other transmigrant settlers in the valley it became evident that the problems they faced were inter-cultural ones. Many of the Muslim migrants from Java, Madura, Ambon, and other parts of Indonesia were unaccustomed to the customs and manners of the Papus, and they complained of their food, lifestyle, cleanliness, etc. Most of these complaints were of a quotidian nature, and often couched in common vernacular terms that were far from politically correct (though not necessarily explicitly racist.)

During our short stay in the Baliem valley and in the course of our visits to the local Papu settlements around Jiwika and Sentanu, I did not come across any evidence of significant Muslim missionary activity or of any visible presence of the mainstream Islamic movements and parties of Indonesia. Bearing in mind the rather pedestrian prejudices evidenced towards the ethnic Papus by the local transmigrant settlers, it can be said that the Tabligh's contact with the ethnic Papus in the valley thus far has been superficial at best. The only activities that have been successfully carried out by the Tabligh in Wamena and the outlying areas around the Baliem valley involve the conversion and teaching of transmigrant Muslims who were already Muslims before they settled in the valley.[18]

In short, the Tablighi Jama`at in the Baliem valley, as the Tabligh elsewhere throughout West Papua, have become part of the Muslim landscape of the province, but its presence and orientation remains a phenomenon of *internal Muslim conversion* rather than *outward conversion of non-Muslims.* Though documented material on Tabligh activities in Papua is scarce, our modest field research in West Papua suggests that it is primarily a movement of transplanted Javanese, Bugis, Madurese, and Sumatran Indonesian Muslims and that it has remained so over the past three decades.

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[17] Interview with Elias Nur, Wamena-Jimika, December 25, 2009.

[18] Though even then it has to be noted that the only visible Muslim presence in Wamena was and remains the Masjid Agong on Jalan Yos Sudarso which, as we have noted above, is a mosque open to all Muslims and not dominated by the Tabligh in any way. There were no regular Tablighi discussions or classes being held there, and it was clear that the mosque was not being used by the Tablighis or any other Muslim movement as a center for teaching or regular missionary work and other related religious or social activities.

Locating the Tablighi Jama`at of West Papua in the Grander Structure of the Tablighi Jama`at in Indonesia and Southeast Asia

Today, the Tablighi Jama`at is fully established in West Papua and is considered a separate administrative unit by the central command of the Tabligh at its Markaz Agong in Kebun Jeruk, Jakarta. According to its leader, Imam Abdullah, the total number of active members (both full-time and part-time) across the province is around 1,000.[19] The West Papuan Tabligh has been conferred independent status on the grounds that the Tabligh there is able to organize its own activities without the technical and logistical support of any other Tabligh branches. This status also means that it is expected to fund its own activities—funding that comes from modest contributions by local members. As I have seen above, almost all of the Tabligh centers in Entrop and elsewhere were built on lands acquired by the local Tablighis themselves, with no financial aid coming from outside.

In the overall structure of the Tablighi network across Indonesia, the West Papuan division is therefore an independent unit in its own right and answers only to the central command in Jakarta, which is the national base of operations for the Tabligh across Indonesia. The West Papuan Tabligh was and remains very active, receiving and sending delegations across the province as well as across Indonesia and further afield. During the course of our interviews with its leaders, we learned that the West Papuan division has even sent off delegations as far and wide as China and Peru. In the words of leader Imam Abdullah:

> Because we have our own independent status, we can both receive and send delegations independently. We get no funding from Jakarta, and we have to do everything ourselves, with our own money… We have also sent our own delegations abroad, but we need to send them first to Jakarta where they are collected and dispatched according to the decisions of the main organizers and administrators there. We can send as many as we want, but normally the procedure is that they will only really know where they will be sent when they are in Jakarta and all the delegations have been collected together. In July and August this year [2009] we sent a delegation from Papua that was later sent to Philippines and then further to Peru. Another delegation sent at the same time was sent by Jakarta to Morocco, and a third was sent to China.[20]

[19] Interview with Ustaz Imam Abdullah Suparsono, Entrop, December 23, 2009.

[20] As expected, the modalities of movement remain consistent throughout: the West Papua division of the Tabligh sends its delegations to Jakarta, where members are assembled while waiting for other delegations from other parts of Indonesia (Central Java, Sulawesi, Madura, and so forth). Only when there are sufficient numbers of Tablighis and adequate funds are the members then packaged out into groups numbering around a dozen, each with its own leader appointed after a *shura* meeting by the groups themselves. The delegations are then told to go where they are needed or have been invited. Thus the final itineraries of these groups remain unclear until the day they are finally told where they are to be sent. Foreign delegations are equally unclear as to where they will be sent in Indonesia upon their initial arrival in Jakarta. A delegation from India may not choose to go to Papua of its own volition, but instead might be dispatched there by the administrators of the central Tabligh Markaz Agong in Jakarta upon arrival. (Interview with Ustaz Imam Abdullah Suparsono, Entrop, December 23, 2009).

Imam Abdullah insisted that their location in West Papua did not render the Papua branch of the Tabligh any less significant than the other divisions across the archipelago, and pointed out that they will continue to receive and send Tabligh delegations across Indonesia and abroad in the coming year. As an independent unit, the West Papuan division is also in the position to host international delegations that come from beyond Southeast Asia, as noted by Imam Abdullah:

> On average we get at least two or three delegations from abroad every year, most often from India, Pakistan or Bangladesh. For the Indian Tablighis, Papua is a very remote place but they like it because it means they are really, really committed to the path of Allah if they manage to come all the way here. Often they are worried when they see the [Christian] missionaries too, and they are also upset when they watch the behavior of the Papus who eat pork and sell pigs in the market. But they are very tough, these Indians, and they are willing to go all over Papua for a month, even up to the tribal highlands in the interior. The last delegation that came to us this year [2009] came from Gujarat, India. There were nine of them. They came with a bigger delegation that arrived in Jakarta and nine of them decided to come to Papua. They stayed with us for almost a month.[21]

The case of the Tablighi Jama`at in West Papua demonstrates several salient features of the Tabligh that have been well recorded by now but are nonetheless worth repeating here:

First, the Tablighi Jama`at is a *lay* missionary movement that does not have the same institutional support network found in other missionary movements, including Christian missionary movements. In West Papua—as in the case of much of Indonesia—the members and supporters of the Tabligh are *ordinary* Indonesian Muslims who have joined the movement on an irregular basis. This emphasis on laity is compounded by the Tabligh's somewhat open nature and the fact that it does not have dedicated missionary colleges, seminaries, or training academies to teach its members how to preach and convert others to their cause. The Tabligh's focus has always been on other Muslims and on bringing them to the "correct path" of normative Islam as opposed to converting non-Muslims to the faith. This may account for the relatively modest scale of success in West Papua, and its relative failure to convert large numbers of Papus to Islam.

Second, the Tablighi Jama`at's modus operandi is based on the principles of self-reliance and autonomy, and individual branches of the Tabligh are expected to survive and develop on their own with relatively little help from other branches. Coupled with the fact that most of its members are ordinary Muslims of modest means, this independence means that the Tabligh chapter in West Papua cannot possibly accumulate enough capital and material resources to compete with better-funded missionary bodies, such as the Christian missionary groups in the province. As noted above, the Christian missionary services in Papua even have their own missionary air service, which the Tabligh cannot hope to rival or replicate due to the meager resources at their disposal.

Third, as in other instances of the arrival, consolidation, and subsequent development of the Tabligh elsewhere in Indonesia and Southeast Asia, the Tabligh in West

[21] Ibid.

Papua has followed the same pattern of expansion and development. Initial probing missions are sent out to "test" the ground and to report to the central command before earnest attempts at conversion are made. After this initial exploration, the Tabligh begins to root itself via the creation of local organic networks based in most cases in mosques and other religious centers that are initially not under their control, but which are later brought under the Tabligh's influence, or better still replaced by centers that are directly owned and controlled by them. The case of the move of Tabligh activities from the Masjid Agong of Jayapura to the Masjid Serambi Mekah in Entrop is a typical example of such a process of slow but determined rooting of activities.[22]

Fourth, as with the case of Tabligh expansion elsewhere, an overwhelming majority of its members and supporters are ordinary lay Muslim transmigrants from other parts of Indonesia like Java and Sulawesi. Due in part to their status as lay Muslims and their lack of professional skills at conversion, many of these ordinary Muslims have retained ordinary, pedestrian prejudices and biases towards the Papus, as seen in the casual derogatory remarks that were made about the dress, cuisine, customs, and manners of the Papus in general. These lay Muslims were certainly not trained according to the standards of political correctness or respect for alterity and difference like the more professional Christian missionaries who may be the products of seminaries and missionary colleges. In their daily interaction with the local Papus they often demonstrate their inability to deal with cultural and religious diversity on the level of face-to-face interactions. For example, with the exception of our local contacts in the Baliem valley who interacted with the Papus on a daily basis, none of the transmigrants I met in the urban settings of Jayapura or Entrop even spoke any of the Papu languages, and had minimal contact with them.

Finally, while the Tabligh in West Papua were and are free to develop and expand their activities in the province, the Tablighis in West Papua are not free to unilaterally engage in cross-border activities with other Tablighi centers that may or may not exist in neighboring Papua New Guinea (which is only 50 km away by road from Jayapura) without the consent of the central command in Jakarta. This pattern of top-down hierarchical command I have seen elsewhere among the Tablighi in Sumatra, Java, and Madura[23] suggests that despite its transnational ambitions and *modus operandi*, the Tablighi Jama`at remains a movement that nevertheless operates within the overarching logic of established nation-states and political territoriality.

To conclude, it would seem that the Tabligh's missionary work in the Papu tribal areas has been piecemeal at best, with *very limited* results. However as noted by the leaders of the movement themselves, the Tablighis remain worried about the activities of Christian missionaries among the ethnic Papus, as they are about Christian

[22] Interview with Ustaz Irfan Ahmad and Ustaz Abdullah Suandy, Entrop, December 22, 2009.

[23] Noor, "The Spread of the Tablighi Jama`at," 2009.

missionary efforts in general. Whether this anxiety about a competitor in the "conversion market" galvanizes the Tablighi Jama`at even further in West Papua remains to be seen and gives reason for more detailed research in the future.

What is clear, however, is that the expansion of the Tablighi Jama`at's network to and across West Papua is a case of a Muslim lay missionary movement expanding its network across a country (Indonesia) but remaining within the confines of its own faith community (Muslims). In this respect, the Tablighi Jama`at remains an interesting example of missionary activism at work, for unlike other groups that seek to convert non-believers to their faith – and as such assume the high-profile status of "high risk activism" – the Tabligh's form of missionary activism is both low-profile and low-risk. For the Tabligh *travels* and *goes everywhere*, but at the same time *remains within the comfort zone of the same and the familiar*: It remains primarily a movement for internal conversion among Muslims, though its identity is still framed in terms of its dialectical opposition to other non-Muslim groups (in this case the Papu animists and Christians.)

Has the Tabligh therefore pushed further the frontiers of Islam in its expansion to West Papua? Yes and no: yes in the sense that it is now present in every province of the vast country, but no in the sense that despite its pan-Indonesian presence it remains within the frontier of the Muslim fold.

The Tablighis might be worried about the success of Christian missionary activism in West Papua, and have admitted that their progress thus far has been slow. Furthermore the Tablighis of West Papua would readily admit that at present they lack both the manpower and the finances to be able to mount a missionary project as ambitious and well-organized as that of the Christian missionaries. But perhaps the biggest handicap they face is their own, by virtue of the movement's low-risk and non-confrontational approach where their missionary activities are seldom allowed to push past the point of upsetting the fragile ethnic-religious balance in Indonesia's complex plural society. Worried though they may be about the development of Christian missionary enterprises in West Papua and about the animism of the Papus, they remain blocked by their own gradualist approach, which requires the non-Muslim Other to be perpetually framed as their constitutive Other, but one that is never confronted violently. At this stage however, it can be concluded that by expanding its network of activities to West Papua the Tablighi Jama`at has indeed stretched its network of activities to the furthest ends of Indonesia, literally going where no Tablighi has gone before.

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Chapter 5
Religious Learning Circles and *Da`wa*: The Modalities of Educated Bangladeshi Women Preaching Islam

Samia Huq

Introduction

This paper looks at women who actively cultivate piety by coming together in religious discussion circles in the capital city of Dhaka in Bangladesh, and their efforts at making personal piety public. The women use the term "*da`wa*" to refer to their proselytizing activities, by which they seek to transform both people's inner spiritual lives as well as the public space. This chapter explores the modalities of the desired transformation, which include conventional preaching to friends and family, and more importantly, going into the public space in a more thought-out and organized manner. I argue that the proselytizing women's approach to transforming the public space involves a deliberate attempt to play down the religious importance of the practice. Women use the word "secular" to describe their *da`wa* activities. This is interesting on many levels. First, the use reveals a plea from the religious quarter to the masses—those who have long considered the public space and public initiatives as non-religious. The appeal, by recourse to ideas of the secular, also stems from the proselytizing women's disavowal of the stringency, moral policing and violent political means used by Islamists whose entry in the public space is grounded in their efforts to establish the Islamic state. The women I discuss are different—perhaps not in the cultivation of personal piety, but in their outreach to the public space, where their use of the term "secular" speaks of a multiplicity and plurality that they, as well as the less religious factions in Bangladesh accuse Islamists of misappropriating. As one woman told me, "Surely, even in the time of the Prophet, not everyone excelled in piety…Piety has its ebbs and flows. But what was remarkable about the Prophet's message and the golden era of the Islamic civilization is that Muslims were creative, innovative and productive. We feel that it is this message that needs to be sent clearly." Thus, the priority given

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to "productive" over "pious" citizens allows the proselytizing women to reach into the public space using strategies that are new and that render pluralism and multiplicity not the sole mandate of secular groups.

Religious folk speaking of secularism can be seen as opportunistic, calculating, specious—preconceptions that have stood in the way of developing a sufficiently nuanced understanding of how religious voices and practices enter the public space in Bangladesh. In this article, I will explore a particular modality of going public that the religious folk subsume as a part of *da`wa*. The article will discuss proselytizing as a way of elucidating what it means for religious people to work towards their vision of a secular and productive society. It argues that "secular" is constructed as plurality and tolerance for mutual co-existence, albeit with a religiously inspired morality that is less emphasized in efforts towards community development. I demonstrate that a particular religious faction speaks of ideas of plurality and progress with a developmentalist[1] approach that has long been a mode of mobilization among liberal/secular factions. The ethnographic account intends to open up ways of a thinking-through conceptual and political impasses posed by a sharp religious/secular dichotomy – a thinking through that is grounded in the notion that particular forms of public Islam, at least in the context of Bangladesh do not necessarily present themselves as counterpoints to post-colonial, state-sanctioned constitutional secularism, but are borne out of a particular kind of secularity where religious blocs also generate popular appeal and lay claims to the religio-political terrain. Before going on to a discussion of *da`wa* as a means of generating public and popular appeal and its framing of the "secular," I must briefly introduce the women who constitute the ethnographic core of this chapter.

Religious Women in Discussion Circles

This paper is based on almost two years of participant observation in three Islamic discussion circles in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The women who lead and attend these circles are educated and financially solvent, and range in age from fifteen to late-sixties.[2] The women in the circles engage in textual readings and interpretations of the

[1] By developmentalist I refer to ways employed by NGOs and other development organizations that focus on tangible issues such as increasing income, providing education, and delivery of health services. In Bangladesh these services have mostly been offered by secular organizations that include Bangladesh's thriving NGOs such as BRAC and Grameen Bank, while Islamic groups have been involved in door-to-door preaching. This trend seems to be changing, and Islamic groups are thinking up ways of being more relevant to the cultural, economic and even political landscape of Bangladesh. To that end, they are emulating secular NGOs and getting involved in development work.

[2] Of the three groups, the two that met in the organizers' homes had mostly younger women, with one of these dedicated exclusively to young, university-going women. The group that congregated in the mosque three times a week had a greater number of older women.

Quran and Hadith and other secondary, exegetical literature. The piety that is preached critiques liberal, Western ways as having derailed Muslims from their "true" identity. Critiques are also made of local religious practices, such as the veneration of *pirs* (saints) and their *mazars* (shrines). Thus, in order to attain piety, the circles and the women who run them call for a change—a change that asks women to critically reflect on their past beliefs and practices in order to chart a new trajectory where their lives can become more "authentically" Islamic and at the same time modern. Women thus embark on living and creating a religious modernity.

The religious discussion circles that are discussed here do not belong to any of the organized groups, such as the Tablighi Jama`at, or to political parties, such as the Jama`at-e-Islami or Hizbut Tahrir, many of which also run religious discussion circles in Dhaka. As a result of the absence of a formal link with any of the organized groups mentioned, I refer to the discussion circles I study as "non-aligned"[3] Islamic discussion circles. The women who run these circles are careful about keeping them free of political overtones for a variety of reasons, ranging from the desire to draw in as many women as possible to a genuine aversion to Islamic political parties to the effort to think up a new vision of Islam in Bangladesh. Consequently, if there are women with strong political affinities or links who attend, they are asked by the organizers not to introduce those affinities into the organization and functioning of the discussions.[4] Thus, these women do not constitute a unified "Islamic" bloc in Bangladesh. The main reason for their coming together is to better learn about Islam from the Quran, *hadith* and other "authentic" texts and in so doing, become more devout Muslims. Many of them have been practicing Muslims whose families are well versed in the Quran and other Islamic texts. For many others, being this religiously observant is new, and they are constantly struggling with meeting the ideal standards of piety. The normative standards of piety include being more diligent in performing religious rituals, cultivating dispositions and inner emotions such as modesty, fear and love of God, and making these personal changes apparent to others. Women consider talking to others to be a divine obligation. Shehnaz, a preacher, quoted from the chapter titled "*Nahl*" of the Quran in order to explain to her class, "We must reach out to others, because this is a command from God. We have trained ourselves, learnt how to overcome obstacles and found a new meaning to our lives. We are ready…each one of us… to pass on everything that is noble about us to others. So, please, please remember that it is your duty to call, to invite, to do *da`wa*." Thus, the women from the discussion circles see *da`wa* as the most effective way to make personal piety public.

[3]I am aware that the term "non-aligned" may spark some controversy, as claims are made about alignment with transnational groups, literally or ideologically. Thus, I use the term to clarify that in the local context, these groups are not a part of any other Islamic groups or parties that also have study circles.

[4]Huq (2011). Discussing the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) Rebellion: Non-Islamist women and religious revival in urban Bangladesh. *Contemporary Islam 5*(3), 267–283.

Da`wa and Public Islam

As Shehnaz clearly states, *da`wa* means invitation. In *The Politics of Piety*, Saba Mahmood quotes from M. Canard's explanation in the *Encyclopedia of Islam*: "*da`wa* literally means call, invitation, appeal or summons. It is a Quranic concept associated primarily with God's call to the prophets and to humanity to believe in the 'true religion', Islam."[5] Mahmood goes on to explain that in Egypt, the term *da`wa* is no longer restricted to its traditional usage—to refer to verbal admonishment and urging fellow Muslims to change in God's way through lectures or conversation, but also encompasses a range of activities such as establishing neighborhood mosques, social welfare organizations, Islamic educational institutions, and printing presses, among other enterprises.[6] In the context of the lesson circles I study, *da`wa* has an equally comprehensive meaning, whereby women place all kinds of activities within its purview.

While women see *da`wa* first and foremost as a religious obligation, they also rely on the practice to carry out a new kind of activism that renders them more vibrantly contributing members of society. Activism by women is not new to the political and cultural landscape of Bangladesh. However, in Bangladesh, as in many other parts of the world, on the basis of moral transformation and the different paths to molding subjectivities, "women's politics and cultural activism diverge towards exclusionary secular and politico-religious forms."[7] As a result of seeing activism sharply divided along religious or secular lines, the general folk (meaning the educated, secular leaning citizens) tend to view proselytizing with some suspicion, and worry about the eventual outcome of such activities.

Anxiety over the eventual outcome of "too much Islam" in the public space has influenced popular opinion and journalistic reporting, as well as academic critiques of recent scholarship on Islamic piety. For example, Saba Mahmood's important work on pious women who congregate in mosque-based Islamic discussion circles has been critiqued for inadequately describing the modalities by which moral reform transforms the public space.[8] The absence of sufficient ethnography on these processes has, in its turn, generated critiques that see piety as it is envisioned and lived by pious women as superficial, without taking seriously how that piety is grounded. Sindre Bangstad asserts that Mahmood has not problematized the mosque women's Salafi grounding, thereby arguing that the piety Mahmood highlights is problematic and partial (Bangstad 2011). She arrives at this conclusion based on recent 2011 reports that Salafis in Egypt burned Coptic churches and did not initially support the pro-democracy uprising at Tahrir Square.[9] In other words, piety is, in this view,

[5] Mahmood (2005); M. Canard, *Encyclopedia of Islam* (1999).

[6] Mahmood, The Politics of Piety, 58.

[7] Amina Jamal, "Global Discourses, Situated Traditions, and the Secular/Religious Framing of Muslim Women's Agency in Pakistan" (Draft chapter used for forthcoming 2011).

[8] Amina Jamal, "Global Discourses, Situated Traditions, and the Secular/Religious Framing of Muslim Women's Agency in Pakistan." See also, Cooper (2008).

[9] Ibid.

considered to be an underlying element of anti-democratic and intolerant tendencies, and thus a counterpoint to the tolerance and plurality promised by Western secularism. Such critiques are based on a stagnant view of Arab Islamism that pays little attention to the ways in which Islamist tones have been changing to keep pace with an evolving, post-Arab-Spring religio-political landscape.[10] Without these recent insights, critiques such as Bangstad's leave very little opportunity to imagine alternatives. For example, such critiques do not ask if the personal-public nexus must always spell danger for society at large. Neither do they ask if piety might have other ongoing and evolving ways of entering the public space.

In the context of Bangladesh, public expressions of religion are frowned upon not only because they are assumed to have the potential to stifle freedom, democracy and tolerance, but also because of the Jama`at-e-Islami's collaboration with the Pakistani army during the struggle for independence in 1971. Consequently, "public" religion has taken on anti-national and anti-cultural connotations. Public expressions of religious fervor are equated with Islamism, and thus feared for the possibility that they might harbor a regressive social agenda that would destabilize citizens' allegiance to cultural beliefs and practices that are "Bengali." Much of this anxiety can be explained in light of the fundamentalist attacks on Bengali celebrations and NGO schools for girls in the late 1990s and early 2000s.[11] However, in Bangladesh as elsewhere, Islam's entry into in the public space has been neither unified nor homogeneous. In today's global climate, Islam increasingly presents itself in a "modern" garb, constantly evolving to accommodate discourses it had not partaken in before (Bayat 2007; Deeb 2009). Thus, women from "non-aligned" discussion circles use *da`wa* as a medium of change that gives Islam a new public presence. It is the modality of "going public" of one such Islam that I highlight in this chapter. Before turning to an ethnographic discussion of how women in non-aligned Islamic discussion circles envision and practice *da`wa* by advocating inclusiveness, tolerance, and nation-building, with personal piety subsumed within their fold. I will briefly discuss constructions of the secular in Bangladesh.

Activism and Representations of the Secular in Bangladesh

Secularism enters the politico-cultural terrain to create political systems as well as particular kinds of subjects. In the political realm, secularism promises a separation between church and state. As Rajeev Bhargava has argued in the introductory

[10]For reports on how Islam and Islamism are changing to address challenges of pluralism and democracy see Bobby Ghosh (2011); Steve Negus (2011).

[11]In 2001, a bomb exploded in the largest celebration of Bengali New Year in Ramna, killing several people and sending shockwaves throughout the nation. This was the first major assault by Islamists on a celebration of Bengaliness through cultural activities such as singing. In 2005, a suicide bombing on Udichi, a cultural organization in Khulna, killed 5 people and injured approximately 50. In the early 1990s NGOs came under attack by Islamists for taking girls out of their homes and thus out of *purdah* in order to attend schools. For more see: "Defending Islam and Women's Honour against NGOs in Bangladesh" in *Women's Studies International Forum* 33 (2010): 316–324.

chapter to his edited anthology, "Initial motivations to Western secularism were complex and variegated: to check absolutism, religious bigotry, and fanaticism, to ensure that the values enshrined in particular religions did not trump other values, to manage religious conflicts reasonably" (Bhargava 1998). This kind of secularism has also been considered an essential companion of democracy (Taylor 1998). Secularism is also considered to produce particular subjects for whom religion becomes a matter of choice (Asad 2003). The importing of secularism into non-Western, post-colonial contexts is intended to produce similar results: these societies, once secular, would also be able to attain a separation of church and state and produce citizens who see religion largely as a matter of choice. With this normative model looming over non-Western societies, scholarship from the past decade has made us aware of a few things about such framings of secularism. First, secularism, even in the west, does not deliver on its promise of a neat separation between church and state (Sandel 1998). Next, as a European invention, the doctrine of secularism needs to be understood not only on the basis of internal Christian reforms as Charles Taylor argues (2007), but also as Europe's colonial encounter with its constitutive and colonial others (Brown 2007; Mahmood 2011). With these critical insights in mind, persistent calls to implement secularism in its idealistic political and cultural formations seem untenable; these calls are further locked in endless debates about good secularism—where societies manage to keep religion out of the public/political space—versus bad secularism—where the public space and politics is subject to religious "intrusions". Talal Asad's work on the topic offers a way forward. Asad argues that secularism, as a principle of state governance, should be understood not as the removal of religion from politics, but rather as its ongoing regulation through state and civic institutions.[12] Consequently, the sharp distinction between the religious and the secular becomes blurry.

In Bangladesh, secularism was placed in the constitution as an accompaniment to socialism, nationalism and democracy, and was intended to usher in religion-free politics and political decisions. The ban on religious political parties soon after independence was imposed in order to put into effect this constitutional mandate and create a more open, tolerant and inclusive polity. The decision to include secularism in the constitution also stems from the western Pakistani authority's use of Islam to suppress the liberation struggle and attempt to thwart the military and guerilla uprising (Khondker 2010). With secularism constitutionalized, Bangladesh was thus to be free of the religious conflicts that marked its past. Modern Bangladesh was to be a place where religion did not interfere with the workings of the state. In the wake of the bloody separation from Pakistan, nationalism was rearticulated, privileging the Bengali over the Muslim identity of the Bengali Muslims of Bangladesh. This national identity anchored itself in the realms of language and culture, as repositories of Bengaliness and the new nationalism.

Saba Mahmood argues that the political solution that secularism professes "lies not so much in tolerating difference and diversity, but in making certain kinds of

[12]Talal Asad. *Formations of the Secular*, 2003; and Saba Mahmood. "Is Critique Secular? Secular Imperatives?" Posted in The Immanent Frame: Secularism, Religion, and the Public Sphere, 2008.

subjectivities so as to render them compliant with liberal political rule" (Mahmood 2006, 57). The early Awami League regime's project of secularizing the state did privilege a certain kind of citizen subject. This subject did not espouse the Jama`ati worldview, nor did it follow a "literalist" interpretive tradition that shared a Jama`ati focus on rituals and practice. Rather, the Muslim subject was one who practiced a syncretistic and Sufi-leaning faith within her private space.[13] In other words, the Bengali Muslims of Bangladesh were to uphold a "traditional" syncretistic faith that historically emerged out of their interaction with Hindus, who had in the past lived in close proximity to them. The secular subject thus may have had faith, but it was a particular kind of faith that had been endorsed as the ideal route to secularism and national, political and economic progress.

During the end of Mujib's era, as a result of public discomfort with secularism being read as an absence of religion, religious images and messages were introduced into the public space. Examples of this include beginning television transmission with recitations from the Quran, Bible, Geeta and Tripitok. Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman himself also began his public speeches with "*Bismillah.*" While these developments were intended to appease the masses, the staunch secularists saw them as affronts to secularism. These secularists talked about a watering down of the project of secularization that had been enshrined in the constitution. The process of secularization was dealt a further blow after Mujib's assassination[14] when the term "secularism" was removed from the constitution, replaced by General Zia-ur-Rahman with "absolute trust and faith in Almighty Allah" (Maniruzzaman 1988, 215). This statement was further amended by General Ershad to read, "The state religion of the republic is Islam, but other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony in the republic" (Shehabuddin 2008, 73; Ahmed 1994). Zia's constitutional amendment also saw the removal of the ban on religious politics, allowing the Jama`at to make inroads into the political terrain. Jama`at subsequently consolidated itself and even enjoyed some electoral success (Alamgir 2009). Jama`at's settling into the political arena saw the emergence of other Islamist, and even militant Islamist groups, who do not all necessarily have warm relations with the Jama`at.[15] The growth of Islamists happened alongside the proliferation of *shalish* (village courts) and *fatwas*, as well as the persecution of minorities including the Ahmadiyaas. These events portrayed religion as inherently tied to regressive

[13] Sufi practices in Bangladesh refer mainly to following a *pir* (live saint or just spiritual teacher and guide) and the veneration of dead saints' shrines, which are bound by certain ritualistic practices. Many practitioners who follow a more literal understanding of religious texts argue that these practices are far removed from "authentic" prophetic practices. There is debate amongst the "*pir*" quarters as well, where different groups vie for legitimacy. They argue that the literalists are incorrect, and that while there are many fake *pirs*, there are also good ones remaining whose practices are prophetic indeed.

[14] On August 15, 1975, the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, his entire immediate family except for two daughters, some members of his extended family members, and a number of key figures from his regime were murdered by young army officers.

[15] For a discussion of smaller Islamist groups and their relations with the Jama`at, see Riaz (2004).

practice and politics. The secular imaginary thus placed all religious and Islamist groups into a single category, displacing it by rendering this "singular" category the "other" of the national development discourse.

National development was not only a matter of constitutional mandates and political changes, but equally, if not more, about real economic transformations. To that end, the dominant development discourse was framed by relations between the state, Western development partners, local and foreign NGOs and since Zia's regime, oil-rich Middle Eastern countries. Over the past 40 years, different regimes have been differently aligned with international powers. Accordingly, their strategies of development have been driven by different ideological and donor-driven imperatives. For example, soon after the end of the Mujib regime, Ziaur Rahman altered the existing balance between nationalism-socialism by promoting economic liberalization and private-sector development (Kabeer 1991, 123). In order to address the needs of a war-ravaged country that had also suffered a famine, Zia welcomed aid from Persian Gulf and Euro-American donors. Ties with the Middle East, including the migration of unskilled and semi-skilled Bangladeshi labor to the oil-rich countries of the Middle East, led to huge foreign exchange earnings for Bangladesh, which in turn served to strengthen ties even further in subsequent regimes. The state's development priorities reflected an appeasing of a liberal agenda pushed forward by Western donors, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, while at the same time courting Middle Eastern countries whose agendas were not as liberal. Thus, Bangladesh experienced a boom in women's entry into the labor market as a result of the arrival in Bangladesh of the export-oriented readymade garments industry. At the same time, the country witnessed the arrival of conservative religious ideas from the Middle East, made manifest in an increase in mosques, madrasas, women's conservative dress, and the proliferation of religious ideas that are viewed by many secular-leaning critics as new to the religio-cultural terrain. Bangladesh also has a thriving NGO sector, the beginnings of which can be traced to the early years following the war of liberation. NGOs have worked with the state and with foreign donors to achieve much success in areas such as poverty reduction, women's empowerment, decreased infant and maternal mortality, decrease in diarrhea deaths, and increased literacy. National development was thus a story of neoliberal change.

As these development initiatives unfolded, the "religion" question loomed in the background. In order to project the nation as modern and progressive, the state has maintained a balance between the imperatives of different ideologically oriented donors. The rise of conservative ideas that entered the country alongside material resources from the Middle East and the resultant change in religious practices at home have not found a space in the nation's conceptualization of progress and development. In fact, as mentioned earlier, public expressions of religion, notably Islam, through examples of *fatwas* and attacks on NGO schools in the late 1990s, only represented an anti-development agenda of regressive change. The two major political parties have themselves resorted to religious rhetoric on many occasions, which political economists see as a reflection of a "clientilist surplus appropriation"—an approach that captures the ruling elites' and alliances' maximization of the appropriation of power and wealth (Khan 2000).

Alliances between centrist and Islamist parties have been forged differently at different times. One outcome of courting Islamists has been the BNP's refusal to acknowledge atrocities caused by certain Islamists.[16] Next, the Awami League, while seen widely as the more secular party, has on the one hand come down heavily on Jama`atis through the trial of war criminals and the banning of certain other militant Islamist outfits, but has also conceded to certain religious demands.[17] Such mixed handling of these groups signals an ill-articulated position by the political parties on the role of religion in public and political life. This in turn is read by staunch advocates of the separation of religion from politics as secularism gone terribly wrong, as it has been tempered by opportunistic politicians and their allowance of "religious" intrusions. The secularists believe that such intrusions should be kept at bay so that "secularism" can deliver all its promises. While underlying this perspective may be certain ideals towards the "common good," it also comes with certain pitfalls.

First, an insistence on "improving secularism" so that religion is eliminated from public and political life tells us very little about the general public's religious sensibilities. Sheikh Mujib's introduction of Islamic language and gestures in public events is seen as an appeasement, which in turn gives rise to the image of a citizen-subject that is religious, but only privately, with religion leaving no mark on the foundations of Bangladeshi society and nation. After Mujib and the removal of the term "secularism" from the constitution, and especially as Jama`at emerges into the political scene, we hear very little about the aspirations of the Bangladeshi people. The political terrain becomes divided into an ideal secularism versus secularism defiled. The citizenry is divided and characterized as secularists rallying for the ideal secularism to set in, as practitioners who are religious in private but desire a secular society dictated by (quasi) liberal desires, or as practitioners who are religious and envision a religious society and perhaps even state. The latter category is conceptualized without thinking through how followers envision Islam in private and public, and whether and to what extent an Islamic state is a part of their imagination.

[16]In the BNP/Jama`at regime of 2001–2006, when there were several terrorist attacks in different parts in Bangladesh and when the presence of a militant outfit with Al-Qaida connections—the JMB—became increasingly fierce, the BNP declared that Bangladesh has no fundamentalists. Critics saw this claim to result from BNP's strategic alliance with Jama`at. Towards the end of their tenure, the BNP did however declare JMB a banned outfit.

[17]The women's development policy was proposed in 2008, when the past caretaker government stalled in its implementation due to a fierce outcry from Islamists. In 2011, the policy was resurrected again and was met with strong protests from Amini and his Islmai Oikyo Jot (IOJ). While the government is being strong in asserting that the policy will be put in place, many feel the government is failing to substantiate its claim that the policy is not anti-Islam. Thus, the issue of women's (inheritance) rights, which is at the heart of the debate, has not been given serious thought. As a result, many progressive women's groups are frustrated that the government is not doing enough, while there are others who despair that these and many other policies are not thought through within a broader progressive—but still Islamic—framework. The latter stance is taken up by those who feel the time has come to think about progress and development in a way that is neither anti-women not anti-Islam, even if simply to move beyond being stalled by regressive Islamists.

The absence of this line of inquiry and analysis collapses notions of state and society into one another, and all negative anti-nation connotations that the Jama`at through its role in 1971 has garnered are brought to bear on the entire category. The publicly religious folk are thought to come with an Islamist agenda that many fear will only take society backwards.

Polarized conceptions of secular versus publicly religious/Islamist (or Islamist-leaning) citizens leave very little to the imagination regarding what may lie in between. As the political terrain has come to be seen as a realm of secularism defiled, where the citizen subject is either secular with private faith or Islamist, the dynamics of religious engagement have changed. The political and cultural landscape is now populated by different kinds of religious groups that partake in transnational and regional Islamic alliances and discourses. These groups are not systematically studied, and different bases and articulations of conservatism and militancy are not carefully separated. The absence of studying and understanding the different religious groups (political and otherwise) also means that there is little or no engagement by non-religious factions with the religious blocs beyond the registers of "fundamentalism," "backwardness," "militancy," and so forth. Such blanket conceptualizations make it very difficult to enter into a conversation with the publicly religious folk to discern their approach to interfaith tolerance, multiplicity and nation-building. This yields a secular worldview that is not "negotiated," "substantive" or "emergent" (Bilgrami 1998).

The question now may be: with whom might one negotiate and why? These questions can be answered only if we break away from the binaries that separate the religious from the secular, the pro-tolerance from the intolerant, and the modern/liberal from the parochial binaries. If we can envision, for a moment, a world without such binaries, we may be able to see many new faces on the political, cultural terrain, whose voices, although there, are nonetheless currently muted. Unmuting these voices will enable one to asses with whom to negotiate and under what terms of those negotiations may be. The next question is: why is negotiation an imperative? The answer to this question lies not so much in the argument for a political construction and a constitutional contract regarding secularism, but in what citizens make of this political construction in understanding and navigating their cultural, political and personal lives.

Even at present, on the eve of the fifteenth constitutional amendment that will restore secularism, there is much debate about what elements that have been brought into the public space by different religious voices should remain and what the terms of their continued presence is to be. A few issues that exemplify the current debate are the national women's policy, *fatwas*, and the existence of Jama'at-e-Islami as a political party. The terrain remains divided and the debates contentious as secularists blame the government for being confused between aiming for a lofty ideal and pandering to regressive Islamic forces. The voices of the citizens, which may well be different from the staunch secularists, the Islamists, and the government as a "pandering" entity, remain little understood.

In the section that follows, I look at particular religious voices—those of young women who congregate in "non-aligned" Islamic discussion circles—and discuss

their *da`wa* initiatives as a way of elucidating their approach to the public space. Through the discussion that follows, I not only highlight the modalities by which women proselytize, rendering private piety public, but also argue that new modalities, such as the one I present here, challenge old binaries and ideas that have long equated public Islam with Islamism, lack of tolerance and anti-nationalism. Contrary to presenting themselves as a counterpoint to secularism, the women through their *da`wa* claim the term secularism for Islam by attempting to frame a narrative of nationalism, pride in the Bengali culture, and plurality. Proselytizing is thus made to challenge the secular/religious binary in the aim of creating a society that is ethical and equally importantly, productive.

New *Da`wa* and New Society

For the women in the non-aligned discussion circles that I study in Dhaka, *da`wa* refers to a host of actions, ranging from verbal calling to charity to community service. Women acknowledge the equal importance of all of these activities and use their discussion circles as platforms to employ themselves and others towards their *da`wa* initiatives. However, the more astute women in the circles, many of whom are preachers, recognize some tensions underlying verbal calling and charity. They claim that verbal admonishment puts the person being preached to on the defensive and may be self-defeating as a result. Eliciting charity infringes upon personal information and private sensitivities of potential donors, leading them to be dissuaded from piety altogether. Consequently, many of the women feel that working towards community development beyond one-on-one admonishment or charity is a more productive avenue through which they can do "God's work and establish good in society."

For Nadera and a group of friends, Community Action (CA) is what allows for this productive engagement with society. For Nadera, CA is most definitely *da`wa*. She says, "Through CA, I am able to do and facilitate for others a lot of charity. I also get to meet different kinds of people where my actions allow them to see and respect what I stand for, hoping that all of it will influence them." In addition, and of no less importance, is the organizational aspect of CA. Nadera argues that CA is first and foremost an organization that does "universal human" work towards community and nation building—a project that requires the input and cooperation of many and different kinds of people. Thus, if CA is not considered to be *da`wa* for others who are involved with it, Nadera and her friends are not uncomfortable with that. She says, "It is a secular organization, secular because it allows, in fact encourages, whoever is interested and committed to be involved, and also because the goals are universally humanitarian." Thus, CA as a mode of proselytizing aims at transcendence beyond personal faith and conviction to include as many people as possible. The desire to be inclusive and consequently a force of change to be reckoned with, allows CA to see faith and the pursuit of piety as evolving and even secondary to projects aimed at community- and nation-building. In bringing

about changes in society, personal piety as well as (party) political affinities are not seen as barriers to inclusion and participation.[18]

However, Nadera adds that as most members of the Executive Committee, who are also the founding members of CA, are religious, they do give a moral bent to the organization. The moral base is set by certain standards, such as:

1. Avoidance of interest banking, thereby relying only on Islamic banking.
2. In community projects, teams for group work are formed in a way that no one team has boys and girls that may end up in romantic relationships. So, while allowing mixed teams, CA tries to avoid potentially "problematic" traps.
3. Purposefully staying away from commemorating certain Western events such as Valentine's Day, and using means such as raffle draws, charity balls, fashion shows, etc., to raise funds.

Fully aware that other organizations whose foundations, and organizational manifestos are overtly Islamic may do the same, Nadera argues that CA differs in not just refraining, but offering an alternative. She says, "Yes we do refrain from certain things that we feel are not allowed. But we don't just preach, 'Don't do this- this is *haram*.' We don't want to be the *haram* police. So we like to give alternatives. Unless we give alternatives, we're not really providing solutions but only injunctions, and that will never deter anybody, not in the long run, at least."

An example of how alternatives are provided can be found in their community initiative, organized on *Pohela Boishakh* (Bengali New Year). Ripe with sentiments and celebrations of everything that represents Bengaliness, such as songs of

[18] Asef Bayat's work on post-Islamism may be useful in understanding how the case I present corresponds to similar changes in Muslim majority countries. Bayat argues that the term post-Islamism is more descriptive than analytic, defining it through certain events such as internal changes in the youth, the religious clergy, women, students, along with "external" pressures of living in the era of globalization, and dealing with other non-Muslim nation-states whose combined effect has been the transformation of the public space from the "grim, dark and male-ness" that characterized the Islamist era or post-revolution Iran. Bayat argues that post-Islamism as a "condition" and a "project" may have originated in Iran in the 1990s but has consequently been taken up by many large and small movements in the Muslim world (2007: 10–15). While I am tempted to present CA as an example of post-Islamism, I must add that Bangladesh's experience of Islamism is very different from Iran's or even Pakistan's in South Asia. Here, the Jama`at-e-Islamic has neither engineered a revolution, nor assumed power single handedly to establish an Islamic state. The term *post*-Islamism thus seems skewed given the Bangladeshi state has never been represented by Islamists and an Islamist agenda. However, the term post-Islamism fits if it is to denote how religious movements–those that are political in their overt quest for state power, and those that are political in a looser sense of the term by simply wanting to moralize individuals and society without going as far as talking about an Islamic state—are changing their tone as they undertake a more pluralistic and less rigid approach and generate appeal. In the case of Bangladesh, as my example will highlight, there is a strong tendency to distance oneself from existing Islamists. However, as Islamists also begin to change their tone and adopt a softer stance, it will be interesting to observe if groups such as Community Action become subsumed within the reformed and toned-down Islamist ambit. Thus, the question of how the different streams that seek to moralize/Islamize the public space may merge or remain separate remains an empirical question worth pursuing over long term.

Rabindra Nath Tagore, celebrating the sari and often the tip, and eating rice and elish fish (the national fish), the day is celebrated with much music, color and festivity. Celebrations beginning at dawn where various cultural groups organize their singing and dancing programs, followed by fairs, food stalls, and face painting. The day is a national holiday and the streets are jammed with fairs and people walking about in general merriment. As mentioned above, in recent years, such celebrations have also been met with the Islamist onslaught condemning the singing and dancing and the free mixing that underlie the festivities. The bombing at *Pohela Boishakh* celebrations in 2001 led to the death of several people.

Nadera's fellow "actioneer" Suha says, "Resorting to violence is obviously unacceptable. In fact we at CA feel that even asking people to refrain from attending is also futile. People have their culture and heritage. They're not going to throw all that away, and we don't even want to ask people of that. Knowing fully well that people are going to go out and hang out in Dhaka University, Ramna, Dhanmondi park, etc. we don't want to resort to ineffective rhetoric and be the only ones remaining indoors. So, we decided to take part in the festivity, but in our own way."

CA bought cheap sandals to distribute to street children who hang around in crowded areas where New Year's celebrations take place. This was a strategy to effectively and productively employ the actioneers—young people who would have partaken in the festivities anyway. The project, which they called "Project *Chappal* [Sandals]," served several purposes. First, CA was able to do some charity, and get many actioneers to celebrate the new year in a different and more constructive manner. In addition, the project included a survey. While giving out the sandals to the street children, actioneers filled in questionnaires that were designed to give information on how many street children attend schools and in which areas, and why some do not. Given the dearth of official data on street children's school attendance, the survey was designed to fill that gap, so that anyone interested in setting up a school for street children in the future would have a clearer direction regarding where to start and how.

Thus, CA's "universal" aims are laced with religion is several ways. First the moral mandate of the organization gives it a religious bent, even if it is not explicitly spelled out. Next, we find that CA attempts to find alternatives to singing and dancing, practices whose prohibition has its roots in a particular theological reasoning. Without coming out and saying it is prohibited, they strive to give youngsters a constructive alternate route, thereby sitting on the fence between its "non-confessional" outward appearance and its "religious" core. The bypassing of religious injunctions allows CA to be perceived differently from Islamist individuals and groups.

CA also aims to distinguish itself from other non-religious community and charitable organizations. While members insist the group is "a secular organization," they argue that it is their "moral"—rather than their Islamic or even religious—basis that sets their organization apart from other "secular" players in the field. Suha says,

> Much like us, secular organizations focus on tangible things such as livelihood, income, services, etc. However, they leave aside the moral teachings. For example, they don't see the problem with interest. Nor are they concerned about how men and women interact in or as

> a result of their initiatives. By compromising the moral part of it, they may be putting in millions, but they are stealing from Peter to pay Paul. And ultimately, without morality and moral teachings, they are putting up a system that fails to serve the community in the long run, in a big way. I know there are lots of big and small organizations who do similar work, but my question is, have the mammoth organizations necessarily produced mammoth sustainable changes?[19]

While Nadera and Suha do not name names, nor point out the "mammoth" organizations who are engaged in development work, we know that in the recent past, various small and large NGOs have come under much criticism and even violent attacks from the Islamist quarters.[20] These acts have led to a strengthening of ideas held in civil society organizations, media outlets, and much of the educated public that Islamists are anti-nation, anti-progress and development, anti-secular, and violent. While CA may be of the opinion that existing NGOs do not follow the best methods to development, they are clear in not wanting to be labeled as anti-nationalists. Thus, they came up with an initiative to observe "*Bijou kibosh*," or Victory Day, on which Bangladesh gained independence from Pakistan in 1971. The initiative was called, "*Shebar maddhomey Bijoyer Prokash*," or, "Expressing victory through service." Nadera is very proud of this event. On behalf of CA, Nadera and some of the other executive committee members took the idea to small and large corporations and were warmly received by them. Of her approach to the event, Nadera says,

> I wanted us to do something different on this 16th December. I wanted it to go beyond mere song and dance, where the day is observed with patriotic cultural programs. Even if there is singing and dancing, I thought that the day should really be commemorated by remembering the spirit of the freedom fighters. Their spirit was of nothing other than selfless patriotism and service to the nation. So, we wanted to take "service" as the central theme and asked each corporation to sponsor one charitable act for the day. It was hugely successful. Corporations were pleased because they got some CSR [corporate social responsibility] kind of publicity, and CA was able to not only instigate and get going something positive, but also network and be known for their ideas and abilities.[21]

CA's highlighting and application of what its members understand to be the "secular" within which the religious is subsumed corroborates the understanding that placing binary distinctions between the secular and the religious does not yield a particularly insightful understanding of how people's lives are lived. The description of CA reveals that the particular construction and configuration of the religious and the secular undergird a model of development that opens up several possibilities. First, in this model, there is a call to critically re-evaluate existing development initiatives and organizations. There is also space to make development youth-driven and championed by young men and women alike. In addition, the model is open to participation from all willing members of society, as it is motivated primarily towards creating a productive and not necessarily a

[19] Interview held in January 2010 in Dhaka at Nadera's residence.

[20] Ali Riaz, *God Willing*.

[21] Interview held in March 2011 in Dhaka, at Nadera's residence.

totalistic pious society. The productive society is to be attained through culture, where cultural practices are seen as ultimately useful for developmental ends. CA's vision of *da`wa* that seeks to place this model into effect through equal participation for all thus claims to be open to a plurality of religious orientations, in which people may exercise their choice to be or not to be pious.

However, these choices are set against the backdrop of an ideal moral project that is grounded in scriptural edicts and thereby constrains certain options, such as the mainstream option of finance management (by focusing on interest-free banking), the option to explore one's sexuality beyond a marital heteronormativity, and the sexual conservatism which affects Western-influenced cultural festivities such as Valentine's Day and charity balls. In these options, morality becomes narrowly defined, with religious scriptures seizing and seeking to standardize the moral project. However, in order to weigh this openness against the constricted nature of choosing the (Islamic) modernization project, the questions to ask would be: what are the implications of this narrowly defined moral project? How does the moral project differently affect the private and the public space? And in these areas, how is the "right to be" constructed, validated, and/or penalized? How are differences maintained, bridged, and/or mediated? These are important questions to ask if we want a fair assessment of how proselytizing molds society and frames plurality. The following discussion of how women relate to the "other," in this case, non-Muslims, will shed some light on questions of interfaith relations, peaceful mediation, and the limits of pluralism.

Relating to the "Other"

In the context of Bangladesh, the "other" for the majority Muslim community consists of minority groups of Hindus, Christians, the people of the Chittagong hill tracts, and other indigenous populations. Interestingly, these are not the groups the women spend much time talking about influencing. In other words, while converting others into Islam remains a highly desirable ideal, the women are more concerned with spiritually awakening existing Muslims, enabling them to experience their religion of birth anew. With conversion sidelined, dealings with the other become about three kinds of liaisons: sharing and learning, strategically collaborating, and/or distancing in certain crucial times. I begin with the sharing and learning.

In order to keep alive their newly acquired religious zeal, the women from the discussion circles feel that it is best to keep similar kinds of company. Often, this decision leaves out many good friends and family members who have not undergone similar religious transformations. In keeping old ties alive, women are urged to behave in a manner that encourages friends to be inquisitive and open to the possibility of seeing religion in a new and invigorated manner. Preachers and others who have remained steadfast in their piety for a long time urge others to resist being influenced by their not-so-religious friends. Even if

others cannot be changed and converted, women feel that sharing their experiences and giving out the "right information and image" about Islam is also a part of *da`wa*.

The efforts towards influencing serves the dual purpose of confirming to oneself that Islam is *the* religion to be followed, as well as letting others know of its supremacy and goodness. In the article, "Peace, Dialogue and *Da`wa*: an analysis of the writings of Maulana Wahiduddin Khan," Yoginder Sikand discusses the scholar's efforts and describes his missionary stance as one that is directed towards softening others' hearts and building bridges. Sikand summarizes Khan's *da`wa* efforts to write, "Even if they were not to convert to Islam, the work of *da`wa* would cause their hearts to be softened. Enemies need to be converted into friends, Islam insists, and just as the Prophet returned good for evil, Muslims must seek to impress others with their character and teachings of Islam, instead of alienating them through conflict" (Sikand 2003).

An interesting instance of such bridge-building *da`wa* is the interaction between Shehnaz, the preacher whose sense of urgency to engage in *da`wa* opened this article, and a Baptist missionary couple that she had met and invited over on several occasions to discuss matters of faith and practice. I asked Shehnaz if she was trying to convert the couple. She replied,

> No. I knew that it would be very difficult to convert them. I mean they're no ordinary Joes, they're hardcore; people who themselves convert others. But I did want to engage with them, and teach as well as learn from them. I wanted to teach them that Islam is really an extension of the creed they follow, not a separate faith that sprung out of nowhere. I had lively discussions with them through which I was able to bring out a lot of commonalities, most of which were new revelations to them. However, when I pointed out the problems with the Trinity, they had their own explanations…and I knew they would. Like I said, these are missionaries; to make their religion appear coherent is their job. But I know that by interacting with them they did learn and were even impressed. They said to me that never before have they met a Muslim with so much passion that was peaceful, like theirs. I also learnt a lot from them. In fact, there was quite a lot of selfish motive behind my interest in them. I wanted to know more about how they lead their lives, how they organize so well to preach so effectively. They had five children all of whom are being home tutored. We also speak of things like that, but I feel that our missionary zeal hasn't allowed us yet to focus hard enough to do many of the things we would ideally like to. And so, interacting with them was also a learning experience for me.[22]

Shehnaz's statements reveal a desire towards greater missionary zeal. In Sikand's article on Mawlana Khan, the author writes that Khan's efforts represent a shift away from the "conquest and imperial splendor" mentality of the Islamists. Khan's belief that Islamists see themselves more as victors than as missionaries propels him to follow a more missionary route towards engaging with others. Shehnaz feels that Christian missionaries represent a certain kind of life committed and dedicated to serving God, an example that is worth drawing from. Thus, while others may not change in the way of Islam, there are definite gains to be made from sharing with and even learning from the "other."

[22]Interview held in September 2009, in Dhaka at Shehnaz's residence.

Women also maintain ties with non-Muslim, Western organizations and individuals for strategic reasons. The preacher Najma has been involved with Zonta,[23] a multi-national women's voluntary association headquartered in the United States for several years. In fact her involvement with Zonta predates her participation in the religious lesson circles. However, her renewed religious zeal has allowed her to approach all the charitable work she does in a new light. She now sees the voluntary and charitable work as a God-sent medium through which she may affect others in a positive way, also bringing Islam to them. She says, "Allah has a purpose for everyone. There are people who object to my involvement with Zonta. They say, 'Why this?' It's this elite, Jewish organization. But I say if we focus on the charitable work we do, and we do a lot of it, what difference does it make that the organization is Jewish?" Najma does not get sidetracked by comments and critiques that reduce the importance of her efforts by describing them as elitist activity. She argues that her participation in elite organizations is an expression of her position and status in society, and that she has been given those by God to serve Him and the community in which she lives. She says, "The world in the Quran class is so comfortable, so cushy, we forget that there are people outside who may never come to the class, but who may still need to hear. So, I use Zonta as an avenue to find these people, and take my *da`wa* beyond its confines. And so in all of Zonta's work, I put in a bit of Islam. This is where I am a new person, tweaking the old job." Thus, she has no problems with being involved with a group that is not necessarily Islamic, even as she constantly brings to this work her own Islamic touch.

Najma identifies the ways in which she turns her work in Zonta into *da`wa*. She says, "In all my speeches, I start with a little *hadith*, and find ways to talk about God at all Zonta gatherings. I have introduced Arabic instruction and lectures on Islam in the free school for poor children which we run in Badda [a poor neighborhood in Dhaka]. In fact I have also gone and spoken to the children about Islam in Ramadan." Unlike Community Action whose "moral bent" restrains its members from engaging in acts that are religiously controversial (such as the observance of Valentine's Day), Najma does not object to or keep away from Zonta's various fund-raising initiatives that involve events such as concerts, fashion shows, or balls, all of which Islamists speak against. She says, "I am aware of the controversy, and I don't necessarily agree with fashion shows and balls. But what we are trying to do is serve particular purposes, where I see myself leaving an Islamic mark too. But there are some things in which my hands are tied. Fund-raising is like that. People don't want to just give without an event. So I say, 'Ok I'll take it up with Allah later.'"

[23] Zonta International, founded in 1919 in the United States, is an organization of women executives and professionals who work together to advance the status of women by supporting a range of development areas such as education and healthcare. Zonta exists in 64 countries and has had a presence in Bangladesh for nearly three decades. While "Zontians" argue that they do much good work, critics see Zonta as an affluent women's pastime whose the achievements do not meet the potential that the Bangladeshi women's collective wealth and connections offer.

Seeing and transforming one's work in organizations such as Zonta into *da`wa* speaks to and furthers the flexibility of the stance on *da`wa* adopted by Community Action. Not only does it challenge the neat binary between the religious and the secular, it demonstrates that these women are overturning those binaries and charting out particular *da`wa* trajectories strategically and based on the resources and constraints at hand. In this respect, *da`wa* fits within a view of the world where multiple faiths and modalities of living may co-exist. This view is not consistent with the position of the Islamists in Bangladesh who are known to have persecuted minority Hindus. The persecution also extended to communities such as the Ahmadiyyas, whose members consider themselves to be Muslims in spite of a certain Muslim belief that they are not. Emulating Pakistan, the past regime of BNP-Jama`at started a campaign against the Ahmadiyyas, stating that particular theological stances do not make them Muslims. The women from the learning circles do not speak with or about such outright hostility. In fact, in their work with corporations, the state, and international organizations such as Zonta, CA members demonstrate their willingness to cooperate with groups and organizations that are not necessarily even Muslim. This cooperation is a strategic one where the women are even willing to play down their proselytizing rhetoric for the sake of making use of resources at hand and cultivating cultural pride and nationalism.

In learning, sharing, and building strategic alliances, women are much more conservative with regard to the family. Thus, inter-faith marriage is an institution that is heavily policed, where proselytizing realizes its goal of conversion. The ruling is that Muslims may marry from amongst the *Ahl-e-kitab* (People of the Book), which leaves out Hindus and Buddhists unless they convert. While a Muslim man marrying a Christian or Jewish woman does not demand the latter's conversion, a Muslim woman cannot marry any non-Muslim unless he converts. During my time in the learning circles, I came across several inter-faith marriages. There was the example of Tahera's daughter, who was marrying an Italian Catholic man. Tahera's family insisted that he convert. The daughter and the Italian man did not feel that conversion was necessary, a stance that made Tahera and her family extremely uncomfortable. Finally, after much tension and discussion with the preacher, Tahera decided that it would be wrong of her to endorse the marriage. The couple got married without Tahera's approval or attendance. The home thus becomes a place where ideas about pluralism, which are overtly or strategically strengthened in the public space, are constricted. The vision of creating a productive society for a new kind of nation is grounded in the belief that Muslim families will create efficient, cooperative, and ethical communities through sharing and learning, and even collaborating. The idea that a similar society can be created without the kind of religio-ethical basis that is rooted in Muslim families is not encouraged.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that women's proselytizing efforts in Bangladesh have religiously appropriated ideas about "secularism," thereby problematizing the religion/secular binary. Many Islamic voices present themselves as having the

potential to also—if not better—participate in nation-building than their secularist counterparts. The arrival of many new Islamic voices on the cultural-political terrain with new visions and mobilizing strategies poses a challenge to insisting on the kind of "old" secularism that would keep religion out of public activity and politics. However, before we rethink secularism and how it may be framed in the constitution to best reflect the aspirations of the people and the modernization of the nation, we need to better understand the different Islamic voices—openly, critically, and self-reflexively. This chapter provides some seeds for this investigation by presenting a particular kind of Islamic voice and exploring its entry into Bangladeshi public space—an entry that uses a modern approach, all the while considered by many as *da`wa* and thus a form of worship. Thinking through current impasses on secularism as an ideal can only be achieved once we move away from the fixity that accompanies normative notions of secularism and focus instead on the elements that are important to the creation of a plural, tolerant and progressive polity; looking at how religious (Muslim and non-Muslim) voices frame these elements will be a crucial part of this broader project. With regard to the Islamic voices, there will be overlaps in different groups' messaging. However, a careful analysis of overlaps and differences is important in exploring how secularism may evolve. The question to ask then is: just because there may be a common set of discursive assumptions among religious actors, does that guarantee similar political outcomes? Or, to quote Mahmood, "Could one be politically opposed and still share a set of epistemological and conceptual truths?"[24] What would this mean for the process of writing a nation's political and cultural fate? More specifically, how, in this authorial process, is tolerance and multiplicity defined and narrated? Who has the final word, and how does this finality emerge from a discussion and debate?

As I have demonstrated in this chapter, a greater understanding of proselytizing offers ways to think through the Islamic voices that are out there and their efforts to create moral, productive societies, and then to critically consider how these demands speak to impasses surrounding the "crisis" of secularism. The examples of "non-aligned" discussion groups highlight the developmentalist approach that engages men and women in the construction of a plural, democratic society. However, the plea for nation-building also has to be understood through its articulations in the private worlds of the individual, which in this case are framed almost exclusively by Muslim ways and ethics. Thus, the ideal nation becomes a productive, plural one where Muslim families remain Muslim. Recent reports from the Middle East, especially in the aftermath of the Arab Spring show that public Islam, even as it is practiced by Islamists such as the Muslim Brothers and the Salafis, is changing in tone to become a part of the reformed political sphere. The women's initiatives I describe thus appear to be a part of a larger project of change sweeping over other Islamic movements today. The modalities of *da`wa* as a means of making piety public remain important windows to gauging the possible directions and outcomes of that change. How claims to secularism will pan out in the long run will, however, have to be assessed in light of not only how certain Islams may negotiate power around matters of the state should they come to occupy positions of authority, but also how

[24] Mahmood, "Secular Imperatives," 2.

"Islams" converge and diverge and how they are made to shape the private sphere in ways that may test the limits of pluralism that proselytizing in the public space is framed to transcend.

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Chapter 6
Proselytizing, Peacework, and Public Relations: Soka Gakkai's Commitment to Interreligious Harmony in Singapore

Juliana Finucane

> *When deluded, one is called an ordinary being, but when enlightened, one is called a Buddha. This is similar to a tarnished mirror that will shine like a jewel when polished. A mind now clouded by the illusions of the innate darkness of life is like a tarnished mirror, but when polished, it is sure to become like a clear mirror, reflecting the essential nature of phenomena and the true aspect of reality. Arouse deep faith, and diligently polish your mirror day and night. How should you polish it? Only by chanting Namu Myoho Renge Kyo.*
>
> Nichiren, "On Attaining Perfect Buddhahood," c.1256

> *The darkness of our world today, lacking a sound philosophy of life, is indeed deep. Our enthusiastic voices, sharing the great philosophy of the Daishonin's Buddhism spread golden waves of hope and revitalization throughout society.*
>
> Daisaku Ikeda in Daibyakurenge, February 2010

In December 2010, the new Buddhist religious group, the Singapore Soka Association (SSA) sent representatives to an interfaith gala dinner sponsored by the Inter-Religious Organisation and held at the Singapore Expo. The Inter-Religious Organisation (IRO) planned this first-of-its-kind event in order to "enhance mutual understanding" in light of recent highly public interreligious tensions, such as the disparaging comments made by pastors Rony Tan and Mark Ng about Taoism made public earlier in the year.[1] The IRO hosted more than 2,000 attendees, including Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong himself.

[1] See Daniel Goh's chapter for further context about these interreligious tensions in Singapore.

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The story announcing this dinner was carried in the national broadsheet, *The Straits Times*, yet this was not where I first heard about the event. I was told the news by a member of the Singapore Soka Association during a walk to promote environmental awareness at West Coast Park. Longtime member Gek Noi was excited when she told me, and indeed, for SSA members, their inclusion in an IRO event is big news. The Inter-Religious Organisation consists of representatives from Singapore's major religions and is designed to promote peace through dialogue and mutual understanding across religious borders. The organization sends representatives from each major world religion to offer invocations at a great number of public events, including many state-sponsored events like the annual Racial Harmony Day dinner. [2] The stated goals of the IRO are drawn from the Singapore Declaration on Religious Harmony, issued in 2003. The Singapore Soka Association also embraces these same goals. Indeed, in the foyer of its Tampines headquarters, the group has prominently displayed the same declaration. And while SSA remains committed to the promotion of interreligious harmony in Singapore, the group has as yet failed to receive sufficient support from the IRO's Buddhist membership to join. Gek Noi said to me, "We would have a better chance if Muslims could support our application!" And though she was joking, there was an element of truth in what she said, as SSA has sustained strong relationships with many Muslims groups in Singapore. Not accidentally, Muslims constitute the only religious group that SSA members adamantly refuse to proselytize.

This chapter explores the Singapore Soka Association's efforts to promote interreligious harmony in Singapore in light of the group's broader project of propagating its faith. Though members no longer aggressively proselytize, this chapter argues that proselytizing is still a central practice. Instead of browbeating people by criticizing other religions, members instead embrace a "both/and" approach to proselytizing, in which they embrace pluralist values about religious tolerance while gently encouraging the conversion of others. Soka Gakkai members have seized on the circulatory power of values like "global citizenship" and "religious pluralism" as desirable global values, and have enthusiastically embraced a host of putatively universal humanist values about difference, while at the same time gently using these values as powerful tools for converting others in local contexts.[3] Members have further embraced the state's definition of the proper social location of religion, even as they push back against these boundaries by redefining national values in a

[2]On its website, the Inter-Religious Organisation lists the major world religions in order of how ancient each is. This is also the order in which representatives offer invocations at public events. These religions, in the order in which the IRO lists them, are: Hinduism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Taoism, Jainism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, and Baha'i Faith, http://www.iro.org.sg/website/home.html.

[3]The chapter in this volume by Rodney Sebastian, in particular, also points to this dynamic whereby the global is harnessed in local context to legitimize and thereby authorize the activities of actors in local contexts.

Buddhist light.[4] The group's simultaneous embrace of these global, national and local values *without contradiction* and its specific understanding of "dialogue" with non-members in a local context suggest both the possibilities and limits of existing models of proselytizing and religious pluralism. As Michael Feener has argued, any discussion of proselytizing and pluralism is driven by a similar tension, as the practice of proselytizing assumes—indeed, requires—a situation of diversity, while at the same time seeking to overcome it. In other words, it is, as Farish Noor has claimed in his contribution to this volume (Chap. 4), the frontier that *must* exist, but can never be reached.

I describe Singapore Soka Association's activities as "proselytizing," even though members themselves prefer to use words like "propagation" and "sharing." I follow legal scholar Tad Stahnke's definition of proselytizing as "expressive conduct taken with the purpose of trying to change the religious beliefs, affiliation, or identity of another" (Stahnke 1999). While proselytizing in many contexts has negative connotations (and surely these negative connotations are a reason SSA members avoid the term), Stahnke's definition attempts to define it more neutrally. The definition does not determine, in advance of empirical evidence, whether the proselytizing is "proper" or "improper." And the definition further emphasizes that proselytizing is "intentional conduct, undertaken with a particular goal in mind," which is true in the case of SSA. In following Stahnke's definition, I align myself with others who have similarly emphasized the *goals* of proselytizing rather than its *outcomes*, including (Chaps. 2 and 11) Melissa Crouch, Neena Mahadev, and other chapters in this volume.

Seeking out avenues for propagation is increasingly urgent for minority religious groups like SSA that struggle to make a place for themselves in the ever more crowded public religious spaces of global, multireligious cities like Singapore. As Hackett has argued, "The right to disseminate one's religion easily surpasses the freedom to believe and to practice one's religion as the most controversial aspect of religious freedom" (Hackett 2006). For SSA, proselytizing is a significant avenue by which members "go public" in urban Singapore and seek to cultivate positive public opinions about their group. As Patsy Rahn has argued about the activities of Falun Gong, the goal of proselytizing is often as much about encouraging the conversion of others as it is about changing public opinion of the group from negative to positive (Rahn 2008).

The SSA's commitment to interreligious harmony serves not only as a way of allowing it entry into Singapore's crowded public religious sphere, but also as a

[4]Francesca Tarocco's study in this volume (Chap. 12) also discusses the careful negotiation that one religious group—in this case, Chinese Buddhists—must undertake vis-à-vis the state's careful delimitation of the proper borders for religious groups. The Buddhists considered by Tarocco accept the limits to their activities imposed by the government, while at the same time gently attempting to redefine "religion" in a way that expands their appropriate realm of operations.

platform for individuals to re-understand their own religious beliefs. Engaging in outreach and "dialogue" with non-members highlights the reality that "conversion" for practitioners is not an experience that either practically or rhetorically mimics the paradigmatic Christian conversion experience of Paul on the road to Damascus. Instead, conversion involves a gradual reshaping of the backdrop against which choices are evaluated as being "rational" or "making sense." Members have seized upon "dialogue" as a descriptor of their means of engaging the world, with interreligious engagement as a significant platform for actualizing this dialogue. The example of Singapore Soka Association thus demonstrates that proselytizing blurs the lines that theory about secular democracy has drawn between tolerance and intolerance, public and private, and individual and collective action. Or, as Hackett has put it, proselytizing is "the thorn in the flesh of the secular state" (Hackett 2008).

Soka Gakkai and Interreligious Dialogue

Singapore Soka Association is a branch of Soka Gakkai International, a group that claims 12 million members in more than 190 countries and territories. Soka Gakkai, or the "Value-Creation Society," is a Buddhist movement founded in 1930s Japan. Formerly affiliated with the priestly Nichiren Shoshu sect in Japan, the group was excommunicated in 1991 and is currently a lay organization. The various national groups are taken care of by the international organization, which is an NGO recognized by the United Nations. Local groups are given enough flexibility to accommodate their own specific contexts, which they've done with great success. Soka Gakkai has its roots in the thirteenth century Japanese Buddhist saint and prophet Nichiren, who is known both for his anti-hierarchical claims that all people regardless of social status were equally able to achieve enlightenment, as well as his fierce intolerance of those who disagreed with him. Nichiren stressed that any person can become a Buddha through her/his own effort, if you "polish your mirror day and night," as he suggests in the epigraph to this article. But how does a person accomplish this clarity? "Only by chanting *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*" (underlining mine). This quote is often cited by members and points to the group's twofold main message. First, members are oriented toward promoting world peace and interreligious harmony through creating an inclusive global community of believers. And second, members claim the *only* way to achieve enlightenment—and, as a corollary, global peace—is through chanting the name of the Lotus Sutra, *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*.

Nichiren also pioneered a type of aggressive religious proselytizing known as *shakubuku*, or "break and subdue," which he saw as a compassionate way to enrich a morally impoverished public with his own Buddhist values. In its early years, Soka Gakkai was similarly confrontational in its attempts at "value-creation," especially in response to Japan's growing militarism. The group courted public controversy both because of its embrace of *shakubuku* proselytizing tactics and its public incursions into politics. In recent years, much of the group's global success

has resulted from distancing itself from its controversial past. Soka Gakkai has cultivated a global following in two ways. First, it has self-consciously adopted an ethos of global liberal pluralism that Richard Hughes Seager has referred to as "Buddhist humanism" (Seager 2006). And second, it has accommodated itself to various local and national settings. This "both/and" aspect of the group's globalization is mirrored in the way it describes its relationships with non-members in Singapore. While the Japanese-language word *shakubuku* continues to be widely used—both as a noun and as a verb—to describe the group's outreach activities, I have never heard anyone using its English-language correlate, "proselytizing." Instead members will describe their activities as outreach, education, "planting the seed," or propagation.

As Seager argues, a significant aspect of the group's harnessing of the global in local contexts is its embrace of global values about humanism, or what George Thomas has described in other contexts as "world cultural principles" (Thomas 2001). As Paul Freston has argued, a worldview governed by these principles is "inherently hostile to proselytizing [because] it depicts one religion as truer than all others" (Freston 2008). As such, Soka Gakkai members are careful to avoid activities that seem proselytic, with an eye not only to various legal and constitutional regulations, but also to these evolving global values. Rather than "proselytizing," Soka Gakkai members engage adherents of other religions via "dialogue." As part of their efforts to cultivate global citizenship and still lay claim to an exclusive religious truth, members have redefined proselytizing as a type of "dialogue" with others, and have placed themselves at the center of what it means to be "global."

In a Soka Gakkai worldview, members' use of dialogue operates simultaneously as a tool for proselytizing and for the promotion of peace. Members describe many types of communication and outreach as types of "dialogue" through which people come together freely, share thoughts openly, and through the process of conversation itself work out what each thinks. In this capacity, dialogue is understood as the foundation for peace, fellowship, and the promotion of global citizenship, and this is how members commonly describe it. Underpinning the impulse to engage in dialogue is the assumption that dialogue is itself a positive good, contingent on a spirit of openness to others. Dialogue is one answer—and the answer Soka Gakkai offers—to the question of how we can hold religious beliefs deeply and still get along with others. Soka Gakkai is not alone in offering this answer, as many scholars have argued for the importance of dialogue as a way to take difference seriously while still embracing democratic and secular values in an increasingly globalized world.[5] Craig Calhoun, for one, has argued that effective public discourse is "in and of itself a form of solidarity" (Calhoun 2002).

Theories about religious pluralism also rely on assumptions about the central importance of free and open-ended public deliberation. Diana Eck, for example, describes pluralism—in this case American pluralism—as the promise to "come as you are, with all your differences, pledg[ing] only to the common civic demands of

[5]For example, see Niebuhr (2008), Bellah (1985), Nussbaum (2002), Taylor (1994), Gutmann (1994) and Appiah (2005).

citizenship. In other words, come and be yourselves" (Eck 2002). In this understanding, pluralism is an active project shaped by the encounter of and true engagement among many different religious groups. Diana Eck describes dialogue as "a two-way discourse that is essential to relationship, not domination. One might call it mutual witness… It is the language of mutuality, not of power" (Eck 1993). Eck's model articulates a way to use dialogue to respect difference by forging as many spaces as possible for communication, while never incorporating "others" into our "we." Yet underlying this respect for difference is an assumption that before participants can be seated at the table of pluralist discourse, they must agree to certain preconditions about civility and openness in service of the greater good of social harmony. Eck carves out a space for creating a greater sense of collectivity—what others might refer to as global civil society marked by George Thomas's "world cultural principles"—which would be "the crucial stage to which our interreligious dialogue must take us if we are to be up to the task of creating communication adequate for our interdependent world."[6] Yet we do not receive from Eck further guidance about the creation of this language of transnational cooperation and mutuality, and she sidesteps questions both about unequal power and about how to create a language that would be open to all.

Global Citizenship

In a public sense, Singapore Soka Association is sincere in its work towards promoting these humanistic values of global citizenship. The group's president and mentor Daisaku Ikeda—affectionately known as "Sensei" among members—has codified this package of humanist values under the broader category of "global citizenship," in which one's cultivation of Buddhist values is coterminous with becoming a good national citizen *and* a humanistic global citizen. Ikeda himself has served as the embodiment of this model of global citizenship, as he has engaged in interfaith and intercultural "dialogues" with many prominent figures throughout the world, from Wangari Maathai and Majid Tehranian, to Nelson Mandela and Linus Pauling, among many others. These conversations form the basis for one of the most commonly read type of book among members—and, with their professionally designed covers and high quality printing, certainly the nicest looking. On the one hand, the format seems uniquely suited for Ikeda's contemporary message of openness, religious pluralism, and world peace in the global era. At the same time, it is a format well worn by Nichiren, though retooled for the global era. Almost all of Nichiren's major writings took the form of dialogues between a protagonist who adopts Nichiren's position and an imagined adversary who is slowly won over. Dialogues are printed and disseminated among members in a way that promotes an impression of Ikeda not only as a conversation

[6]Ibid., 203.

partner with scholars, public figures, and activists, but also as a person centrally engaged in a global dialogue about the meaning and importance of a set of urgently needed global values.

These global values have Soka Gakkai counterparts, and members often talk of global humanistic values loosely, using phrases like human revolution, global value creation, and *kosen rufu* interchangeably.[7] Daisaku Ikeda defines the values of a global citizen in a sufficiently broad way so as to include non-members as well. In a lecture at Teacher's College of Columbia University, Ikeda claimed that global citizens share three main characteristics. First, global citizens share "the **wisdom** to perceive the interconnectedness of all life and living." Global citizens also have "the **courage** not to fear or deny difference," and instead foster mutual respect and understanding among all peoples. Finally, global citizens have, "The **compassion** to maintain an imaginative empathy that reaches beyond one's immediate surroundings and extends to those suffering in distant places" (boldface in original).[8]

In his address to the first graduating class of Soka University of America in 2005, Ikeda enumerated the qualities of a global citizen slightly differently, though in an equally open-ended fashion (Ikeda 2006). First, global citizens have a respect and reverence for life. They respect cultural difference, develop the capacity to respect other cultures, and share "the spirit of working for the common people, sharing their joys and sorrows."[9] They promote democracy, a point that Ikeda elucidated with references to John Dewey and Walt Whitman, before defining it more plainly as "a way of life whose purpose is to enable people to achieve spiritual autonomy, live in mutual respect and enjoy happiness."[10] Finally, global citizens share the spirit of mentor and disciple.

Ikeda frames global citizenship not as a religious pursuit but rather as a universal one, applicable to all people who strive to make the world a more harmonious and peaceful place, even as he is continually articulating these values in a language that deeply resonates with a Soka Gakkai moral worldview. In his address to the Soka University of America graduates, he stresses the importance of the relationship of mutual trust that should exist between teachers and students, but refers to this relationship using the language of "mentor and disciple," a language that even a casual member recognizes as a cornerstone of Soka Gakkai philosophy. Ikeda then stresses that, "Soka education does not purport to teach any religious doctrine," because it is rather based on "a solid and, I believe, universal worldview."[11] After claiming universality for this value, he then subtly shifts back to reasserting a familiar Buddhist image, as he explains that, "Just as a diamond can only be polished by another diamond, it is only through intense human interaction engaging the entire personality

[7] The term *kosen rufu* articulates the ideal of working together to move towards an age of peace and harmony through spreading the teachings of Nichiren about chanting the Lotus Sutra.

[8] *Seikyo Shimbun*, June 16, 1996, 2.

[9] Ibid., 137.

[10] Ibid., 139.

[11] Ibid., 140.

that people can forge themselves, raising themselves up to ever greater heights. It is the relationship between teacher and learner, between mentor and disciple, that makes this possible."[12] Careful listeners will pick up on the reference to the enlightened state of Buddhahood. Elsewhere, Ikeda is clearer about the significance of the diamond imagery: "It is by forging our lives under the intense pressure of difficulties and in the severe heat of hardships that we develop and crystallize, like a diamond, the steadfast *ichinen* or 'self' of Buddhahood in the depths of our lives. By experiencing hardships, our body and mind become indestructible entities of the Buddha… On the other hand, if ours is a safe and easy practice that is free from any real hardship, we will be unable to truly polish our lives. It is only by overcoming great hardships, by persevering in the midst of intense heat and pressure, that we can become 'kings of life' just as a diamond is the king of jewels" (Ikeda 1989). Ikeda then goes on to claim that embracing the *gohonzon* is the only way to polish the diamond of Buddhahood such that all people can "cultivate lives of indestructible brilliance and create a diamond crystal of happiness within yourselves, with your hearts beautiful and radiant."

Global Religion in a Local Context

Ikeda's equation of Soka Gakkai's values with universal values has been internalized by Singaporean members, as well, many of whom see their values as not uniquely Buddhist, but rather universally applicable. A longtime member in her mid-40s described celebrating the Chinese New Year with her students in the kindergarten where she used to teach: "We have this custom where we give these *ang pao*, um, little red packages to the children," she said. She wrote the Chinese characters in my notebook. "You usually put money in them, hmm, or chocolates sometimes, these kinds of things. But for my students, I also put guidances from Sensei [Ikeda], you know, without putting his name on them." I asked if she worried that distributing the words of a religious leader might violate norms about religious propagation in public places. "No, not at all. Because I didn't put Sensei's name on them, so they're not religious like that. The guidances themselves can be helpful for anyone, doesn't matter who you are."

In Singapore, masking the religious roots of such guidances is not merely a personal preference, but additionally is a matter of law, and members tend to see most of their public activities in secular Singapore as *cultural* rather than *religious*. In many ways, this dynamic is similar to Yiguan Dao's public identification of itself as not a religious group in Singapore, as Francis Lim argues in this volume (Chap. 9). The first adherents of Soka Gakkai in Singapore came in the mid- to late-1960s in the form of Japanese businessmen and investors who met to chant and study together in private homes. In 1972, the group of 100 members registered with the Registrar of

[12] Ibid.

Societies as the Singapore Nichiren Shoshū Association. The group's registration was followed by an intense *shakubuku* effort, resulting in a membership of more than 10,000 by 1980.[13] By the early 1980s, the group had already begun participating in patriotic festivals, including the National Day celebrations. By 1987, Soka Gakkai adherents were a highly visible presence at the celebrations, supplying around 2,000 volunteers to take part in a torch-lighting ceremony closing the celebrations, and an additional 200 volunteers to help train and organize participants in other ceremonies. In recent years, SSA has averaged more than a 1,000 volunteers and performers in each parade, usually contributing one or more of the event's many "cultural performances." This widely advertised and televised event continues to be one of Singapore Soka Association's most high-profile incursions into Singaporean public space, and one of the major feathers in its public relations cap.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Soka Gakkai began to attract a broader audience in Singapore, increasingly appealing to ethnic Chinese, especially young people and middle-aged women (Metraux 2001). Today the group claims around 30,000 members. Similar to local branches elsewhere, the vast majority of Singapore Soka Association's activities take place in private homes around the city, where citizens' private activities are only loosely monitored. In addition to this vast network of private homes, the group also boasts seven centers and a kindergarten, and is currently seeking to acquire land to build a multistory headquarters modeled after the Wisma Kebudayaan Soka headquarters in Kuala Lumpur.

As noted above, in addition to embracing global cultural values, Singapore Soka Association also must reckon with a state that aggressively maintains religious harmony. The government establishes the terrain on which religious groups operate, both through establishing limits to permissible activities and speech among religious adherents, as well as through defining "religion" itself.[14] Singapore's rapid industrialization, modernization, and economic development over the past 30 years has had profound effects on the social, cultural, and religious life of this global city-state, largely because of direct state management of these "non-state" realms. The social space slotted for religion in Singapore is precise, and thus the possibilities for a religious group engaging in public outreach or proselytizing, which necessarily implies exploring the boundaries of that space, are strictly circumscribed.

As a multireligious, multiethnic country, Singapore aggressively maintains harmony among the disparate groups within its borders. The ruling People's Action Party (PAP) in Singapore has promoted a variable policy regarding both multiculturalism and religious difference over the years since independence. The PAP initially promoted a policy of secularization in which both religious and ethnic identities were

[13] Tong (2008, 142). While I agree with Tong that membership numbers are somewhat unreliable because we must count on the group's self-reporting, I do not similarly agree with that this imprecision results from the group's being "weary of outsiders," as I found both leaders and ordinary members consistently open and accommodating.

[14] See Michael Feener's chapter for a more comprehensive discussion of the various ways in which states establish limits and manage religious difference in Asia broadly and Southeast Asia in particular.

secondary to the interest of promoting national unity. The PAP focused on creating a meritocratic and "ethnically undifferentiated citizenship" (Hefner 2001). As the leaders of a reluctantly independent nation with scant natural resources, the PAP attempted to mobilize the population under what Chua Beng Huat has described as an "ideology of survival" (Chua 2002). This emphasis that the nation was in crisis both allowed the government to create a coherent understanding of "nation," as well as to justify the many policy decisions on the part of a state that was increasingly restricting personal liberties. The logic of the PAP at this time was understood and embraced by the general population, who rallied communally to deal with the hardships of becoming an independent nation.

During this time, religion was encouraged as long as it promoted national goals and did not seek to participate in political debate. Widespread coverage of religion in the nationally-run Singapore *Straits Times* newspaper demonstrates the strong hold the government had—and continues to have—on public narratives about religion, as stories about religion's role in promoting social harmony significantly outnumber stories about religious conflict.[15] Those marginal groups that were considered to threaten social stability through aggressive or misleading proselytizing were immediately labeled "cults" or worse, and criticized in the newspaper.[16]

Throughout the 1970s, however, Singaporeans grew increasingly wealthy and the "ideology of survival" no longer made as much sense as a strategy of legitimation on the part of the government, which instead shifted to promoting communal values. In 1979, it introduced a government program into schools in order to teach "religious knowledge" and moral values, which would ostensibly cultivate values of good citizenship in students. An unexpected result of introducing the Religious Knowledge curricula in the schools was the mobilization of some religious groups, including Muslim and Christian minorities, against what they perceived as an alliance between the state and the majority population. Instead of promoting greater communal harmony, the Religious Knowledge program "did not so much provide an antidote to Western individualism as bring religious difference back into the public square."[17]

By the late 1980s, the government backpedaled on the Religious Knowledge program, acknowledging that it had not only contributed to conflicts among students in schools, but might also have more detrimental effects for interreligious and

[15] Articles in the *Straits Times* like the following are representative of this trend: "Religious Tolerance will Ensure our Survival," May 27, 1964; "Vital to keep up with each other's customs," August 28, 1988; "Religious harmony as a Reality," September 16, 1987; "Live and Let Pray," December 17, 1988; "Swami's plans for more friendly world," March 16, 1970; and "Help government promote stability, religious groups told," May 28, 1972.

[16] Articles in the *Straits Times* like the following are representative of this trend: "Beware the Subversives Trying to Use Religion as Tool: Othman," December 1, 1976; "Moonies Banned: 'Movement Prejudicial to Public Welfare and Good Order'," April 3, 1982; "Call to Watch Out for False Prophets," June 4, 1985; "Look Out for Conman with 'Holy Ash'," February 8, 1985; and "The Curse of the Cults: At Least 15 S'poreans Lured into Cults While Studying or Holidaying Abroad."

[17] Hefner, "Introduction," 39.

interethnic harmony in the long term. Instead, it more clearly articulated a public policy for delineating and "registering" religious groups. The government exercised tighter control over voluntary associations, making it illegal to convene publicly unless a group first registered with the state and giving the state final authority to deny a group registration for any reason. For example, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness has yet to be recognized by the state as a legitimate religious group, though a number of practitioners of Krishna Consciousness do live in Singapore.[18] Shortly after the PAP phased out the Religious Knowledge program, it introduced in 1990 the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Bill, which prohibited religious leaders from commenting on social and political issues (Clammer 1998). A year after the passage of the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Bill, the state issued the Shared Values White Paper, which more clearly articulated a set of national shared values that included interreligious harmony and service to the state.[19]

Dialogue as Exchange? Or Dialogue as Proselytizing?

Singapore Soka Association members have navigated this complicated sociopolitical landscape with skill, and unlike members of some other new religious and minority movements, tend to see themselves as enjoying a great deal of religious freedom to propagate their religion. Perhaps one of the greatest reasons that SSA members see themselves as having a great deal of religious freedom is that their group has operated largely free of public and government suspicion as a result of their carefully cultivated public image and their close relationship with the government. SSA does not challenge national goals, but rather has long led the way in celebrating them, and this embrace has been one of the group's main ways of making incursions into the public realm. For example, in spite of the government's diligent efforts to resist religious favoritism, the Soka Gakkai is the *only* religious group that participates in the National Day Parade. SSA has also participated in the Chingay Chinese New Year celebrations, Racial Harmony Month walks, charity road races, interfaith colloquia, and many other government-sponsored events. Lim Ah Yook, Assistant Director in the Lifeskills and Lifestyles Division of the government-run People's Association, has worked with SSA on many events since the mid-1980s and said that one reason the government is so fond of SSA is the group's willingness to take on tasks with energy and good cheer, and thus serve as

[18] Adherents have gotten around these restrictions by forming another group called the Krishna Mandir.

[19] The Shared Values White Paper outlined five basic values that while not tagged as Confucian, were deeply influenced by it, as Hill and Lian argue. These values include nation before community and society before the self, the primacy of the family as the basic unit of society, "regard and community support for the individual," consensus over difference, and racial and religious harmony (Hill and Lian 1995).

a "shining example" to other Singaporeans.[20] "I know I can call them with any opportunity and they will do a better job with higher spirits than anyone else," she said. Tay Boon Khai, the Singaporean Army colonel in charge of organizing the National Day Parade in 2008, put it more bluntly: "They just have an amazing ability to organize huge groups of people."

SSA's embrace of national values is borne out in the news coverage of the group, which has been largely either neutral or favorable. Unlike more photogenic groups whose rituals and festivals lend themselves to colorful news stories, Singapore Soka Association has relied on its participation in public events to garner its coverage by the press including through its recent participation in the inaugural Youth Olympic Games. It has also received positive press for visits made by government officials to the centers. For example, Prime Minister Goh helped SSA inaugurate its new headquarters in 1993, and President Nathan has also visited. The Youth Division was awarded the Singapore Youth Award for Community and Youth Services in 2005. Furthermore, educational initiatives at the group's kindergarten at Tampines have also received complimentary media coverage.

Yet while the group enthusiastically promotes interreligious harmony via these types of civic events and refuses to engage in outwardly proselytic activities, its private and semi-private activities tell a more complicated story, not least because of the group's claims to a religious truth that is fundamentally exclusive. Though the group is sincere in its refusal to encourage the conversion of Muslims, and members rarely voice negative opinions about other religious groups in public, tensions with other religious groups exist. These tensions are often manifested when members talk about their own choices to convert. For many converts, to be Buddhist does not represent a significant break with an existing religious milieu. While SSA practices are markedly different from the dominant type of Chinese Buddhist/Taoist religious traditions that many Singaporeans have grown up with, some of the language is familiar across these traditions, including concepts such as enlightenment, karma, and Buddha nature.[21] SSA members tend to look at these traditional Chinese practices as the counterpoint to what they describe as the more *rational* aspects of Soka Gakkai that had initially attracted them.[22] Tong argues

[20] The People's Association is a vast network of community organizations intended to bring citizens' concerns to the government, and communicate governmental messages to citizens. According to the state-run organization's website, the People's Association "brings people together to take ownership of and contribute to community well-being. We connect the people and the government for consultation and feedback. We leverage on these relationships to strengthen racial harmony and social cohesion, to ensure a united and resilient Singapore," http://www.pa.gov.sg.

[21] Fifty-one percent of Chinese Singaporeans are Buddhist or Taoist, and sometimes the line between these two religions is quite fluid. Thus, "Chinese religiosity" in Singapore often refers collectively to both traditions, along with Confucianism, ancestor worship, and folk religion. As Tham observes, "Chinese attitude to religion is quite ambiguous." (Tham 2008). Yet Tong's research demonstrates that as part of the "process of rationalization" in Singapore, greater differentiation between Buddhism and Taoism is currently underway (Tong 2007).

[22] Daniel Goh similarly notes the ambivalence with which many Singaporean Chinese approach the more "superstitious" or "magical" Chinese folk practices.

that the draw of "rational" religion underlies a broader social trend in Singapore of conversion away from traditional Chinese religions. For Tong, the "rationalization" of religion signals a

> shift in orientation and a 'search for a meaning system' where the informants find a greater isomorphic fit to their worldview. They move from religious systems that emphasize the idea of magic to one which they regard as a systematization of ideas and ethical images of the world, a search for meaning rather than unconditional acceptance of traditional beliefs.[23]

Though there exists a strain of members who understand the workings of the Lotus Sutra as more "magical," members tend to confirm Tong's observation in the sense that they understand *why* they chant the *daimoku* and see their own actions as able to directly change their karma, even as *how* the Lotus Sutra specifically works in their lives retains a significant element of mystery. For example, a small group of members was recently invited to celebrate Vesak Day at the Tibetan Buddhist center in Geylang. As they narrated the visit to me, their story was punctuated by baffled laughter about the ritual practices and comments like, "I have no idea what it meant."

In general, though, this criticism is mostly muted, only slightly keener than some of the dismissive comments I have heard about evangelical Christianity. Because religious diversity in Singapore is inextricably bound up with racial diversity, assessing why members feel comfortable being critical of some "others" and not other "others" is complicated. Observationally, I noticed that Chinese members were generally unwilling to make negative or critical comments about Muslims or Hindus, which are traditions in Singapore that are neatly aligned with ethnic categories of Malays and Indians, respectively.[24] They were more willing to offer less charitable reflections on Singaporean Christianity, especially evangelical Christianity, which is predominantly ethnically Chinese. But they were most willing to be critical of Buddhism and other traditional Chinese religions, which is simultaneously ethnically Chinese and share a similar religious lineage. The vast majority of SSA's converts are drawn from this pool.

Members reserve a special animosity, however, for those members of the orthodox priesthood who excommunicated the lay Soka Gakkai in 1991. Singapore Soka Association members see these members of the orthodoxy as not only having chosen the *most* wrong path, but as having betrayed Soka Gakkai in the process. This animosity is not specific to Singapore, as President Ikeda retains some of Nichiren's combative spirit when he urges members to be wary of those who would slander the Lotus Sutra and persecute Soka Gakkai. As Nichiren saw his own persecution as evidence of the righteousness of his mission, Ikeda similarly sees Soka Gakkai's "persecution" by Nichirenist priests as evidence that the Lotus Sutra is unfolding in

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[23] Tong, *Rationalizing Religion*, 114–115.

[24] Tham notes that almost all Malays are Muslim, and two-thirds of Indians practice Hinduism (Tham 2008, 18). Hinduism is a notoriously slippery category even in Singapore where the government is heavily involved in outlining religious boundaries. Additionally, many newer guru-centered Hindu-based movements are increasingly appealing to ethnic Chinese, as suggested by Rodney Sebastian in his contribution to this volume in Chap. 8.

history. A central part of the preparation to receive the *gohonzon* in Singapore is that members must be comprehensively educated about the "priesthood issue." Being well versed in Soka Gakkai's version of the split is necessary both because a historical view of the organization is in general important for members, but also so that members can speak cogently about the issue to non-members and potential members.

This hostility remains palpable even though the Nichirenist contingent in Singapore is not a threat to SSA in any obvious material ways. Yet while Nichirenist orthodoxy in Singapore does not seem to be competing for membership or public attention, it still offers Singapore Soka Association members a potent, if somewhat imagined, counterpoint that expresses what they are *not*. SSA General Director Ong speaks of this difference often. "We have our own priest here," he said, referring to Reverend Yuhan Watanabe, the former Japanese Nichiren Shoshū priest who left the orthodoxy and joined SSA in 1995. Reverend Watanabe helped SSA open its first temple, a small room for chanting and rituals called An-Le, which is located at the Senja Culture Centre.[25] The original intent of the temple was for the "reformist priest" to lead chanting sessions and preside over rituals like weddings and funerals, though today the fact that the room is a temple seems rather more symbolic than functional.[26] "[W]hen [members] saw Reverend performing services, people started requesting that he do their weddings and other things too. Sort of, these old habits are hard to break. People see a priest doing rituals and think that makes the ritual better or more effective. But Reverend Watanabe is just an employee! Like I am an employee too. He's a priest, but I'm still his boss. [laughter]. So we started a roster system and now we just go in that order. Nobody can choose; you just get whoever is next on the list." Mr. Ong does not think it is inconsistent that his lay organization employs a priest in a priestly role because of the group's consummately "rational" interpretation of his role. "It's important for members to see that our priest is just like anyone else. They learn from seeing that there isn't anything Reverend does that regular members can't do as well. So it's like an educational experience for our members to see this." The only time I have seen Reverend Watanabe dressed in robes was in a video of a meeting in Japan.

The tense relationship between SSA and other Singaporean Buddhist groups bears out in its continued exclusion from the IRO. SSA has at least twice submitted applications to join the Inter-Religious Organisation, but has not yet received necessary support from other Buddhist groups who don't consider the group "Buddhist enough." The Education Director of SSA explained that, "People don't see us doing

[25] An-Le means "Temple of Peace and Happiness." It was first opened in the Tampines Soka Centre in 1997, and then moved to Senja in 2002.

[26] An SGI-USA website devoted to "Soka Spirit," or clarifying the priesthood issue, refers to this temple as a "so-called temple." Along with a small one in Ghana that opened after An-Le, only two such temples exist. Ted Morino, "What About…? What Are the Reformist Priests Doing?" Soka Gakkai International-USA, February 5, 1999, http://www.sokaspirit.org/resource/world-tribune/what-about…-what-are-the-reformist-priests-doing.

things that they understand as Buddhist, like celebrating Vesak Day.[27] Many of these groups, their members don't do much *other* than celebrate Vesak Day anyways, so what could we do as a part of the IRO that we cannot do already?" She pointed to the government's support of SSA's participation in the National Day Parade and Chingay as evidence that the group did not need the public legitimation that comes along with being a member of a "mainstream" and publicly recognizable religion as outlined in the Inter-Religious Organisation. I cannot help but note that the prospect of SSA becoming a member of the IRO highlights a cognitive disjuncture; while other member religious groups send their representatives in elaborate dress typical of their tradition to recite prayers, SSA has no parallel practice. The one time I saw General Director Ong participate in a similarly inspired event, he looked, in his ordinary street clothes and armed not with a prayer but with a "guidance" from president Ikeda, hopelessly out of place.

Redescribing Dialogue, Talking Conversion

The line between that which is "religious" and that which is merely cultural in this sense is something members cannot often articulate easily, as "culture" in this worldview has a religious value. Members are encouraged not only to see their own Soka Gakkai values as universally relevant, but further to see their own ordinary lives as permeated with a deeply religious sensibility. This impression is heightened by the circulation among members of Ikeda's "daily encouragements," which are short—often only a sentence or two—aphorisms intended to be inspirational and encouraging, both in practice and in daily life. These encouragements include, for example, "Knowing that to give up is to be defeated by oneself, continue single-mindedly to take small but significant steps in the shaping of your destiny," and "To the extent that we love others, we will be loved. To the extent that we work for others' happiness, we will enjoy protection and support. This is the law of cause and effect." The vast majority of these encouragements do not explicitly refer to Buddhism, yet for those members who have most completely internalized the Soka Gakkai ethos and moral worldview—or, in a Durkheimian sense, have most completely had the conscience collective stamped onto their selves—indications that these encouragements promote a Soka Gakkai moral worldview are everywhere.

For example, a non-member might not see anything particularly "religious" about defining the "law of cause and effect" in the way Ikeda does above. Yet many Soka Gakkai members do not hear "law of cause and effect" in a casual way, as the "law of cause and effect" is synonymous with the idea of karma, a central belief for

[27] Vesak Day is often referred to in shorthand as the Buddha's Birth Day, but more broadly refers to a celebration of many notable aspects of his life, including his birth, enlightenment, and death. In Singapore, Vesak Day is commemorated by chanting and meditation in temples, making offerings, engaging in acts of generosity such as almsgiving, and processing with robed monks through the streets by candlelight.

members who believe that karma can be changed and thus we are in control of our own causes and effects on a daily basis. Members use this Buddhist language to put forth a compelling reality that is suffused by a Soka Gakkai worldview. The infusion of Ikeda's language into everyday conversation among members and, especially, between members and non-members, suggests a way of imagining the world in which even everyday interactions can be understood according to a Soka Gakkai moral logic. In this deepest sense, attempts to understand Soka Gakkai as a merely confessional religion break down, as the moral logic of the group imbricates itself into individuals most effectively through permeating the everyday with words and creating a moral order—a worldview—that is experienced as real and irrefutable.

One measure of how effectively this worldview "stamps" itself onto a person in a Durkheimian sense is how naturally this language comes to so many members. For example, like Ikeda, members often talk about personal successes as "achieving victories," which were made possible by their "indomitable" or "undefeated" spirit. The language of victory and defeat in religion is not new in this Buddhist tradition, as Nichiren also framed his own many struggles in this language. Members constantly talk about doing things with sincerity and of being able to evaluate other people on the basis of their sincerity and earnestness. And members are constantly encouraged to participate in events with non-members and to be active participants in "sharing" about their own traditions in a non-aggressive way.

As a researcher and non-member "other," I saw firsthand this refusal to engage in outwardly proselytic activities, in spite of my initial worries that studying a group known for its past proselytizing would put me in some uncomfortable situations. Instead, only a small number have encouraged me to start chanting or have even asked me if I am a member. And when they have, their comments have been mostly lighthearted rather than exhortatory. "It's like eating chicken rice," one Singaporean member told me. "You can look at the chicken rice and see that it looks delicious. You can smell it, mmm, and it smells so good. You can see other people eating it and listen to them talk about it. But you will never really *know* the chicken rice until you taste it." We both laughed at his analogy, but he didn't pursue the subject.

Instead, members constantly engage me in a kind of "dialogue" that often involves their "sharing experiences" with me. One member described the significance to members of "sharing experiences" in the following way: "A lot of what we do is about planting the seed in others who have never heard of Soka or *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*" she said. "It doesn't matter if they start chanting today. Or tomorrow. Or the next day. But someday, maybe in a month or a year or 10 years, that person I told about *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo* will experience some sort of struggle or will need some sort of help. And then they will remember that I told them about *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*, and think, you know, maybe now I should try this." Planting the seed through "sharing experiences" serves two ends. First, it is an important way of encouraging others to convert. And second, "sharing experiences" is a central way members learn to understand their own lives in a Soka Gakkai interpretive framework in which even the smallest events can be understood as the workings of the Lotus Sutra. Through the act of repeatedly narrating their own stories to others, members learn to speak a particular shared Soka Gakkai language, thus solidifying their sense of membership in the community.

Members' dialogues are subjected to both direct and indirect disciplinary processes that shape them into intelligible and remarkably consistent narratives. The same experiences are shared so often that speakers learn—consciously or unconsciously—to adapt the telling to highlight those moments that will resonate most with listeners. Some members' experiences are also disciplined in more formal ways. For example, leaders have "practice" sessions to help members refine their narratives. At one such session before a large meeting in Tampines, a leader reminded one of her members to include a few guidances from Ikeda that she had found helpful. Interspersing one's own comments with comments from President Ikeda is another common way of disciplining individual experiences into exempla of a single universal experience of conversion and the subsequent reaffirmations of their faith. The more a person is incorporated into the group, the better she is at understanding all these experiences according to a Soka Gakkai Buddhist metalanguage.[28]

As members steep themselves in a Soka Gakkai worldview, they emulate discursive models they have become familiar with, while at the same time, making them their own. Susan Harding has described a similar process in her discussion of fundamentalist Baptist acts of witnessing. "Witnessing aims to separate novice listeners from their prior, given reality, to constitute a new, previously unperceived or indistinct reality, and to impress that reality upon them, make it felt, heard, seen, known undeniably real," Harding argues. "The reality, or *truth*, constituted in witnessing is, in part, a linguistic one: the supernatural manifests itself as God's voice and his spirit is communicated and experienced through words" (Harding 2000). Witnessing appears to the "novice listener" as a conversation, but it is no mere dialogue, as it is a process by which the saved impresses upon the unsaved listener what Ruth Borker describes as a "compelling religious reality completely at variance with [the listener's] experience."[29] Soka Gakkai members' relationship to the religious quality of words is similar. The *words* of and about the Lotus Sutra are the plainest and most direct expression of the core religious belief and practice; chanting the Lotus Sutra is efficacious in and of itself. Communication about the Lotus Sutra or intended to impress the truth of the Lotus Sutra on others is a religious act of compassion in the truest sense. Like the Baptists' strategy for converting others, Soka Gakkai's strategy also hinges on "one person insinuating his or her mode of interpretation in the mind of another."[30]

The most compelling experiences are those that narrate how members took up the practice—or, conversion stories. Many of these stories begin during a time of struggle in their lives. During these moments of struggle, people experience a turning point when they unexpectedly meet a Soka Gakkai practitioner face-to-face.

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[28] I follow Roland Barthes' understanding of a "metalanguage" as a type of discourse on discourse. Barthes has described a metalanguage as "myth itself… [I]t is a second language, *in which* one speaks about the first." In this context, I understand the Soka Gakkai metalanguage to be a second-order reflection on difference, in which all differences are understood in light of a broader Buddhist logic that organizes difference and sameness according to their significance (Barthes 1972).

[29] Ruth Borker, "The Presentation of the Gospel in Everyday Life," unpublished manuscript cited in Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics*, 36–37.

[30] Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, 37.

The member introduces the practice and shares her/his own experiences and those of others, sometimes in the form of reading material. Many experiences relate a person's initial reluctance to practice and others' skepticism about their practice once they decide to take it up. Conversion stories do not stop at one's own conversion, but typically follow through to include one's efforts to convert family and loved ones. Thus, it is in the moment of *speaking* the truth of the Lotus Sutra to others that a person's conversion becomes complete. As Bahktin has argued,

> The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention… Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral language…, but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own (Bahktin 1982).

Conclusion

SSA members' understanding of dialogue as a type of communication that is both the means and end of its religious practice testifies to the limits of contemporary models of religious pluralism. While I may not *feel* as though I am being proselytized to, that is exactly the point. The fact that SSA members have chosen to proselytize in this way highlights their awareness that the group is operating in a larger global civil arena marked by certain values about tolerance and its limits. The group tacitly acknowledges the cosmopolitan discomfort with strongly proselytic activities in its choice to promote its exclusive message by embracing dominant cultural values and by cultivating an ethic of global citizenship in which other religions are respected. The group promotes itself as a thoroughly cosmopolitan religious organization open to anyone, and at the same time, uses this ethos as a powerful tool for persuading others of its correctness. The group's understanding of dialogue as a fundamentally *religious* project supports the many theoretical critiques of models of civil society that do not fully account for the reality that participants in public conversations never speak neutral languages, but instead always articulate their concerns in specific moral vocabularies.[31]

Perhaps a better model for thinking about SSA's proselytizing would be to think about the communication that takes place as a type of redescription rather than either a type of dialogue or a type of persuasion. Richard Rorty, for one, argues that *redescription* involves creative new uses of language to make my truth more compelling to a listener, which is different from argumentation, or trying to show another person that my truth more closely corresponds to the truth "out there." While Rorty is describing the way social change occurs, his method for change through redescription applies to Soka Gakkai's proselytizing as well. His method is "to

[31] See for example, Kenneth Baynes on moral vocabularies and the difficulty of agreeing on what constitutes "reasonable" public arguments (Baynes 2002).

redescribe lots and lots of things in new ways, until you have created a pattern of linguistic behavior which will tempt the rising generation to adopt it, thereby causing them to look for appropriate new forms of nonlinguistic behavior… [This sort of philosophy] says things like 'try thinking of it this way'—or more specifically, 'try to ignore the apparently futile traditional questions by substituting the following new and possibly interesting questions'" (Rorty 1989). Not only do members redescribe ordinary events as meaningful, they are also actively engaged in taking publicly shared values—including religious pluralism and global citizenship—and redescribing them in a Buddhist light. Members do not try to put forth *new* values or argue that other values are the most important, but instead aim to redescribe the significance of those values *already* central to the ethos of global civil society. Eventually, against the backdrop of these redescriptions, certain things begin "to just make sense" in new ways.

Embracing redescription as an effective method of proselytizing that does not seem like proselytizing, Soka Gakkai is able to promote itself as a thoroughly modern, cosmopolitan, and global religious group whose values are in keeping with the values of secular democracy. The group's public embrace of these values in different contexts not only suggests that the group acknowledges their circulatory power as markers of a tolerant, liberal, and open-minded religious group, it further allows the group to use this identity to attract potential converts who similarly believe that religion *should be* tolerant, liberal and open-minded. In proselytizing in this way, Soka Gakkai members follow the biases of many scholars who presuppose a certain understanding of modernity in which "only religions that have accepted the assumptions of liberal discourse are being commended" (Asad 2003). Even as Soka Gakkai does not publicly push back against the limits of religious tolerance, its understanding of the role of communications both as a carrier of information *and* as a religious project challenges notions that Soka Gakkai as an institution embraces wholeheartedly these liberal values. Because *all* communications about Soka Gakkai can, in effect, be seen as a type of "planting the seed," the line between what is properly public and what is properly private becomes blurry. For a group of people for whom "speaking is believing," as Susan Harding argued of Baptist fundamentalists, models of civil society that are premised on carving out a space for non-coercive, deliberative dialogue seem somewhat limited. For Soka Gakkai members, dialogue is not unproblematically a means of free and open conversation because there is little question about what the outcome of the dialogue will be. In spite of his countless "dialogues" with others, I have seen no evidence that Ikeda has either changed his mind or expressed doubt about anything. Dialogue is instead an opportunity for spreading the truth of the Lotus Sutra—for proselytizing.

In understanding the religious importance of communications in this way, Soka Gakkai members assert the group's public importance and claim for themselves a great degree of religious freedom. Members accept the limits on free speech in the public sphere in order to press back against them through redescription. The choices members have made in "going public" suggest their tacit acknowledgment that public spaces are governed by unequal power dynamics, not the least of which is that certain habits of discourse among both speakers and listeners exist and govern any

party's ability to speak or be heard at that moment. By learning to speak the language of dominant cultural values in this local context, as well as the language of global civil society, SSA has gained entry into public spaces, and thus carves out a space to exercise the most basic religious freedom to speak and be heard—and to proselytize—even as members pursue these projects under the guise of liberal values of tolerance and religious pluralism.

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Chapter 7
Pluralist Secularism and the Displacements of Christian Proselytizing in Singapore

Daniel P.S. Goh

Recent scholarship on secularism has focused on the mutual constitution of the secular and the religious. "Secularization" is not the inexorable march of rationality as religion fades into pockets of enchantment, but the historical outcome of modernizing projects defining the secular as public principle vis-à-vis religion as private reason and instituting this division in differentiated public spheres and life-world domains (Asad 2003; Salvatore 2007; Taylor 2007). Much of the leading work on secularization to date has focused on developments within the context of the modernizing West. Consideration of Asian cases will help illuminate the imbrications of secularization with religious and ethnic pluralism in the making of postcolonial and capitalist societies, therefore elaborating the complexities of secularism beyond its civilizational focus on the historical legacies of Christendom. It is to this end that I analyze the contemporary struggle of evangelical Christians with *pluralist secularism* in Singapore in this chapter.

By pluralist secularism, I refer to a specific formation of secularism that takes religious pluralism as its constitutive foundation. In this formation, the state acts as the *arbiter* that stands above the public sphere, sets the ground rules, and mediates conflicts among religious groups, rather than as an *arena* participant in the public sphere negotiating policy with other interest groups (Lively 1978). Pluralist secularism so defined characterizes many Western as well as Asian countries. In Southeast Asia, pluralist secularism has been the dominant state ideology in Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, though the dominance of a particular religious bloc—Islam in the former two and the Catholic Church in the latter—has made for complex politics. Like its neighbors, the origins of pluralist secularism in Singapore lie in historical trajectories of colonial state building and decolonization. However, two factors differentiate Singapore's pluralist secularism from its neighbors: corporatist nation-building and the rapid growth of evangelical Christianity.

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The Singapore state derives its authority as arbiter of pluralism from the postcolonial transposition of British colonial discourse on race, which essentialized religion as the strongly emotive component of dangerous primal identities threatening civil strife. This transposition harks back to historical experiences of racial and religious conflict during decolonization in the 1960s and takes the rhetorical form of the preservation of religious harmony (Sinha 2005). At the same time that it regulates the religious, the state draws on the symbolic and cultural resources of the plural ethnic and religious groups for its corporatist nation-building program (Brown 1994). Religious institutions are co-opted by the state as functional entities providing important social goods, such as education, welfare services, and moral values. In this respect, the state works closely with religious institutions, aiding the institutions with material support while tapping into their vernacular communal networks as grassroots for the state's communitarian multiculturalism (Chua 2005). Consequently, the state acts as both the guarantor and cultivator of a secular public morality crafted from the wellsprings of the citizens' religious beliefs and values. Religious pluralism is not only to be arbitrated, but has to be protected as the very source of the nation's secularity.

The 1980s was the crucial decade for the consolidation of Singapore's pluralist secularism. At the beginning of the decade, the state's Religious Knowledge education program kicked off a social revitalization movement in the face of what the ruling elites saw as anomic Westernization caused by rapid economic growth. The elites experimented in the reconstruction of Confucian ethics as an umbrella framework for forging Singapore's national values. Though the educational experiments were abandoned at the end of the decade, the Confucianist discourse was reworked by the elites as the "Asian values" national ideology against intense international human rights pressure after the government cracked down on liberal Christian social workers and activists allegedly involved in a "Marxist conspiracy."[1] It was also during this time just after the crackdowns that the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act was enacted. The Act empowered the government to circumvent the courts and issue orders restraining religious expression through the Internal Security Department to anyone believed to be subverting the state, promoting a political cause, provoking disaffection against the government, or causing interreligious enmity through his or her religious practices. Though never enforced, the Act has served as the sword of Damocles, warning against the "mixing" of religion and politics. The ruling elites believe the latter would undermine both religious pluralism and secularism by exposing the public realm to competing primal emotions that are best channeled to private charity and morality working to reproduce public secularity.

[1] The "Marxist conspiracy" event comprised a series of crackdowns that began in May and June 1987 with the extra-judicial detention of 22 Roman Catholic church and social workers and professionals, among whom were supporters of an opposition political party. The government also subsequently expelled the Christian Conference of Asia, a liberal Christian umbrella group that championed human rights issues across the region. The crackdowns came in the wake of democratization movements supported by Christian churches in South Korea and the Philippines and led to the consolidation of the ruling regime. The event remains to be fully documented. See Barr (2008).

One of the concerns that led to the enactment of the Act was Christian proselytization in the 1970s and 1980s as the Charismatic Renewal movement swept through the Singapore church made up largely of English-speaking, middle-class Chinese. In this period, new independent Pentecostal megachurches were founded and grew rapidly to overtake the mainstream denominational churches, attracting mainly new converts drawn to vibrant church services and strong evangelical purpose. Several local churches, notably the Anglicans and Methodists, embraced the Renewal. Christian proselytization intensified and the government warned the churches not to test the pluralist secularism it had established, either by criticizing public policy or by offending the sensitivities of other religious groups through overeager proselytization, especially with regards to Malay Muslims. Through the 1990s, the evangelicals adapted by focusing their proselytizing on inviting fellow Chinese of traditional Taoist and Buddhist persuasions to their vibrant services. By the turn of the century, it became apparent that church growth had slowed and the revival had waned. From 1980 to 1990, the number of Christians grew by more than 25 percent to 12.7 percent of the population. From 1990 to 2000, the number of Christians grew 15 percent.

In response to flagging revivalism, evangelicals have displaced their proselytizing from the private realm into new forays to Christianize the secular public sphere. "Displacement" refers to Christians' attempts both to move their restrained proselytization out of its ascribed place in pluralist secularism and to redefine the boundary markers between the secular and the religious. Here I will argue that the evangelicals have done this in the arena of the mass media, capitalist market, nation building, and civil society, but have faltered against state-enforced and self-regulating secularity in these differentiated public spheres, which they are not equipped to tackle with their Pentecostal theologies and practices. We can see that the contours and modus operandi of pluralist secularism are clearly visible when its normalized common sense and practice is challenged by "unruly subjects," who could be no more "other-wise" postcolonial for being diasporic Chinese Christians (Mahmood 2010). Therefore, as I also show, the evangelicals have *symbolically displaced* their failures onto new articulations of indigenous Chinese Christianity, with important implications for their continuing engagement with pluralist secularism.

Evangelical Magic and the Mass Media Frontier

While appreciating the efficacy of using mass media culture to reach out to young people and to express the effervescence of Spirit-filled worship, more conservative evangelicals fear its secularizing effects and, worse, the possibility of its acting as a Trojan horse for demonic temptations that exalt individual egos at the expense of true worship. The conservative evangelicals' fear is accentuated by the rise of independent Pentecostal megachurches freed from denominational liturgical rites to experiment with mass media forms. The 4 major megachurches with more than 10,000 members totaled some 63,000 members in 2008, making up around a quarter of all Protestants in Singapore. The dominant image of Christian

worship in the media is that of megachurch "worship at a rock concert" rather than the staid solemnity of the Anglican high mass. Local media reported that Faith Community Baptist Church, one of the "big four," staged "The Christmas Stomp" for its Christmas evangelical rally in 2009. The production involved an "imaginative Wii-like experience, with gaming animation filling the giant stage," 100 young people acting "as street-style percussionists, with huge plastic cylinders as improvised drums," and some 8,000 members and guests holding mini-drums (Lee and Long 2010a).

The anxieties over authentic worship have led the Dean of Singapore's St. Andrew's Cathedral, Kuan Kim Seng, to publish a theological call "to worship God acceptably." While Anglicans have embraced the Renewal, they have remained suspicious of non-Christian cultural forms. In *Our Duty and Our Joy*, Kuan introduces the problematic with redoubled comparisons. His "earliest perception of the 'divine'," Kuan writes, "was visiting the Chinese temple with my family, when I would ask for 'blessings,' so that I would pass all my school examinations!" Chinese religious worship was "a series of transactions between mortals and the 'gods,'" while Christian worship was more than transactions, as it involved "a deep sense of awe and wonder" and "a response of love." Later, Kuan became occupied with the question of whether it was right to worship God with joss sticks associated with pagan idols and charismatic Christians equating worship with exuberant singing (Kuan 2008).

Turning to the Bible, Kuan locates true worship in the Greek word *latreuo*, defining it as "worshipping God by serving Him and His purposes," though the word historically refers to the priestly performance of religious duties and services in return for a fee. Kuan contrasts this to *proskuneo*, the more commonly used word for worship in the New Testament, which refers to "outward expression of worship" (Kuan 2008, 6–7). Other words are discussed as different aspects of true worship, which Kuan believes to be "total and complete surrender," with "everything in life" consecrated to God (Kuan 2008, 19). He criticizes the reduction of worship to the liturgical, when church leaders "pass the 'worship' to the musicians" (Kuan 2008, 38). He also warns against leaders who are wolves in sheep's clothing, not "concerned about the worship of God" but "only concerned about themselves," in particular celebrity preachers who "demand first-class air travel and luxury suites in the best hotels in town before they come to minister in your church" (Kuan 2008, 68). Kuan writes that *latreuo*-worship is crucial for completing the Great Commission, implicitly criticizing the instrumental use of mass concerts for evangelism. For Kuan, the gravity of Christianity has shifted to the non-Western world as a result of Protestant missions. He reveals that he wrote *Our Duty and Our Joy* as "a humble act of *latreuo*-worship unto God" for sending Robert Morrison of the London Missionary Society to China in 1807, the first Protestant missionary and "Apostle to the Chinese" (Kuan 2008, 100).

Crucially, the ambivalence toward the appropriation of mass media and popular cultural forms expressed by Kuan redoubles unto the indigenization consciousness symbolically structured as the split between "Chinese" and "Western." The split is metonymically ordered in a temporal sequence in the Christian narrative of

engagement with the secular. In the first evangelical encounter, "Chinese" represents lack and "Western" represents fulfillment, as we find in Kuan's comparison of Chinese religious practices and Christian worship. But in the second Pentecostal encounter, "Chinese" represents authenticity and "Western" represents counterfeit, as we find in Kuan's criticism of American-style charismatic worship and celebrity evangelism. A symbolic archetype that is a Chinese-Western hybrid—Morrison for Kuan—then acts as a linchpin binding the two encounters and autobiography to history to clinch the account of meaningful divine destiny. Thus mass media and pop culture forms have opened up the space for new ways to proselytize but have raised questions of religious authenticity for believers and observers alike. In the case of Christianity in Singapore, because of the popularity of Pentecostalism, the new ways to proselytize are inextricably tied to new forms of worship enabled by the same mass media and pop culture forms, which adds anxiety about spiritual authenticity to the question.

Already famous for its rock concert-style worship, Faith Community Baptist Church incorporated an entertainment company in 2000. The church was formed in 1986 when Lawrence Khong was fired from the pastorate of the Baptist church after he turned Pentecostal. Combining fiery Southern Baptist conservatism and Pentecostal openness, Khong has been steadfast in maintaining his conservative values and evangelical focus while exploring entrepreneurial outlets for evangelism in a restrictive secular environment. In 1992, Faith Community Baptist Church was one of the first churches to move into a refurbished old movie theater in a public housing estate. That same year, it established TOUCH Community Services, which grew to become one of the largest welfare organizations in Singapore and is known for its professionalism. Its approach is to bring Christian values into the secular arena without being overtly evangelical or even obviously Christian, believing that the love shown would be witness enough. In 1998, it established TOUCH Community Theatre. The inaugural show was a musical about old Singapore as a place where migrants could fulfill their aspirations through hard work. The press reported that the production "compiled admirably an array of cultural and performance traditions that Singaporeans can claim as their own, in the true spirit of community" (Kaiden 1998).

Khong had greater aspirations. He wanted to venture "into the media ministry to reclaim this industry for Jesus Christ," after he heard God telling him that "the real pulpit of the world" is not found in churches, and that the church "has lost the means to speak to the millions," as the real pulpit "in this 'sight and sound' generation is found in cinemas, television, concert halls and theatres" broadcasting lies to millions.[2] In August 2001, Khong's *Magic of Love* was staged at the Indoor Stadium, drawing 20,000 people over six shows. But he was dissatisfied because Christian supporters attended the one commercial show despite press coverage (Khong 2008, 33–4; Chow 2001). For Khong, this did not fulfill the mission of seizing "the real

[2]Faith Community Baptist Church, "Milestones," http://www.fcbc.org.sg/fcbc/index.php/en/about-us/milestones.html, Accessed June 27, 2011; Khong (2008).

pulpit of the world" but merely replicated "a church evangelistic meeting" in another form (Khong 2008, 9).

In March 2004, the show played for two weeks in the Genting Highlands casino in Malaysia. But the evangelical impact was insignificant, except when one show was booked by a local church as an evangelistic event. The impact was most visible when Khong used the magic show as an innovative form of evangelical rally, for example when he put on a "spook show" in the month of the Hungry Ghost Festival to relate the magic directly to popular Chinese religious beliefs, casting them as deceptions, delusions, and demonic. In its incarnation as Project SMILE, it enhanced the welfare services provided by TOUCH, but the show had to go off-air on Christianity because community service was a secular domain regulated by the state. The magic venture was caught in the pluralist secular bind. When tickets were sold commercially, Khong "did not have the liberty to preach" and could only say anti-climactically at the end that the show was "a real-life testimony" of "the magic of God's love" (Khong 2008, 90, 92). He could only hope to "release, into the marketplace, the presence of God outside the walls of the church," which he sensed whenever he received a standing ovation (Khong 2008, 94–5).

Khong could not re-sacralize the secularity of the media sphere, where the principle of distinction between entertainment and didacticism mapped onto the secular-religious division. His "burning man" performance capped the tourist-oriented Chingay Parade during the Chinese New Year in 2009, but it was treated as an entertaining spectacle. On his Magicbox show at the swanky Esplanade Theatre in 2008, a press critic thought the magic "was truly magical" and the musical charming, but "when the show took on theatrical elements to narrate a tale of love and family values, it faltered just a little and became too preachy" (Shetty 2008). A reader wrote to criticize the amateurish performance and the sponsors pushing their products on the audience (Leong 2008). In response, supporters wrote to praise the "family values communicated" and the "good, clean entertainment for the family" it provided (*Straits Times* 2008, July 26), which meant that Khong was preaching to the converted and was merely creating alternative Christian entertainment, not reclaiming "the real pulpit."

Commercial success eludes Khong. This is partly because of magic as the genre of choice, which is limited in scope. Originally, the church planned for a cable television station but the cost was prohibitive. Then it produced low-budget television movies that did not interest the globalizing state-owned media companies. But turning to show entertainment was hardly a viable way to reclaim "the real pulpit." It was also risky given show business's intimate link with the gambling industry. Just as Khong's magic show played in Genting in 2004, the Singapore government announced it was considering the construction of casino resorts to revive the economy, a decision that sparked intense public debate and strong religious opposition that lasted a whole year. Faith Community Baptist was thrown into the limelight in March 2005 when a church member apparently murdered his family and killed himself because of gambling debts. The church had helped him pay off $100,000 in gambling debts a decade before, but he relapsed after a holiday trip to Genting in

December 2004 (Vijayan 2005). The coincidence was unfortunate but uncanny. The media venture also came at a cost to church unity, causing dissent, with some believing that Khong was demonized. Some 3,000 members left the church in the early 2000s, and church membership remained at 10,000 through the decade (Khong 2008, 45, 17–8, 44).

Why magic then? Half of the answer lies in Khong's last venture before the media foray. Since 1993, Khong had headed the Spiritual Warfare Network, which he transformed into the LoveSingapore movement that united a third of Protestants for evangelical revival. He prophesied that a "major harvest wave" of conversions seven symbolic years into the movement in 2001 would take place and turn Singapore into the "Antioch of Asia" to evangelize the region (LoveSingapore Movement 2000, 111). Only 3,000 conversions took place despite the mass organization and mobilization of the faithful for outreach through cultural programs such as theater, charity walks, and concerts (Tan-Chow 2007). Subsequent to the credibility hit, Khong not only intensified his media foray but also transformed Faith Community Baptist into a disciplined "Government of 12" cell church where a leader disciples a dozen people until each is ready to lead a dozen, thereby turning the community church into an evangelical army primed for spiritual warfare.[3] Taken together, the magic foray and the tightening of church organization saw Khong moving the church away from the failed cultural model of outreach to a spiritual warfare model focused on seizing specific cultural domains now re-imagined as territory. In this model, Christian love is less a thing to be shared culturally, but a weapon to be wielded to reclaim cultural spaces from secular forces which are deemed demonic.

The other half of the answer lies in the narrative displacement in *Give Me The Multitudes*!, the book he wrote in 2008 to vindicate the media foray. Khong recalled that when he was attending seminary in Dallas in the 1970s, he was frequently asked to preach to American high school students, which was rare for an Asian, because he could catch their attention with magic. Khong imagined that the kids thought, "If this Chinese chap can fool me for half an hour, I guess he knows something which I don't" (Khong 2008, 12). Fascinated with magic since his youth, Khong found distinction in a foreign Western land through magic and used it to close the gap between him and his Western colleagues. Magic was at the heart of Khong's evangelical encounter of lack and became formative of his very identity as a Chinese Christian. Therefore, he also recalled how he used magic at the evangelistic Lunar New Year banquets for non-Christian Chinese organized by the small Chinese church he led in Dallas. In the Pentecostal encounter of God's call to penetrate the sinful media world dominated by Western production, Khong "remembered" God asking him like he did to Moses: "What is the staff (or rod) that you have in your hands?" (Khong 2008, 11). In other words, Khong the magician is the hybrid figure that seizes divine destiny.

[3] Khong (2000). Khong adopted the "G12 vision" from César Castellanos, a Colombian Pentecostal leader of a quarter-million-strong megachurch in Bogota, whom he met in 2001.

The Travails of Marketplace Ministry

One of the lessons Khong (2008, 111) drew from his media venture experience was "marketplace ministry," to "see labour as worship and the church must begin every Monday in the marketplace." This afterthought is built into the very identity of New Creation Church and City Harvest Church, two of the "big four" churches whose membership surged past Faith Community Baptist in the 2000s to double and triple the latter's membership, respectively. Indeed, the two churches have kept the flagging revivalism going, growing at an annual rate of 12 to 15 percent compared with the 2 to 4 percent in mainstream churches (Lee and Long 2010b). City Harvest founder Kong Hee's inspiration and mentor is Korean megachurch leader David Yong-Gi Cho, who famously propounds that illnesses and poverty are symptoms of demonic activity that God's blessings would defeat. Sebastian Kim (2008) has observed that Cho's gospel of holistic blessing can be considered a contextual Asian theology because it was a response to social injustice and suffering. However, caught up in a setting of general prosperity and upward social mobility, there is a tendency for Pentecostalism to adopt a *consumption* ethic, in which economic success and wealth is displayed in exuberant consumption as an evangelical *sign* of distinction of having God's blessing, so as to draw people to the church.

City Harvest promotes an entrepreneurship ethos and embraces capitalism as a vehicle for evangelical ministry, blurring the distinction between church and corporation. Today, the church is the second-largest megachurch in Asia with 33,000 members and boasting a $47 million titanium-clad designer church complex with a 2,700-seat underground auditorium and a half-million-dollar fountain in a working class neighborhood. It broadcasts its services by satellite and cable television to 107 countries, sells its sermons in digital format on the Internet, hosts the massive biennial Asia Conference and Church Growth International network, and offers corporate training and motivational courses. In their study of global Pentecostalism, Donald Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori (2007, 135) describe City Harvest as "the most extravagant church" they visited. In 2010, it invested $310 million to become a co-owner of a landmark downtown convention complex, in order to move its services to a 12,000-seat auditorium there and use the property dividends to cover rent (Lee and Long 2010c).

Activities in the church resemble economic transactions. For example, in 2009, at the height of the economic downturn, the church offered to pay members' school fees and expenses in exchange for community service hours and church attendance (Yen 2009). The church provides venture funding for profit-making social enterprises (Arshad 2007). Church members who are successful entrepreneurs are often highlighted by the church to encourage the rest and featured in the press as evidence that "Christian values can be applied to the corporate marketplace (Chua 2008)." Kong, a successful co-owner of several franchised fashion boutiques, and his wife, Ho Yeow Sun, a pastor who went from cutting Christian music albums sold by the church to a successful international pop music career under the name Sun Ho, exemplify the consumption ethic and theology of blessings. Kong encouraged Ho to

cross over into pop music to embody "the cultural mandate" to bring Christ into the marketplace and media industry (Lee and Long 2010d). They are often featured in celebrity news in the press, for example, for fulfilling the Singaporean dream of upgrading from a public housing flat to a downtown condominium apartment furnished with imported designer furniture (Tay 2007).

In 2007, New Creation Church spectacularly invested $280 million to partner state-owned transnational property giant Capitaland to develop a "lifestyle hub" to serve planned science research parks as well as its own needs for a large permanent worship venue. A year later, it committed another $220 million to cover rising costs, investing more than Capitaland in the project. It would own the complex's civic and cultural zone with a state-of-the-art 5,000-seat theater, while Capitaland would own the smaller retail area. By then, the church had raised a third of the capital needs from its annual surpluses of tithe and donation incomes, a figure amounting to about $30 million a year (Teo 2007; Chan 2008; Tan and Tan 2008). Already, New Creation runs childcare services and an East Coast Park leisure complex, along with gift, book, and travel businesses. The church is also a regular corporate sponsor taking its place alongside transnational corporations in high-profile fund raising events (Straits Times 2009, December 16). Joseph Prince, leader of the 24,000-strong church, was paid a half-million dollar salary in 2008 because he "enriched the church," by "bringing in about 95% of [the] church's income," and, "above all," because "many people have experienced the grace and love of [the] Lord Jesus for themselves" through his ministry (Tan and Sim 2009).

The consumption ethic, unlike the Protestant ethic, not only pushes the Christian into the capitalist marketplace but also brings the marketplace into the Christian domain. Indeed within this context, economic success is not just a sign of God's grace, *but is grace itself*. Thus, earnings are not to be frugally reinvested to derive more earnings, for wealth is God's blessing and should also be enjoyed *for* evangelism. Prince combines this teaching with end-time millenarian doctrines when he calls the present generation, "the Benjamin Generation," after the beloved youngest brother of Joseph in the Old Testament. In a tract of the same title, Prince relates the buying of his high-end dream car to Jacob's feeling revived when he saw the wagons sent by Joseph, the favored son, who was sold into slavery before rising to become governor. Jacob saw the wagons as evidence that his son was still alive and doing extremely well. Prince equates his BMW to a modern-day wagon and proclaims, "God wants to give us wagons!" More importantly, he writes, "I knew that when I started driving the car, there would be a few people who would criticize me. But I went ahead and bought the car for the sake of the many. I wanted to let them see that God is good. I wanted them to know that He can give His servant a dream car" (Prince 2006). The theology of blessing leads Pentecostals to align themselves with the rise of Asian capitalism and to enjoy conspicuous consumption as God's grace to revive the church. The Pentecostal is not to be satisfied with success, but is called to revel in the success to edify and evangelize.

However, the blurring of church-corporation distinction has sparked public controversies that put the evangelical value of the consumption ethic in question. In 2003, for example, a businessman-member accused the church of hard-selling

Ho's albums. The church management board responded that the royalties went to charity and that it was natural for the church to cheer the "secular project" of its "music pastor," in "the same way we would for any entrepreneur or professional from our church" (City Harvest Church 2003). Months later, Ho was severely criticized for appearing in a sexy gown in Hollywood. Church members threatened to quit if she continued to maintain her leadership position in the church and if the church continued to promote her products. Kong came out in defense of his wife, saying that "Asian-American Lucy Liu wore more revealing clothes in the movie Charlie's Angels," that Ho was not technically a pastor but the church's music director and leading counselor, and that members who have a "philosophical difference" with the church's "world view" should find another among the "400-over wonderful churches" in Singapore (Wong 2003; Li 2003). The response reveals the *pluralist* secularization of Christian beliefs that inevitably accompanies the attempt to tame Mammon through marketplace ministry. Christian morality is relativized to secular morality, while theological debates are reduced to philosophical options and church membership to a matter of lifestyle choice in a religious marketplace.

Marketplace ministry has also intensified the secularization of space and invited another form of secularity into the church: state regulation of economic life. Due to City Harvest's mall investment and New Creation's "lifestyle hub" project, public concerns that spaces zoned for shared civic, commercial and cultural purposes would be dominated by exclusive religious use have led to new governmental guidelines limiting the use of space in a commercial complex by a religious organization to only 10,000 square meters, provided it is used in a "non-exclusive way" and devoid of religious symbolism (Lee 2010). This removes all material distinction between megachurch worship and pop concert performances.

In 2007, after a major scandal involving a secular charity, the Singapore government issued a Code of Governance for all charities. While the code is non-binding, organizations have to explain themselves if they choose not to follow it. New Creation objected to the stipulation that the board should be independent of management, claiming it was against its religious beliefs, as "Pastor Prince is ordained by God to lead the church." City Harvest similarly claimed that it did not contradict the code, as Kong sat on the board but was not on the payroll. Along with the Methodist Church, New Creation called for separate regulation of religious charities. Soon after, the government sent auditors to check seven religious groups receiving the largest income, including New Creation, City Harvest and Faith Community Baptist (Tan 2007a, b; Tan and Arshad 2007). Days later, the show of force was reinforced by the announcement of a probe into a prominent local Buddhist charity for giving out interest-free personal loans amounting to millions of dollars. The audit found four areas for improvement, including loans involving conflicts of interest (Tan and Sim 2008). Under pressure from scrutiny by the state, press, and individual citizens, Prince went off New Creation's payroll in late 2009, and the church defended itself as a private society accountable only to its members and the law, claiming it was not a public charity accountable to the general public (Kang 2009; Lee and Long 2010e).

Dogged by accusations that the church bankrolled Ho's music career, things came to a head at City Harvest in early 2010 after the mall investment was announced to church members. The huge investment invited press scrutiny and public airings of discontent by church members who felt they should have been informed of how exactly their tithes and donations were going to be spent. But when it tried to release some details, the consortium that owned Suntec Singapore, which had bought 80% of the shares for a much lower $235 million only 8 months earlier, warned the church with a lawyer's letter to keep to their non-disclosure agreement (Yen 2010c). The church was caught in a bind of their own making by blurring the church-corporation line. Poison pen letters on the misuse of church ties for personal profit circulated. A month later, in a supposedly unrelated move that caught everyone off-guard and just a day after the church closed the Asia Conference, police raided the church and homes of church leaders in an investigation into the misuse of church funds. At least 20 people, including Kong and Ho, were summoned for questioning at police headquarters. Kong stepped down from the pastorate, but remained as chairman of the church board (Yen 2010f).

The National Council of Churches, the umbrella body of the major Protestant denominations and independent churches, waded into the muddied waters to list principles for church involvement in business, the overarching rule being that "the church should not allow itself to be distracted from its mission of preaching the gospel by being too deeply involved in business, whether big or small," and compared churches to banks, "which own property but only to serve their core business of banking" (Long 2010). The irony of the analogy to the recent financial crisis is lost on the more conservative evangelicals, who seem to remain ambivalent about the daring Pentecostal forays into the marketplace. It is intrinsic to capitalism to displace its crises by expanding into new market domains that would then spark qualitatively new crises. By expanding the banking of souls into the capitalist domain to keep up the flames of evangelism, the logic of self-referential profit, of profit not as signs of grace but as ends in themselves, especially when it is confused as grace, pulls the church into a market orbit. There it is subjected to a cyclical crisis of its own involving the character of money that Marcel Mauss (1990) alerted us to: the church's money as *gifts* for God's work that always contains the qualitative imprint of the giver and the social expectation of reciprocity against the money secularized as *capital* circulated for profit that is misrecognized as grace, alienated from the giver as God's dispensation that could be quantified and must be grown.

Since the start of the investigation—still an open case at the time of writing—Kong has laid low and communicated with his supporters through his blog. Reassuring his supporters that his family is doing well, he writes that the "page has turned," but that, "I believe that the City Harvest story will continue to unfold. There is not a hint of doubt in my heart that my Lord Jesus Christ is not only the author of our faith, but also its finisher" (Kong 2010). Later in a special press report, Kong described himself as a businessman whose "mercantile instincts lie in his Indonesian-Chinese blood" (Lee and Long 2010f). Indeed, the story will unfold, as the stage appears set for the redoubling of Christian ambivalence concerning secularity unto a Chinese narrative.

Chinese Spirits and the Healing of the Nation

In the midst of the commotion at City Harvest, another controversy erupted at New Creation. Pastor Mark Ng, who heads the church's Chinese language ministry, came under fire for mocking Taoist rituals during a 2008 sermon. A concerned citizen uploaded an audio clip on the online video sharing site YouTube. In the clip, he trivialized praying to Chinese deities as equivalent to seeking protection from secret society gang members. Ng quickly apologized for the "serious indiscretion" on New Creation's website and visited the Taoist Federation to apologize to the chairman in person (Yen 2010d, e).

The quick reaction by New Creation forestalled a crisis, as there was precedent in the case of Pastor Rony Tan, the founder of 12,000-strong Lighthouse Evangelism. Four months earlier, in early February, video clips of disparaging remarks about Buddhist and Taoist beliefs and practices by Tan and two former Chinese religionists testifying about their conversion in a sermon that was circulated online. The clips were uploaded on Lighthouse Evangelism's website a week before. Circulating sermons through the Internet for evangelical effect was a common practice among technologically savvy megachurches. The clips raised an online firestorm. Citizens posted the clips, discussed them and accused Tan for undermining religious harmony. Tan was called up by the Internal Security Department for hours of questioning, after which he posted his apology online and visited leaders of the Buddhist Federation and Taoist Federation to apologize. He apologized to his congregation that Sunday, saying, "By God's grace, I must redeem myself by promoting religious harmony, while still doing the good works of Christ effectively" (Feng 2010a, b).

Importantly, in both the mixing of church and business and the disparaging of popular Chinese religiosity as inferior to Christianity, individual citizens played a crucial role in turning them into public issues. Megachurch leaders quickly realized that the church ceases to be a private space of worship once it begins to engage the world. Separationist churches are left alone even though they may disparage popular Chinese religion during church meetings. Their evangelicalism is very different and consists of inviting acquaintances to church for inward-looking services. As long as they remain behind the church doors, their seemingly quaint old-fashioned hymns and this-worldly rejection form part of the multicultural landscape. On the other hand, Pentecostal evangelicalism reaches out into the world by remolding worship with mass media and pop cultural forms and reframing transactions between church and members with capitalist forms of exchange. It is modeled on the facilitation of flow, emphasizing participation in public life to usher in crowds through open doors and through which they would flow back out as witnesses to the masses. But what this also means is that the religious pluralism of society and the pluralist secularism of the state reach into the church, turning the church into a public space where Christian activities are scrutinized by non-Christian members of the public and subjected to state regulation.

The *imagined* other—of crowds and masses—is central in Pentecostal evangelicalism, and this other is not just an unsaved soul but also an *injured* subject.

Inevitably, as Pentecostals enter the public sphere to save imagined injured others, they encounter the imagined community of the nation, with its own particular model of state-managed pluralism. Again, the secularity produces ambivalence. On the one hand, they encounter a dominant nationalist worldview of imagined others suffering from lack in the developmentalist discourse of the postcolonial state, which is even more accentuated in Singapore because nationalist historiography emphasizes not indigenous but immigrant heritages. This discourse interpellates the Pentecostals themselves, calling on them to contribute to the multicultural ethos and moral fabric of the nation, so as to anchor the self culturally while it is driven to relentless economic pursuits. Yet, to the Pentecostals, the nation, precisely because it is pluralistic in its character and secular in its constitution, is the injured subject writ large. The Pentecostal focus on healing injured individual souls is thus displaced unto the nation, which is treated as a spatio-geographical reality—a land, a city with walls and gates, a hub of flows—that requires actual spiritual actions for healing.

The healing of the nation defines the main thrust of LoveSingapore, which Lawrence Khong has been leading and in which Moses Tay played a major role after his retirement from the Anglican bishopric in 2000. That year, LoveSingapore published *Dare to Believe*, containing narrative accounts and its manifesto. Tay wrote the foreword, introducing the movement as one "born out of prayer" and that has "struggled against demonic forces and natural barriers" to grow. The attention then turns to the nation, imagined as moving, in "the sheer sovereign grace of God," "from survival to success, and from success to global leadership–not just in the natural but also in the spiritual realm." The challenges are then alluded to: "Singapore now stands as a multi-racial and multi-religious society … The government maintains a strong policy advocating tolerance and harmony among the different races and religions." He writes,

> While the sun has set on the British Empire, of which Singapore was an integral part in the Far East, the Son of Righteousness is rising with healing in its wings. As we reflect on our spiritual roots, paeans of praise must well up in our hearts for the movement of God in our history. Prominent evangelists include the Chinese scholar John Sung, who changed the spiritual landscape of Southeast Asia since his seven-wave harvest in 1935, the effects of which are still felt 65 years later. (Tay 2000)

By switching between the history of Singapore as an Asian nation rising from the ashes of Western imperialism and the indigenization of Christianity through the charismatic evangelism of Sung, the independent Chinese evangelist who combined conservatism and charismatic practices and revived the Singapore church in the late 1930s, Tay's apologetics not only aligned the LoveSingapore project with the nationalist developmental project, but also positioned the evangelical call to action for the contemporary "seven-wave harvest" in the pluralistic public space of the nation rather than the private relational space between Christian and non-Christian individuals in conventional evangelism. In 1998, LoveSingapore organized its first charity walkathon, an event that doubled as a scaling-up of the practice of spiritual prayerwalking to claim the land for Christ against demonic

forces. Eugene Seow, Faith Community Baptist's deputy pastor and TOUCH's director, writes,

> As the day dawned on 1st May, a national holiday, crowds gathered on a large plot of reclaimed land across the harbor from the Central Business District for what we called "*Taking the City Walk*." A massive human traffic jam almost paralyzed the Marina South MRT train station, while buses and taxis clogged surface streets. From all directions people converged on the rally site, until 40,000 believers from about 70 churches filled the field. Never before in the history of Singapore had so many Christians gathered in public to bless their nation. (Seow 2000: 42)

The walkathon was only the annual climax of prayerwalking activities organized at different scales in the city center and in less Christianized outlying districts throughout the year. For example, when Methodists went out into the northern town of Yishun to plant a mission, they took "territorial responsibility" and conducted "spiritual mapping" to "focus targeted prayer," so that Yishun would fulfill the meaning of its name in Chinese—"flow of righteousness" (Ho 2000, 56–7). In 2000, the prayerwalking event reached its peak with 60,000 participants from 100 churches (Seow 2000, 45), but participation went downhill after that as the "seven-wave harvest" disappointed, as I have pointed out earlier in the context of Pastor Khong's turn to magic. It has lately been organized as a scaled-down event by Faith Community Baptist. What is interesting is the overdetermined publicity of the Walk: the Labor Day holiday, the rally site, the physical clogging of streets, and the sheer excitement of Christian effervescence that transforms the innocuous flânerie of walking the city into the evangelical taking over of the city. This also meant the "seven-wave harvest" disappointment of 2001 cut deeper than usual.

Pentecostals have responded by reworking the apologetics. In *God's Destiny for Your Nation*, Anglican Dean John Tay (2008) works through the Old Testament and argues that prophetic history "revolves around nations." The failure of many Christians to recognize this truth is because the Western worldview conceives salvation in individual terms. However, Asians have perspicacity on this matter because of the focus on "the family and community." Based on Old Testament sources again, Tay believes Jesus would return to Jerusalem from the East and thus the "enemy has built up strongholds to block the return … by way of the east (the major non-Christian religions are located here: Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam)." Next in importance to Israel is Singapore. The name, history and geography are crucial. Singapore means "lion city" in Sanskrit because according to legend Prince Sang Nila Utama saw a lion when he landed on the island in the thirteenth century. Tay takes this story as literal history, claiming that because there were never lions in Singapore, but only tigers, what the prince saw was a demon posing as the Lion of Judah, which represents Christ. Singapore was therefore founded as a "demon principality." The birth of postcolonial Singapore is significant to Tay, for God ordained the secular ruling elites to transform Singapore into the economic hub of Asia, turning it into "the gateway city" of the East situated midway between "the centre of the earth" (Jerusalem) and "the ends of the earth" (French Polynesia). Independence also marked the start of the jubilee clock for proclaiming "liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants" (quoted from Leviticus 25). Thus, counting from 1965,

Tay believes Singapore will return to Christ in 2015 and calls on Christians to work for seven years from 2008 to 2014 to fulfill this divine destiny by targeting seven areas: entertainment, media, business, education, government, religion, and family.

Another response to the 2001 "seven-wave harvest" disappointment tackles the "religion" area, more specifically Chinese religion, as a variant of the redoubling of ambivalence onto indigenization. I have shown that this redoubling involves the expression of lack in the evangelical encounter between Chinese religion and Christianity, and then the reversal of fulfillment in a Chinese Christianity against Western decay in the Pentecostal encounter, with a hybrid exemplar conjoining the two encounters. A feature of Pentecostal publicity is getting individuals to testify to a congregation about being born again or being healed. In 2007, Rony Tan extended this publicity beyond the space of the church into the public sphere by testimonies from Lighthouse members who wrote their stories in the third person.

In one testimony, a devout Taoist woman afflicted with nerve disorder and skin infection had turned to temple mediums and "talismans and blessings" from temples to heal her to no avail. She reviled Christianity, but her husband was an engineer who designed the internal lighting and electrical work for a "glitzy new church building"—that is Lighthouse Evangelism—and the whole family was invited to the opening ceremony, which "turned out to be a special healing service." The wife and family went along, "Giving Papa 'face,' as the Chinese call it," and the wife was healed and converted at the service. The husband who "believed in no one except himself" and thought religion was "impractical" decided to attend Lighthouse services when their daughter was diagnosed with a brain growth and after he read "his medical encyclopedia" thoroughly. As he "did not want to jump into the faith impulsively," he attended services for a while before converting. The daughter went through successful surgery and treatment (Tan 2007, 85, 88–89, 86, 92). Here, the suffering Taoist wife represents the evangelical encounter and the scientistic Westernized husband the Pentecostal encounter, while the exemplary hybrid is the church itself with its unusually grand and modern façade in a public housing estate, and its pastor, whose healing power is seen as "true" and "efficacious" compared with "fake" Taoist mediums and "inadequate" Western medicine.

Many of the other stories in Tan's collection told of the conversions of former Taoists and Buddhists. Specific practices, such as the drinking of ashes of burnt paper talismans mixed with water, were denigrated, while a haunting was attributed to demonic forces brought on by three Chinese "idols" that were destroyed along with the altar by a house-cleansing platoon of pastor and a cell group of eight members. The controversy that broke in 2010 over Tan's denigrations of Taoism and Buddhism and over similar comments by New Creation's Ng was not born from isolated indiscretions. Denigrations of Chinese religion are intrinsic to the Pentecostal foray into a plural public sphere where ambivalence redoubles onto indigenization and appears in ethnicized terms as attacks on "demonic" Chinese practices. However, what the Pentecostals believed were obvious theological facts challenged the pluralist secular norms of the public sphere. The Pentecostals thought they were participating in religious pluralism by contributing their core religious beliefs and practices—spiritual warfare and evangelism—to the public sphere, only to discover the public sphere was

not as simple as they thought. They discovered that it was regulated by secular norms enforced by the state and internalized by many citizens who are using the same mass media and pop cultural forms as the Pentecostals to police the public sphere.

The Gap in the Land

As seen in John Tay's nation-based apologetics, the Singapore government is seen as an instrument of God, making the Antioch of Asia possible. At the same time, the realization of this possibility in the prophetic jubilee year means the Christianization of the state. But this desire and calling cannot be articulated in the public sphere, as it would constitute a blatant crossing of the line between religion and politics that the state has clearly drawn after the 1987 crackdowns on liberal Christian social activists. That the desire and calling to Christianize the state has been invoked but cannot be articulated means frustration on the part of Pentecostal intellectuals. Most Pentecostals carry this hope into now-familiar practices of prayerwalking. For example, in 2008, LoveSingapore organized Friday lunch prayers for "intercessors" on a 30th floor auditorium overlooking the civic district and new Parliament House in the lead-up to National Day. The LoveSingapore website described the venue as an, "Awesome place to be found in the GAP on behalf of the land. You get this feel of open horizons with a Jacob 'stairway' to an open heaven!" (LoveSingapore 2008). But these practices seem to belong to the failed "seven-wave harvest" prophecy and proved to be insufficient for an increasingly activist faction.

In March 2009, the Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE), a 25-year-old feminist organization with a liberal bent, held its annual general meeting. Unexpectedly, more than 100 people showed up, including many new members, who elected nine unknown newcomers to the twelve-member executive committee. Older members and supporters became concerned, and the revelation was slow in coming as the new leaders refused to state their intentions. It was discovered that the new honorary secretary had earlier published a letter attacking a Nominated Member of Parliament for advancing the homosexual cause by seeking to repeal a penal code section that criminalizes homosexual sex. They also discovered that six of the new leaders, including new President Josie Lau, attended the 4,000-strong Church of Our Saviour, an Anglican church active in LoveSingapore, and had been urged by senior church member Thio Su Mien to take over and correct AWARE's alleged "promotion of lesbianism and homosexuality" (Low and Au 2009; Wong et al. 2009a).

The former leaders and older members called for an extraordinary general meeting. The new leadership hired a commercial event organizer, security officers, and top-gun lawyers. It also mobilized volunteers in red shirts bearing the slogan, "pro-woman, pro-family and pro-Singapore," who strong-armed some of the old guard supporters, who were wearing white shirts bearing a counter-slogan, "We are Aware" (Wong 2009). At the end of the raucous seven-hour meeting, the Christian usurpers reluctantly resigned after a vote of no confidence was passed

by about two-thirds of the 2,200 members present and after being advised by their lawyers to do so out of precedent, and "courtesy, custom and common-sense" (Wong et al. 2009b).

The weekend before the meeting, Pastor Derek Hong of the Church of Our Saviour and a key leader in LoveSingapore, called on women members to "be engaged" and support Lau and "her sisters" in his sermon, which was posted on the church's website. The press quoted him saying, "It's not a crusade against the people but there's a line that God has drawn for us, and we don't want our nation crossing that line" (Straits Times 2009, April 29). Hong backed down after the National Council of Churches' president, Anglican Bishop John Chew, quickly issued public disapproval of the church's involvement in the controversy and its use of the pulpit to push for causes. Non-Christian religious leaders supported Chew and stated that secular organizations should stay secular (Low 2009). Quoting a supporter of the usurping leadership who changed her mind about attending the meeting after discussing Bishop Chew's statement with her Bible study group and based on the seats the usurping leadership prepared, the press wondered if many more Pentecostals had changed their minds (Wong et al. 2009c). Yet, the fact that the usurping leadership could draw more than 700 supporters in spite of the show of force by religious leaders to affirm the secularity of the public sphere shows that the activist faction among Pentecostals is not insignificant.

On the other hand, none of the supporters stood up to debate the other side, except for Thio, who admonished the crowd to "show respect to their elders" and some who called out, "How rude, how rude"; instead, they remained seated as though they were listening to a sermon (Basu 2009). This attitude shows how unready Pentecostal activists were to face the rough-and-tumble of civil society. Instead, they mimicked authoritarian tactics of intimidation and censorship and adopted highhanded paternalism, for example, throwing out journalists and switching off the microphone, just when the state has been liberalizing. Because the state has liberalized over the years to allow a freer public sphere and greater participation from secular civil society but not religious activism, Pentecostals felt the need to go out and get themselves a civil society outfit for greater impact. The urgency is felt even more because the government has also been moving toward greater social liberalism as it seeks to transform Singapore into a cosmopolitan global city. It announced that openly homosexual individuals would not be discriminated against in the civil service in 2003, and while it did not repeal the penal code criminalizing gay acts in 2007, it vowed not to actively prosecute it. After the AWARE meeting, the Deputy Prime Minister reiterated the government's stand on homosexuality—"A stable society with traditional, heterosexual family values but with space for homosexuals to live their private lives and contribute to society"—and reaffirmed the strict separation of religion and politics (Wong 2009). As far as the state was concerned, the secular public sphere is heterosexual and multi-religious *because* both homosexuality and Christian beliefs are private matters.

There are two reasons the activists are particularly riled up over homosexuality, and neither is due to mimicry of the Christian right in the United States. Former Anglican Bishop Moses Tay is a folk hero among Pentecostals for leading the

charge during his tenure in the 1990s against liberal Anglicanism's growing acceptance of homosexuality, which he detailed as a contest between righteous African and Asian churches against Western rot and heresy in his autobiography (Tay 2009). Opposition to homosexuality is a central feature in the indigenization of Chinese Christian identity as it has been elsewhere in the world over recent decades.

Second, Pentecostal activists wholeheartedly agree with the state's view on Asian values as rooted in the traditional heterosexual family, but for them the public-private division that defines the secularity of the public sphere did not make sense. They could not understand that sexuality *must* be a private *cultural* choice so that the secular could be publicly heterosexual, just as faith must be a private religious choice so that the secular could be pluralistic, because secularism is constructed by privatizing specific practices it defines, differentiates, and regulates as culture, lifestyle and religion. The fact that the state's heterosexuality squared with theirs led the Pentecostals to see an opening for entering into the public sphere to impose what were in effect their private views on sexuality. Thus, the activists seemed genuinely bewildered that everyone was singling them out as Christians imposing private views when they believed they had acted in the public interest.

In late 2009, a few months after the AWARE incident, Thio Li-ann, a prominent law professor attending the same church as her mother, Thio Su Mien, published *Mind the Gap*. In the book, Thio, who as a nominated Member of Parliament was a vocal opponent of the repeal of the penal code criminalizing gay acts, laid out a theology for Pentecostal activism. In her work the foundational imaginary is the nation as a city under siege (Thio 2009, 27). Thio worries about the "the protective wall that divides society from the corrupting influence of sin, evil and immorality." "A gap," for Thio (2009, 98, 101), "means a breach in the defences," which requires one to "stand before God on behalf of the land," "to be God's appointed advocate to speak up for a situation or the state of a country as an intercessor," and to fight "against satanic spiritual forces." God would bring destruction "if the degree and scale of sin in our societies crosses a threshold, and if there is no one to stand in the gap" (Thio 2009, 123). Thus far, these attitudes are still within the domain of the LoveSingapore spiritual warfare theology.

The new element that Thio brings to the table is a theology that makes sense of the private-public divide and redefines it in Pentecostal terms. Lawlessness, as connoted by anomie, a derivation of the Greek word for law in the New Testament, forms the fulcrum of her argument. It is "a spiritual condition" for Thio (2009, 124–125), one that resides in the most private realm, but that "breeds disorder and a sickness in the body politic, undermining civic virtue and an ethos of community responsibility and ultimately, undermining the common good." Lawlessness is the internal rejection of God's law and truth, but is manifested materially in the "moral barometer" of sexuality, proceeding from the degradation of the body through sexual impurity to "due penalty received in bodies" of homosexuals and, finally, to unlivable laws and social anarchy (Thio 2009, 131). She argues that the "purpose of Christian engagement in the public square" is not to establish a theocracy but to "deepen democracy" so that Christians can fight "the spirit of lawlessness" by presenting "an alternative, superior approach towards the task of regulating state and

society," and ultimately, "not to win arguments by the force of our reason and logic, but to turn the hearts of those estranged from their Creator back home" (Thio 2009, 165–66). In other words, Christians must bring the truth and lawfulness they have cultivated in their private lives out to concretely influence the public sphere and keep lawlessness at bay, so that non-Christians will have a chance of discovering God's law in their private lives.

The ideal "religion-state relations" for Thio (2009, 301) is "co-operation" and "accommodation." It becomes apparent that the wall whose gap Christians need to stand in is the state. The "barbarians at the gate" are "militant secularists" who demand "the exclusion of religious voices from the public square," so that "religiously influenced values" would not "challenge hedonistic values such as sexual diversity/perversity" (Thio 2009, 309). In this view, the barbarians come in many shades such as "humanism," "materialism," "moral relativism," "situational ethics," "radical liberalism," and "secular fundamentalism," but they are united by their sexual liberalism, which they use to breach the walls and spread lawlessness so that God's law cannot take root (Thio 2009, 210). Their latest battering ram is to cast homosexuality as a human right to bring about secularist "moral imperialism." Thio (2009, 187) writes, "Calling a human wrong a human right is neocolonialism by any other name, which smells as foul." The redoubling of ambivalence as indigenization appears again, as the West is vilified for its moral decay. For Thio, the exemplary hybrid figure is the Roman centurion who turned to Jesus to help heal his beloved servant in the Bible (Luke 7), as he was a representative of the state, but "loved the nation of Israel," and "had no satanic anti-Semitic spirit in him." The centurion built a synagogue "to facilitate the freedom of religious worship," and, most importantly, submitted to God's authority (Thio 2009, 309). This portends another displacement of proselytization, unto the state itself.

Conclusion

Pentecostals in Singapore command a great deal of economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital. Among all the religions, they are in the best position to challenge the pluralist secularism that the strong developmental state has nurtured for over 40 years. This pluralist secularism is deep and extensive in Singapore. It is extensive in its operation through the various differentiated spheres and deep in its ability to self-police with minimal state intervention. It is this extensiveness and depth that the Pentecostals have shown up in their attempts to displace evangelism into the differentiated spheres. Witness thus the faltering media, marketplace, and public sphere ministry undertaken by the Pentecostals, which when successful leads to the secularization of their ministry, and when failing offers a situation in which Christian authenticity is only strenuously maintained. Also, witness the intense public scrutiny and backlash by individual citizens and even fellow church members reinforcing the rhetoric of maintaining "religious harmony" when the Pentecostals failed to conform to the secularity of the differentiated spheres they have crossed into. In spite of their

command of a wealth of resources, Pentecostals have failed to move the secularism entrenched in the public sphere *because* of its grounding in religious pluralism.

Beaten back into the private realm of prayer, reflection and writing, the Pentecostals have displaced their failures into articulations of Chinese Christianity. The sum of these articulations has the potential to evolve into a new indigenous Christian identity that narrates the exemplary hybrid Asian Christian whose calling is to challenge the secularity of Western origins and immoral permutations. The cause is aided by the Pentecostals' embrace of new technologies and media and the sectarian diversity that has allowed the Pentecostals to launch forays into different spheres and articulate divergent theologies. Thio's theology of "the gap" is the latest installment that portends the next foray into the public sphere, this time with the Pentecostals more aware of the pluralist secularism they are seeking to challenge. However, one Asian city would not make for a second Reformation that the Pentecostals themselves hope for. The extant spread and growth of Pentecostalism in Asia, for which the Singaporean Pentecostals are partly responsible, may well give birth to a new vision of the Protestant ethic. But whether it would be a switchman and, if so, for which tracks of history remains to be seen, for the Pentecostals of Singapore have not yet been able to move the pluralist secularism that restrains their core evangelical purpose and guards the exemplary Asian city of neoliberal capitalism.

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Chapter 8
Performing Identities: State-ISKCON Interactions in Singapore

Rodney Sebastian

Religious Managerialism in Singapore

This chapter discusses the growth and expansion of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), popularly referred to as the "Hare Krishnas," within the context of the socio-political situation in Singapore. It will focus on the interactions between the State and ISKCON and the strategies undertaken by the latter to establish its presence in Singapore. The choice of Singapore serves as a suitable exemplar of a dynamic cosmopolitan city-state composed of people from a variety of religious orientations and a democratic authoritarian government. Moreover, the availability of a range of empirical studies on religiosity in Singapore and the benefit of a rich database of policies of a four-decade rule of a single political party renders the Singapore state an ideal case study. ISKCON, which until the late 1980s was widely accepted as a world-rejecting new religious movement (NRM) both in Western and Asian societies, serves as a good example of a classic NRM that emerged during the counterculture period in the 1960s and has undergone various forms of internal and external transformations in its struggle for survival and expansion. The intersection of a new authoritarian state exercising a large measure of control over the lives of its citizens who are engaged in meeting the state's objective of material prosperity and modernization with that of a new but traditional religious movement with monastic inclinations and whose proselytizing methods are deliberately of high public visibility promises to be a dramatic encounter. According to Rosalind Hackett, the right to express and practice one's religion is subject to restrictions that can be imposed by the state in the interests of public order, security, and decency (Hackett 2008). Specifically the recognition of the right to proselytize in any particular context is a good indicator of respect for the range of

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rights related to freedom of religion and belief. It is often the minority or sectarian groups like ISKCON that are the litmus test, and therefore its measure of freedom to proselytize in Singapore will be discussed here (Hunter and Price 2001).

The constitution of Singapore states that every person has the right to profess and practice his or her religion and to propagate it. Every religious group has the right to manage its own religious affairs, to establish and maintain institutions for religious or charitable purposes, to acquire and own property, and to hold and administer it in accordance with law. Religious groups also have the right to establish and maintain institutions for the education of children and to provide instruction in their own religion, but there must be no discrimination on the grounds of religion in any law relating to such institutions. Although the constitution is mostly honored, the state is prepared to suppress, exploit, control, or mold religion or religious groups to achieve its objectives of economic development and social stability. State officials have on many occasions explicitly voiced the need to regulate religious movements in a way that renders them complementary to wider national interests (Wee 1989; Clammer 1991). Religious groups are directly or indirectly accorded preferential social space by the state. Indirect designation occurs through the existing legal framework, which compels religious movements to adjust themselves accordingly without active interference by the state. Direct designation occurs when the state utilizes punitive measures to exercise control over particular religious groups or individuals who cross the preset socio-religious boundaries.

The enclosed and integrated system of governance in Singapore resonates with Ralph Miliband's definition of the state as a supreme central power comprising a set of institutions including the government, the legislature, the bureaucracy, the judiciary, the police, and the armed forces (Miliband 1969). Also, Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony aptly describes the state's management of religion by characterizing it as a form of domination that is performed in a coercive sense—"calibrated coercion" (Gramsci 1973). To stay in power, members of the ruling group need to convince their subjects that they are working for the benefit of the citizens and that it is commonsensical and natural for the citizens to assimilate the values espoused by the state (Kong 1993). Social control imposed by the ruling group is likely to be accepted voluntarily by the governed as necessary in order to achieve certain desirable objectives (Chua 1995). Consequently, policies and actions are supported by the majority of the people and the power of the ruling group is uncontested. The Singapore Government uses such hegemonic tactics to argue that its method of managing diverse religious groups is the most practical and beneficial for Singaporeans. Regulation of religion is chiefly aimed towards the prevention of conflict (Ling 1987). The state officially declares itself to be secular, and secularism is advocated as a practical approach to manage multi-religiosity in a neutral way (Sinha 1999).

The Singapore government's ideological formation has been thoroughly analyzed by Chua Beng Huat,[1] and its model of interventionist and experimental secularization has been summarized by Søren Christensen (2007) in a chronological four-phase typology. To summarize, from independence to the late 1970s, against the

[1]Chua, *Communitarian Ideology and Democracy in Singapore.*

backdrop of three racial riots and the battle with communalistic policies during the merger with Malaysia, the Singaporean government took a conservative stance on matters related to race and religion. State-run programs of secularization aimed to diffuse communal tensions by ensuring people would increasingly conduct themselves in terms of secular values as opposed to religious ones. In the immediate aftermath of the separation from Malaysia in 1965, the need for survival was emphasized and the pursuit of material education and economic progress were established as vanguards of nation-building, effectively relegating religion to the backdrop of private space. From the late 1970s to the mid-1980s, however, religion would occupy a more central role, as the countercultural phenomenon that burgeoned in the United States in the 1970s had a deep impact on Singapore's leaders. The Singaporean government observed that secular modernism led to hedonism and a degradation of social mores and embarked on a campaign against what it perceived to be elements of the counterculture phenomenon on its own soil.[2] Religion was considered the cultural "software" that had to be "programmed" into Asian minds in order to uphold traditional Asian values of responsibility and thrift in the face of frivolous "Westernization" (Lee 1979). Thus the state introduced a compulsory "Religious Knowledge" program in schools, which encouraged Singaporeans to preserve their cultural heritage (Pereira 2005). However from the late 1980s, this policy was reversed, due to some unexpected consequences. In an infamous episode labeled "the Marxist conspiracy," state officials detained 16 Catholic activists for allegedly having "subversive" associations with leftist ideologies. Making an example of this case, state officials emphasized that the government does not tolerate the invasion of political space by religious bodies (Tong 2007). This incident, coupled with perceived increased religiosity and proselytization, caused the state to realize that enthusiasm for religion was expressed in unintended ways by the Asian values program. Subsequently it was terminated and replaced by a civics/moral education program, which would incorporate aspects of nation-building and an awareness of our shared values. Furthermore, in 1990, the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act (MRHA) was passed to prevent religious groups from being used for political purposes and from criticizing one another. Throughout the 1990s, religion kept a relatively low profile in the public scene, but was propelled into the spotlight in the wake of the September 11, 2001, attacks as a security issue. In August 2002, local members of the Al-Qaeda-linked terrorist network Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) were arrested, and a few weeks later, four Muslim girls were suspended from school for violating rules on school uniform by wearing the *tudung* (Malay term for a Muslim headscarf). The issue escalated into a matter of the highest state concern. Complex debates, which revolved around the concepts of common space versus private space and religiosity versus secularism, ensued in parliament following the highly dramatized incidents. It is clear that while the state expects religion not to intrude into what it demarcates as "common space," it has no intention of letting religion unfold unrestrictedly in its own private spaces. In the following section, I will discuss some theoretical concepts that will be useful in examining state-religion relations in the context of the physical and social space accorded to NRMs in Singapore's plural society.

[2]Christensen, "The Conduct of Religious Conduct," 11.

State-NRM Interactions: Theoretical Frameworks

James Beckford's framework of situating NRMs in the context of the relationship between movements and members and between the movements and their host societies is particularly applicable in making sense of the state-ISKCON interactions in Singapore. It "insists on the need to take seriously the patterns of social relationships through which NRMs are active in society," and highlights "public controversies" as important instances of such activity (Fig. 8.1) (Beckford 1985).

The vertical axis (internal) of Beckford's framework represents the relationship between members and movement while the horizontal (external) represents the relationship between the movement and society. The *devotee* label on the vertical axis is consigned to those who devote themselves fully to the promotion of their movement's values, teachings, and material security. Relations with people who are not fellow members are attenuated. The devotee relationship is further characterized by submission to an authority having dominion over virtually all aspects of life including the member's material conditions (Beckford 1985, 82). The *adept* "combines a high degree of commitment to an NRM with periods of involvement in kinship, affectual, economic, and occupational relations extending beyond its boundaries," while the *client* "accepts whatever the movements are offering—wisdom, skills, therapy, friendship—on a contractual basis with very limited assumptions about the movements' impact on the conduct of their life" (Beckford 1985, 83). *Patrons* are those who do not take up positions of responsibility but contribute by offering moral support, material assistance, and occasional advice for services.

As for the external mode of insertion in society, *refuge* refers to cases where the NRM disengage from society and few attempts are made to reform the outside

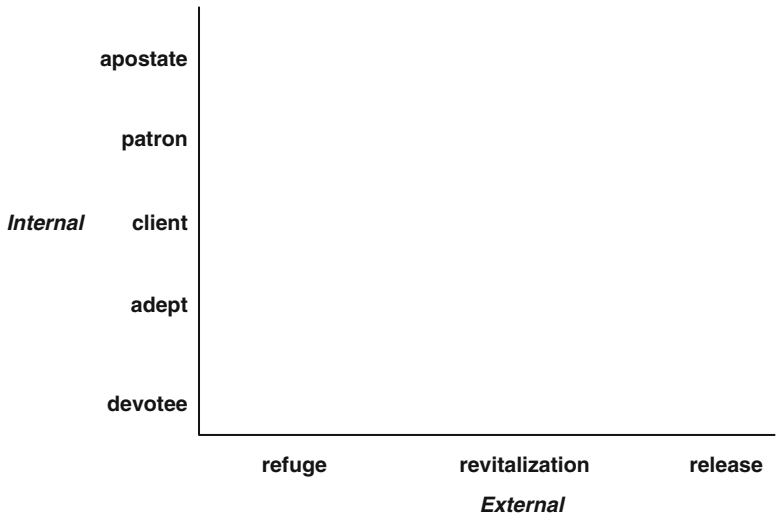

Fig. 8.1 Beckford's framework

world. Numbers or material prosperity does not measure the success of the movement, "unless they occur in conjunction with spiritual achievements corresponding to utopian ideals" (Beckford 1985, 85–87). Some early ISKCON congregations where entry into monkhood was encouraged and temple and farm communities were the norm are examples of *refuge* relationships with society. *Revitalization* refers to a deliberate attempt to transform important social processes and institutions through the application of distinctive values rooted in comprehensive meaning-systems (Beckford 1985, 87). A balance must be sought between confronting society and compromising with it by working with existing arrangements. The final category of *release* refers to NRMs that specialize in offering to release people from conditions allegedly obstructing the full realization of their potential. The sale and delivery of "release" services often marks the conclusion of the relationship between the movement and the client, and success is directly assessed in terms of sales and performance (Beckford 1985, 89). It should be noted that it is possible for a single NRM to simultaneously have several modes of insertion in society in accordance with its particular interaction with the external world in different circumstances and times and with different ways of managing its members. Beckford also adds that the changing fortune of NRMs could be due to general shifts in public sentiment or taste (Beckford 1985, 79). It will be shown in this chapter how ISKCON changes its modes of relationships with its own members and the society, in order to adapt to the pluralistic environment in which it aims to proselytize. This environment is regulated by the state, which interacts with different religious movements in particular ways to control proselytization and achieve its own objectives of social stability and economic development.

While Beckford's model situates NRMs in a range of relationships with members and society at a macro-level, symbolic interactionism is useful for studying the specific interaction between the state and religious movements at the micro-level. It illustrates how social reality is formed through interactions and performances by agents. It rationalizes changing, continually readjusting social processes by viewing agents as role-taking actors negotiating with one another to create temporary, socially constructed relations which remain in a state of constant flux governed by a relatively stable framework, as demonstrated by Beckford. Erving Goffman's dramaturgical model uses the analogy of theater whereby social behavior is scripted. When agents interact with each other, they employ symbolic devices to "manage" the impression others receive from them (Reynolds 1993). Social behavior is therefore a performance by actors whose objective is to control the impression others have of him/her (Goffman 1959). Religious groups adopt specific performances in relation to the state to gain legitimacy and ensure survival.[3]

[3]For example, in this volume (Chap. 11), Neena Mahadev describes how the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka has distanced itself from the charismatic elements of Christianity, such as faith-healing and praise and worship sessions, and instead engages in a performance of "sobriety" and in dialogue with Buddhist nationalist political figures to ensure continuity of their established religious space.

In the hegemonic city of Singapore, both the state and religious movements stage performances in the public sphere (front region). The state clearly defines its expectations and boundaries for the role of religious movements through the stage provided by the media and by the establishment of laws. In a bid to produce an image of fairness, the state claims to be neutral to all religions. In turn, religious movements, which seek state approval, strive to meet these expectations through a performance of charity work, inter-faith dialogues, and other social welfare activities. These state-approved activities are carried out in the front stage of the movements' expressed constitutions, websites, public programs, and so forth. As for the backstage, Goffman explains that the actor "can ready himself or herself for the next performance; in the back region, partially shorn of social costuming, the individual can be more of himself or herself."[4] In the case of many religious movements, the primary motive in the backstage is to expand and increase the number of followers. Simultaneously, in the back region of the state, where policies are debated by executive powers such as the cabinet, the main objective for a secular state dominated by a singular political party such as Singapore's would presumably be to harness religion to cultivate a population of subservient, disciplined and hard-working citizens who contribute to economic development and social stability. This was revealed in the summary of the history of the Singapore government's ideological formation in the previous section. These motives may not be very palatable for the public stage, so the state engages in "private" operatives in the backstage, such as disallowing potentially threatening religious movements from being officially registered and barring their foreign preachers from entry. When coherence between the state and religious movement is negotiated, the latter enjoys a privileged position in the public space as one of the pillars of society. Religious movements whose performances do not fit into the state's ideal vision due to fundamental differences of opinion on ideology or due to the acts of leaders and members would be perceived and treated unfavorably by the state. However, positions are not definitive. They are subject to changes; one "faux pas" can break down the relationship between the state and the religious movement.[5] The case of Madan Mohan Das is one example. Madan Mohan Dasa, a *devotee* monk from the Krishna Mandir, one of the societies representing ISKCON in Singapore, was detained in 2009 for 5 days by the military police for failing to cut his *sikha*,[6] and for not eating the food provided by the Singapore Armed Forces during his National Service. In protest to the detention, a member of the Krishna Mandir put up an online petition titled, "Hindu priest suffers heavy religious assault during National Service in Singapore," and claimed that Madan Mohan Das and his father, the president of the temple, were on a fast to protest his detention. Two days later, after denunciation from the state, they took down the petition and apologized for causing "a lot of hardship to the Singapore government in

[4]Reynolds, *Interactionism: Exposition and Critique*, 101.

[5]Ibid., 7.

[6]A *sikha* is a tuft of hair kept at the back of the head by traditional Vaishnavas and Brahmins.

the matter of the Hindu priest in NS" and promised "to abide by the SAF's conditions on him in the best interest of the nation."[7] The Singapore *Straits Times* reported the issue and mentioned that Madan Mohan Das had dropped the protest only after, "he found out that he could face 3 years in detention."[8] The success of the performance depends on the tactful interaction between co-actors and/or audience. To prevent embarrassment and the disruption of the social process, actors often engage in what Goffman calls "impression management." This refers to the way that actors supervise their own performances to avoid being interrupted. If actors say or do something unsuitable to their performance, they may seek to redeem themselves quickly by saying or doing something to re-harmonize it, as in the case of the Madan Mohan Das' apology. The rest of this chapter will illustrate in more detail how this process of performance on the part of the State and ISKCON has played out.

ISKCON: An Evolving Global NRM

This section will be focused on how ISKCON has adapted to changing global and local circumstances. This will enable a deeper understanding of the worldview and rationalization processes employed by ISKCON members in Singapore to negotiate their identity. ISKCON is a modern and global branch of the movement inaugurated by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in the sixteenth century. Drawing from monotheistic Vaishnava teachings and the Vedic scriptures, Chaitanya taught that the constitutional position of every living entity or soul (*jiva)*, is to be established in a loving devotional relationship of service to the Supreme God, Krishna in the spiritual world. This renders the soul the highest bliss, eternity, and complete knowledge. The living entity in the material world transmigrates through different species of life and finally comes to the human form of life where it is given an opportunity to revive its relationship with Krishna through the practice of *bhakti yoga* (devotional service) under the guidance of a spiritual master or guru. The principles of *bhakti yoga* taught in ISKCON as in other traditional Vaishnava schools are to always engage one's senses in devotional service by hearing, chanting, and remembering Krishna's names, forms, pastimes and qualities. ISKCON's practices of singing Krishna's names in public and distributing literature about Krishna and Vaishnava philosophy are based on this principle. Members of ISKCON believe that all living beings who hear the chanting of the names of Krishna will accrue permanent spiritual credit. The highly visible public chanting is thus considered the greatest type of welfare work which will bring about peace, individually and collectively.

Historically, the movement has met with opposition from various sections of society both in India and abroad. The first recorded instance of resistance from the

[7] "Apology for the Hindu Priest in NS Issue," http://www.thepetitionsite.com/2/help-save-madana-mohan-das/. Accessed July 7, 2011.

[8] *The Straits Times*, July 27, 2009.

state took place about 500 years ago during the time of Chaitanya, who is believed to be an incarnation of Krishna by Gaudiya Vaishnavas and who inaugurated the congregational chanting of Krishna's names (called *sankirtan* or *kirtan)*. According to the biographies of Chaitanya, the then chief magistrate of Bengal, Chand Khazi, a Muslim, had banned *sankirtans* (Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada 1987). He ordered his soldiers to enter the homes of devotees where they were taking place, confiscate, and even break the musical instruments that were used. He also threatened the devotees with arrest and forced conversion to Islam. Local Hindus who were opposed to Chaitanya's movement supported this ban claiming that God's name should be chanted silently, in the mind, and that Chaitanya and his followers were transgressing scriptural injunctions. The devotees stopped the *kirtans* out of fear and informed Chaitanya of their plans to migrate elsewhere. In response, Chaitanya ordered all the Vaishnavas to assemble on the streets of Navadvip (the then capital of Bengal) and organized a massive civil disobedience movement by personally leading the first public *sankirtan* party with thousands of his followers who had assembled with torches. The *sankirtan* party proceeded toward Chand Khazi's residence and had by then increased in numbers exponentially. Eventually Chaitanya personally met with the terrified Khazi and engaged in theological discussions with him and requested that he lift the ban on the *sankirtan* movement, which the Khazi acceded to. Similarly 500 years later, under Prabhupada's leadership, members of the movement met with a range of types of resistance for engaging in public *sankirtan*, the most severe being the imprisonment of devotees in places like Australia.[9]

Prabhupada, from his first meetings with his guru, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur, was directed to preach Chaitanya's message in English to the Western world and to print devotional literature in English (Goswami 1983). Following his guru's order, Prabhupada arrived in the US in 1965, at the age of 70 with just 40 rupees and a trunk full of books. He preached vigorously at every opportunity and soon found "ready listeners among the young and disaffected" (Knott 2000; Daner 1976), from the American counterculture or hippie movement. He established the International Society of Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) in New York in 1966. Soon Prabhupada published books profusely, started the first public *sankirtans* outside of India and *ratha yathras* (chariot processions of Krishna), and sent out missionaries to establish centers worldwide to distribute his books.[10] The movement spread to European, African, and Asian cities, and Prabhupada established over 100 temples in 11 years before passing away in 1977. To oversee the movement in his absence, Prabhupada had appointed the GBC (Governing Body Commission), a committee comprising his senior disciples. Thus, Prabhupada is widely regarded by Gaudiya Vaishnavas to have fulfilled the prediction of Chaitanya, who had said that his name would be spread in every town and village around the world. This belief would legitimize his proselytizing methods as a standard template for ISKCON members to practice in plural societies.

[9]The courts eventually permitted them to continue the public chanting. See Das (1999).

[10]Satsvarupa Das Goswami, *Srila Prabhupada Lilamrta.*

ISKCON has been described by scholars as being in a state of high tension with its environment in the mid-1970s, conforming to Beckford's typology of a *devotee* relationship with its own members and a *refuge* relationship with society (Rochford 1987). Members of the movement were economically, socially, and spiritually dependent on the movement's authorities. Like many other new religious groups, ISKCON mapped its own oppositional religious culture through its internal structure, robust practices, and symbols, which integrated members and segregated them from the perceived corrosive effects of the external secular world (Rochford 2007, 6). In the 1960s and 1970s, hippies were to attracted to the movement because it appealed to their desire to find a transcendent form of bliss: Below the large "Hare Krishna" sign outside the temple was a small placard that stated: "Stay High All the Time, Discover Eternal Bliss" (Johnson 1976).

During this period, ISKCON supported itself economically by the distribution of literature, *Back to Godhead* magazines, and incense to the public in exchange for donations.[11] These efforts combined the movement's missionary goals with its need for economic sustenance. However, the anti-cult movement was also at its peak in America during this time, and ISKCON, like the members of the Unification Church became a target of public scrutiny because of its fund-raising practices in airports and other public places, and its recruitment of young people who thereafter became world-rejecting devotees (Rochford 1987, 110). The public image of ISKCON was reshaped from a "peculiar, but essentially harmless, religious movement to a threatening and dangerous one," (Rochford 2007, 13) largely due to the anti-cult propaganda disseminated by the media. Consequently, in the late 1970s, ISKCON's communities in the US became increasingly closed religious enclaves and interaction with outsiders was limited largely to proselytizing and distributing literature (Rochford 1985, 159–160).

In the 1980s, the post-Prabhupada years, a serious issue threatened ISKCON. An economic crisis arose as revenues from its literature distribution plunged, and ISKCON's communal structure became unsustainable and disintegrated. Thereafter, ISKCON became a congregationally-based movement composed mainly of independent nuclear families (Rochford 1985, 7). The proportion of householders had far outnumbered unmarried renunciates. By the 1990s, the majority of devotees had regular jobs outside of the movement and mostly visited the temples on weekends and festival days (Rochford 1985, 52–73). Thus began the shift from *devotee* to *adept* for ISKCON's internal relationship with members. Proselytization was no longer aimed at enjoining recruits to live in the temple, but rather to get them to practice Krishna consciousness at home.

Another major phenomenon that altered the mosaic of ISKCON members is the large influx of Hindu Indian migrants in ISKCON temples worldwide from the 1980s, especially in the United States and United Kingdom. They were instrumental in ensuring ISKCON's survival through their donations and supported the movement during attacks from the anti-cult movement in the United States

[11] Prominent places like airports and busy streets were selected for this. See Rochford (1985).

(Rochford 1985, 181–184). Beckford's model would refer to them as *patrons*. Estimates indicate that in 2005, a considerable majority of ISKCON's approximately 50,000-member North American congregation was of Indian descent (Rochford 1985, 182). This was a significant departure from ISKCON's early demographics.

Prabhupada had actually wanted to maintain a non-sectarian identity for ISKCON that would transcend the label of Hinduism. However in later years, as a response to negative publicity, ISKCON adopted strategies aimed at fostering a more positive public image by aligning its social position more closely with the dominant culture and its religious institutions (Rochford 1984). The main purpose of these efforts was to convince the public that ISKCON was a legitimate religious movement and not a deviant and threatening group. This corresponds to Goffman's dramaturgical model where ISKCON engages in *impression management* to re-harmonize its image in society. One example of such efforts was in 1980, when the North American GBC declared its intention to alter ISKCON's public image from that of a "cult" to a "denomination of the Hindu Church" (Rochford 1985, 271). For Indians, ISKCON temples and restaurants where authentic Indian meals were served were avenues of cultural and religious affirmation in a new environment (Rochford 2007, 183). This was especially so when Indian immigration increased in the United States and Canada from the 1960s, when there were hardly any Hindu temples to serve their needs (Rochford 2007, 183). One result of this phenomenon, termed the "Hinduization of ISKCON," has been that Western devotees perceive a dilution of ISKCON's original practices, as Indian Hindus have inadvertently introduced their social and religious beliefs in temples, such as the worship of other Hindu gods who are considered to be demigods or agents of Krishna, and social rituals such as marriage ceremonies and *holi* festivals (Rochford 2007, 188–200).

ISKCON in Singapore: Taking Root (1970s)

In this section I will discuss the history of ISKCON in Singapore from its inception in 1971 to the present, by focusing on the state's management of the movement and the proselytization strategies adopted by members in response. The research was mainly conducted in Singapore, with the occasional visit to Malaysia to interview devotees who had played key roles in the development of the Hare Krishna movement in the city-state.[12] The data was collected through participant observation and

[12]I had also written to the Ministry of Home Affairs, which oversees the management of religion in Singapore to request an interview. I was hoping to get the official viewpoint on religious movements and to verify the claims made by ISKCON members. However my request was declined and I was provided with a general message which said that the government maintains a neutral position on religious matters and acts only to maintain social harmony and cohesion and that, "No one is allowed to break our laws with impunity or act in a fashion that undermines national interest on account of his religious beliefs." This response reflects the official viewpoint that was discussed in the previous sections.

interviews with informants.[13] I interviewed 30 devotees, ranging from the age of 21 to 60, targeting those who played key roles and/or who were leaders from various groups. Because of the sensitive nature of the topic involved and due to ethical considerations, I will not reveal the real names of my respondents. Instead, they will be referred to as respondents A, B, C, and so on.[14] Where real names are revealed, these refer to public or historical personalities whose actions and words are available in the public domain.

Expansion of ISKCON in Singapore was already envisaged as early as 1970. In a letter to a disciple, Prabhupada wrote that preaching in Singapore would be good for two reasons. The first was that, like Hong Kong, Singapore was an English-speaking country, so it would not be difficult for his Western disciples to communicate. Second, there were many Indians there who would support the movement (Janananda Das 1996). In 1971, Prabhupada sent two of his disciples to Singapore. They would go door-to-door selling books during the day, and in the evenings, hold programs in houses and temples. The Indians, especially the Sindhis, were receptive to the devotees, probably because Krishna worship is popular in their culture . They also received positive coverage from the local newspapers (Janananda Das 1996, 14). When Prabhupada heard about the developments in Singapore, he sent two more of his disciples there. He especially encouraged his disciples and admonished them to recruit Singaporean Chinese:

> If we can get some Chinese followers of this cult, it will be a great success. I know that amongst the Chinese there are so many scholars and learned, cultured gentlemen. So to convince them will be easier than others, even though they are of the Buddhist philosophy. That is akin to our philosophy, although it is a little different.[15]

In March 1971, Prabhupada was to come for a short stay on his way to Australia from India. There was a program arranged at the Srinivas Perumal temple where a crowd of a 1,000 people had gathered. However, Prabhupada and his entourage were barred from going beyond the customs checkpoint at the airport. According to several biographies and accounts from devotees, this was the only such incident in the world. ISKCON's official biography of Prabhupada describes this visit as follows:

> Prabhupada travelled with three disciples: Syamasundara as his secretary, Pradyumna as his servant and Sanskrit editor, and Nandakumara as his cook. The first stop was Singapore, where, without explanation, immigration authorities refused Prabhupada entry into the

[13] I gathered insights into the respondents' lives and perceptions through weekly interactions, friendships, informal conversations, and socializing, as well as from recorded interviews. Prior to conducting this research, I had already developed a personal interest in Gaudiya Vaishnavism, had begun attending programs, and had become vegetarian. The advantages of participant observation, developing friendships with devotees, and displaying a genuine personal interest in Vaishnava philosophy and culture allowed me to gain the trust of the devotees and garner deeper insights into their perspectives.

[14] The suffix "Das" will be used for male initiated members, as that is how they are addressed in devotee circles.

[15] Letter to Bali Mardan, June 2, 1971.

> country. Sympathetic Indians in Singapore had arranged for Prabhupada to lecture and had even mailed hundreds of invitations, but Srila Prabhupada, disappointed and feeling ill, had to continue the twelve-hour flight to Sydney.[16]

The exact reasons for Prabhupada's not being allowed entry into Singapore are unclear, but the city-state has gained notoriety in ISKCON's historical discourse for being the only country to have barred their founder. The biographies of Prabhupada written by his disciples will ensure that these episodes will be entrenched in the minds of future generations of ISKCON devotees, both international and local. Currently, explanations such as "the government suspected him of being a CIA agent," and "the devotees with Prabhupada didn't know how to talk" are common in devotee circles. However it is likely that the Singapore government had perceived ISKCON to be a product of the much abhorred American counterculture phenomenon. This thesis is supported by the fact that just prior to the restriction on Prabhupada's entry, two of his disciples were also not allowed to re-enter Singapore after an engagement in Malaysia.[17] Thus the back stage operatives of the state come into play; preachers whom the state perceives to be potentially disruptive to the socio-religious settings are discriminated against, and this is not officially declared in public.

In 1973, Prabhupada initiated a Chinese student (who will be referred to as A. Das) in Melbourne and whose family was living in Singapore. Later, two Singaporean Indian devotees were also initiated by Prabhupada through mail. This batch of devotees, led by A. Das began conducting weekly devotional programs at his home on Gardenia Road. In response to their efforts, Prabhupada wrote what was to be his final instruction for Singapore through a letter to A. Das in May 1977:

> I am very pleased with your activities there [Singapore] and advise you to go on with *kirtan*. You say there is a small community there taking part in *kirtan* and *prasadam* [food offered to Krishna] distribution, so try to increase it as far as possible, according to time and place in the situation you find in Singapore…..hold *kirtans* with your friends, read passages from my books, distribute *prasadam* and try to get more people to read the books….You don't need to establish a temple, but gradually get funds and organize.

Besides the handful of members who joined and a respectable number of books being sold, ISKCON had limited success in Singapore in terms of the number of recruits during this early period. Singapore was a young nation, fresh from independence from its colonial master and separation from neighboring Malaysia, intent on achieving material success by educating and training its people for a fast-paced industrial economy. The circumstances in the West, such as the resentment over war and the frustration and disenchantment associated with industrialization, were absent. Given that no temple had been established in Singapore and that Prabhupada and his American disciples were restricted in their movements, it was difficult if not impossible to apply the methods that had proven to be highly successful in other

[16] Satsvarupa Das Goswami, *Srila Prabhupada Lilamrta*, 89.

[17] Jananananda Das, *Prabhupada in Malaysia*, 26.

parts of the world. Moreover, unlike the United States, where ethnic Indians did not become members until considerably later, most of the early recruits in the movement in Singapore were Indians.

The Post-Prabhupada Era (1977–Mid-1990s)

Some of the devotees attending the initial house programs on Gardenia Road wanted to adopt a strategy of propagating Krishna consciousness that was more analogous to Prabhupada's methods in other parts of the world. This group, headed by B. Das (one of the Singaporean Indian disciples of Prabhupada), set up a center in a house near Seletar Airbase and later shifted to Wellington Road. This was the first of several cycles of schism to occur later. This group was unofficially recognized as representing ISKCON due to its orthodoxy and allegiance to the worldwide ISKCON movement and was overseen by a European GBC guru. By 1979, as in other ISKCON temples, some Singaporeans joined "full-time,"[18] adopting Beckford's "devotee" relationship with society and living in the center. However the progress that was made was short-lived because in 1981, the then GBC-guru in charge of Singapore was found out to have violated his spiritual vows and was excommunicated from ISKCON due to his various transgressions. As in other parts of the world, the "fall-down" of the guru had a devastating effect on the congregation.[19] Many of them left, but a few devotees continued to pledge loyalty to him and carried on with programs in various places such as the Balasubramaniam temple and in different houses. They even registered a society called "Prabhupada Yoga Meditation Centre" and published newsletters and distributed several books. This group was especially successful in recruiting Chinese members, not least because its leader was a Chinese Malaysian.

In 1985, another group of devotees led by B. Das established a Hare Krishna center in Singapore. Over the next decade, the center shifted to various places adapting to the size of the congregation, rental costs, and the available facilities. This period also saw significant developments in the expansion of the movement in Singapore. From 1987 to 1989, the devotees set up a bookshop called "Govinda's Gifts" in Little India's Serangoon Plaza. One respondent revealed that the bookshop was instrumental in propagating Krishna consciousness to many people. In 1989, a patron offered the devotees a registered but defunct society called the Shiv Mandir to carry out their activities. They gladly accepted the offer and took over the society. Thus for some years, mainstream ISKCON was represented in Singapore through this society. With reference to Goffman's model, the movement

[18] To "join full-time" is a colloquial term used in ISKCON to refer to members who give up their job or studies to live and serve in the temple.

[19] An ISKCON member is considered to have "fallen-down" when he or she breaks one of the four regulative principles of no meat-eating, illicit sex, intoxication, and gambling.

stages a performance of an officially accepted religious society in the front stage while continuing to strategize and organize ISKCON's proselytizing activities in the back stage.

Despite the unfavorable environment, there were attempts to implement aspects of ISKCON's worldwide practices within the local context. C. Das recalled that the famous practice of chanting in public streets, or *sankirtan*, was attempted in Orchard Road in the late 1980s:

> ….we had it twice in Orchard Road. In 1988 they closed the streets once a month in the weekend and let you do whatever you want. We took that as an opportunity and had *kirtan* there. Our pictures came out in the Straits Times and Chinese newspapers. But after the second time, they thought "oh-oh we never thought these Hare Krishnas would be coming and chanting" [laughs]. So they stopped that and said from now on we will organize the activities. So that was the end of the *sankirtan* in Orchard Road.

In other places, like Melbourne, ISKCON devotees were routinely arrested for street *sankirtan* before it was finally allowed. These instances serve as examples of religious groups' attempts to lay claims to public space in modern secular, pluralistic societies so as to achieve their spiritual objectives.

The strained relationship between the movement and the State was exacerbated due to an incident that took place in 1989, when a group of South Indian Singaporeans objected to a North Indian Hindu festival, *Dussera*, based on the epic *Ramayana*, which had been organized by ISKCON devotees. Lord Rama's victory was celebrated by burning an effigy of Ravana and Kumbhakarna. A reporter from the *Tamil Murasu* (a local Tamil newspaper) interviewed one of the organizers and published an article in a controversial tone. It gave an account of the festival based on the interview with the spokesperson of the Shiv Mandir and contained responses to the following questions: "Aryan or Dravidian?"; "Isn't Ravana a human too?"; "What's the objective?"; and, "Would it be appropriate for Singapore?"[20] After the festival, the ISD called up the devotees and told them not to hold the festival anymore because it had agitated some members of the South Indian community. One respondent claimed that he came to know that the South Indians who objected to the festival were actually Sri Lankan Tamils, who were a minority, and that they had lodged complaints to the Hindu Endowments Board, the Hindu Advisory Board, and the Ministry of Home Affairs. A *faux pas* had been committed by ISKCON Singapore and in a show of compliance with the Internal Security Department's demands, the festival was not celebrated again.

A practice that is a significant aspect of ISKCON's proselytizing activities is the distribution of Prabhupada's books. Prabhupada would relish hearing about the scores of books that were sold worldwide and would repeatedly express his pleasure, which would in turn encourage devotees to distribute more. In Singapore, a large number of books were distributed through book fairs and door-to-door distribution especially in the late 1980s and mid-1990s. C. Das reported that at one time Singapore was the country with the fourth largest number of books sold in Asia.

[20] *Tamil Murasu*, October 14, 1989.

He said, "About 150–200 books used to be sold on a daily basis and anything less than a $1,000 worth of books sold was considered a disaster." The population density of Singapore and the close proximity of apartments in HDB estates were the likely factors contributing to this success. The door-to-door distribution of literature is a discreet and strategic form of proselytization in secular space, where direct preaching is frowned upon as a threat to the dominant mode of state-sanctioned religious pluralism. Research on this particular form of proselytization is likely to reveal several layers of strategic communications employed by the book distributor.

A few attempts had been made to register ISKCON as a religious society in Singapore, but they had all failed.[21] The Registrar of Societies in Singapore carefully examines applications for the registration of religious societies, in contrast to the ease with which corporate companies and welfare social societies[22] are allowed to formally register. C. Das, the former vice-president of the Shiv Mandir, narrated how one particular attempt had worsened the relations between the state and the movement. In 1995, the devotees from Shiva Mandir were able to register ISKCON as a company, as opposed to a society. Then in 1996, the GBC in charge of Singapore, an American *sannyasi*,[23] wrote to the Singapore Embassy in the United States to persuade the Singapore authorities to allow "ISKCON Singapore" to be registered as a branch of the international movement. ISKCON's official magazine, *Back to Godhead*, was sent along with the letter. When the Ministry of Home Affairs in Singapore received the petition, they noticed that in the list of worldwide ISKCON centers printed in the magazine, there was an entry for "ISKCON Singapore" and the Shiv Mandir's address was displayed. The Singapore officials were concerned that even before they had given approval to register the society, the devotees had publicized themselves as "ISKCON Singapore." The Internal Security Department (ISD) interviewed the president of Shiv Mandir about the issue and found out that the devotees had been giving out name cards with "ISKCON Singapore" printed on them. When the devotees responded that they had registered ISKCON as a company, the state authorities instructed them to deregister it. They were allowed to continue their activities under the auspices of the Shiv Mandir but were told not to allow any foreign preachers to visit. Respondents revealed that the ISD had also asked the devotees to change the name of the society, as "they felt it was a misnomer," since they were not devotees of Shiva. Eventually the name was changed to Sri Krishna Mandir after negotiation with the ISD. According to a former vice-president of the temple, the authorities had also said that, "They don't want to see any young people joining the movement and

[21] In contrast to ISKCON, the Yiguan Dao sect formally registered itself as *Tong Tou Teck Hwee* in Singapore, a moral society that promotes Confucian values and Chinese culture. The group did not register as a religion at least in part due to its illegal status in China and Taiwan and the negative views held by orthodox Chinese religions. See Francis Lim Khek Ghee's Chap. 9 in this volume.

[22] Religious organizations that are registered as welfare societies are not allowed to proselytize under the guise of welfare organizations, which could explain why ISKCON was not registered as a welfare society.

[23] A monk in the renounced order of life according to Vedic precepts.

people chanting on the streets like in the Western countries." B. Das, the president of Shiv Mandir, subsequently communicated the ban on foreign devotees to the ISKCON GBC and ISKCON centers worldwide. This incident shows that the state feels threatened by ISKCON's public visibility and its potential to attract the youth. The state holds the perception that such activities of proselytization may disturb the fragile platform of social stability it has built up in Singapore's plural society. As per Goffman, another *faux pas* had been committed by ISKCON. The state took the opportunity to censure the movement and impose restrictions. ISKCON then engaged in impression management to reharmonize its relationship with the state.

By the late 1990s, some devotees had broken away from the Krishna Mandir due to differences of opinion over the post-Prabhupada succession in ISKCON. This group mainly conducted programs in houses and Hindu temples and continued to host their gurus in Singapore despite the unofficial ban. The foreign gurus and preachers would dress in ordinary clothes to gain entry to Singapore. They were not always successful. One respondent narrated how his guru who had been wearing ordinary clothes was greeted by an immigration official (who had probably noticed his neckbeads) with "Hare Krishna." Thinking the official was a devotee, the guru returned the greeting by responding "Hare Krishna." He was promptly turned away. Other ISKCON *sannyasis*, feeling that it was taboo to change out of their saffron robes, avoided Singapore altogether. This restriction on foreign devotees has continued to the present.[24] One respondent reported that in 2003, an Australian ISKCON devotee and his family of six were refused entry into Singapore by officials at the immigration services desk. The officials, according to this devotee, said that they had been given orders not to let any ISKCON devotees into the country, and that they did not know why this directive had been given to them. The restrictions on the registration of ISKCON and entry of foreign preachers coincided with the phase of religious management in Singapore in the late 1980s, during which religion was perceived to be subversive. Here, it is shown that a variety of performances have simultaneously been played out by different agents of ISKCON in responding to the state-imposed restrictions and by agents of the state in managing the emergent issues.

The second phase of ISKCON in Singapore was characterized by another feature: poor relations with local Hindu organizations. One reason for this is related to ISKCON's view of the status of gods (besides Krishna) in the Hindu pantheon, which differs from that of popular Hinduism in Singapore. ISKCON adopts the traditional Vaishnava practise of exclusive worship of Krishna or Vishnu. Other popular gods in the Hindu pantheon, like Shiva, Ganesh, and Durga, are regarded as "demigods," or empowered servants of Krishna who perform a specific function in the management of the universe. According to some respondents, the application of this resulted in the depreciation of the worship of other gods and induced many

[24]However a few foreign monks I interviewed revealed that they were allowed to pass through the customs in their customary robes. They were Indians.

devotees to behave in a fanatical manner, upsetting some local Hindus. Another senior devotee recalled that in the 1980s, "The drawback was the local organizations. They [ISKCON devotees] never made any effort to reach out to them and as a result they probably have a lot of misconceived notions of what the Hare Krishnas are all about." Due to these negative views, some ISKCON members undertook reflexive strategies to facilitate proselytization, which will be highlighted in the next phase.[25]

The Hare Krishna Explosion in Singapore (Mid-1990s to the Present)

The third and current phase of ISKCON in Singapore has been characterized by an increasing fissure among congregations, greater integration with the Hindu landscape, and a boom in numbers due to the influx of professionals from South Asian countries. In the previous phases there were at most two large congregations, the Krishna Mandir and the Prabhupada Yoga Meditation Centre, and a handful of smaller groups that gathered in homes. However from the mid-1990s, the devotee population continued to split into more groups. The increasing fractionalization was mainly due to differences of opinions on ideology and practice, different gurus, personal differences, and division along linguistic or ethnic lines. Fragmentation was facilitated by ISKCON's not having the liberty to exist as a legitimate registered society in Singapore. Due to the non-existence of a central authority, devotees are free to break away from congregations and form their own groups without the stigma of defection, as they can still identify themselves as ISKCON members to the international and local community of devotees. At present, a number of such groups exist and they conduct their programs in various Hindu temples such as the Lakshmi Narayan Temple, Holy Tree Balasubramaniam Temple, the Srinivas Perumal Temple, the Arasa Kesari Temple, and Arulmigu VelMurugan Gnanamuneeswarar Temple.

A few respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the fragmented state of the movement in Singapore. H. Das, who is also a congregation leader and organizes weekly programs in the Arasa Kesari temple, had a positive outlook on the simultaneous presence of different groups:

> Many people have asked me, "You [ISKCON devotees] have many programs in other congregations." I always respond, "We are all one group. We have decentralized our programs for the benefit of people living across the island. It's all the same brand. Like all over they

[25] However respondents added that there were instances where leaders of Hindu organizations such as the Hindu Endowments Board and Hindu Advisory Board had attended ISKCON programs and had cordial meetings with the devotees. Furthermore in 1998, an ISKCON devotee spearheaded the organization of a large-scale collaborative program in which the entire Bhagavad-Gita was recited in the Srinivas Perumal temple and which involved the participation of several Hindu groups and leaders.

> have McDonalds and KFC, just like that we have Hare Krishna all over the island." So it's the same brand but different management, different corporate centers, but the material that you get is the same…we should have many groups and many more centers to give the same brand…All programs are teaching the same philosophy under the umbrella of Srila Prabhupada's ISKCON.

At present, four ISKCON-linked societies are registered under different names in Singapore as front organizations. Furthermore three Gaudiya Math (Gaudiya Vaishnava institutions headed by Prabhupada's godbrothers in India) societies have also been registered by devotees, some of whom are defectors from ISKCON. There also exist two Indian vegetarian restaurants managed by devotees. The fissure among congregations and societies had the unintended effect of dispersing the movement throughout the city-state and making it more accessible to people. The criticism the movement has drawn because of this has been harmonized by ISKCON agents as a form of franchising to increase outreach.

Another issue that marks the third phase of ISKCON in Singapore is greater integration with the Hindu community through organizing programs in Hindu temples and participating in activities with Hindu organizations. From the mid-1990s ISKCON leaders, including the GBC, had encouraged local devotees to continue holding programs in Hindu temples, "as it would be good for their relationship with Hindu community." At present, it is common for devotees to be invited to sing during festivals in Hindu temples where deities, including those not related to Krishna, are brought on processions to community centers or public meeting areas in residential complexes. Once a month, the devotees from the Gita Reading Society participate in a 3-h *bhajan* session organized by the Hindu Centre in the Perumal temple, where residents of elderly nursing homes are invited to participate. Various *bhakti* movements such as the Sai Baba Society are also allotted a slot to sing in this session. ISKCON members have also conducted regular talks in the National University of Singapore (NUS) organized by the NUS Hindu Society since the mid-1990s. In 2008, members of the Bengali congregation, who registered a society called the "Sri Harinam Society," were given permission to conduct weekly programs at the Perumal Temple. They were also asked to volunteer their services for a major festival where the deity known as Lord Balaji (a form of Krishna) from the famous Tirupati temple in South India was brought Singapore. And again in 2009, they were asked to volunteer as marshals for the annual Thaipusam festival. Although the practices of Thaipusam, which includes mortification of the flesh and worship of the "demigod" Murugan, are at odds with the singing and dancing for Krishna by ISKCON devotees, they agreed to volunteer. Not all respondents agreed with these forms of integration. B. Das felt that devotees might compromise their practices by conducting programs where demigod worship is prominent. In her contribution to this volume (Chap. 10), Julia Huang discusses how the Tzu Chi movement in Malaysia has recruited members through public events advertised by the local Buddhist networks as opposed to seeking conversions through personal networking.[26] Although not

[26] Julia Huang, this volume (Chap. 10).

entirely similar to ISKCON in the sense that the Tzu Chi movement's events are secular social services, both movements have availed themselves of the opportunities presented by existing religious communities to proselytize within their folds. The increased integration with the Hindu community is a front-stage performance to harmonize poor relations with Hindu organizations mentioned in the second phase. It has also paved the way for greater involvement of Hindus in Singapore under Beckford's *client* and *patron* typologies, similar to ISKCON centers in the United States and United Kingdom, whose main supporters are currently Hindu migrants.

The "Hinduization" of ISKCON in North America and the United Kingdom has been attributed to the surge in the migration of Indian professionals who offer moral support and material assistance performing the role of "patrons" in Beckford's typology. This phenomenon has been replicated in Singapore where since the early 1990s, the city-state encouraged an influx of professionals and laborers of South Asian descent (mainly Indian and Bangladeshi). The increasing number of Indian immigrants in ISKCON congregations in Singapore has lent weight to the credibility of the movement as a bona fide Hindu sect in the perception of the public and Hindu administrative bodies such as the Hindu Endowments Board, which have thus far been dominated by a South Indian Shaivite version of Hinduism. In particular, Bengali Hindus have an affinity with Chaitanya and Prabhupada, both of whom were born in Bengal. Currently about 400 Bengalis, most of whom work in Singapore as laborers, organize their own programs under the auspices of the Harinam Society. Interviews with them suggest that the weekly programs they attend provide them relief and rejuvenation from their harsh working conditions.

Leaders like G. Das have expressed the need for the ISKCON societies to also engage with grassroots and governmental organizations to forge a public presence. The members of the Krishna Mandir enhance their publicity by inviting ministers to their events and advertise this prominently on their pre-event posters and post-event reports with a view to underscore their legitimacy.[27] The Krishna Mandir also projects itself as a welfare organization, collecting funds for the distribution of *prasadam* to the elderly nursing homes and other needy people. They were granted the IPC (Institution of a Public Character) status, which issues its donors double tax deduction benefits. The construction of its image as a welfare society is a performance in response to the Singapore government's preferred role for religion. This is significant as ISKCON's ideology and practices do not emphasize social service but rather service to Krishna. The former is perceived to simply result in good *karma*, which continues to bind the soul to the world whereas the latter awards liberation.

[27]For example, after their *ratha yathra* in 2009, they submitted a report on a public Hare Krishna website titled, "Muslim MP attends Singapore *Ratha Yathra* 2009." http://www.harekrsna.com/sun/news/07-09/news2830.htm. Accessed July 7, 2011.

Continuing Challenges to ISKCON Singapore

Most of the outreach to Indian immigrants occurs through personal networking by other Indian immigrants who have been ISKCON members prior to coming to Singapore or who become devotees after their arrival. During festivals such as *Janmastami* (a festival celebrating the advent of Krishna) and *ratha yathra*, special efforts are made to invite members of various ethnic Indian societies to attend. Therefore, as in other parts of the world, the migrant Indian community serves in a range of roles in ISKCON from "devotee" to "patron" in Beckford's typology. However, as revealed by respondents, one drawback of having congregations largely composed of expatriates is that they are transient.

There are other challenges faced by the devotees in Singapore. One of the most prominent symbols of ISKCON is the annual *ratha yathra* parade, where the chariots of Jagannath, Baladev, and Subhadra are pulled along public roads in major cities of the world. The procession is accompanied by devotees singing, playing musical instruments, and dancing. *Prasadam* and books are also distributed to members of the public. In some cities like Baltimore and London the festival has become an annual carnival where the mayors have declared it, "Hare Krishna *Ratha Yathra* Day."[28] In Singapore, the devotees have yet to succeed in organizing the *ratha yathra* on such a large public scale. However they have made progress in terms of visibility from having previously held it at isolated farms, on temple premises, and in sports stadiums. From 2006, the Krishna Mandir held the festivals in Toa Payoh Stadium, and in 2009, the Gita Reading Society followed suit by organizing it in Bedok Stadium. Usually about a thousand people turn up for each of the chariot festivals. Further, since 2008, members of the Gita Reading Society have organized the *ratha yathra* procession during the Hindu Thaipusam procession, which passes by parts of Singapore's central city area. In this way, ISKCON members are likely to continue to negotiate for greater public space. The Singapore government on the other hand, while keen to portray its commitment to multiculturalism and multi-religiosity, carefully guards against the use of public spaces by religious bodies to preserve its secularity and to appear fair to all religions.

The lack of a temple is one of the outstanding features of ISKCON in Singapore. Currently three congregations—the Krishna Mandir, Gita Reading Society, and Chaitanya Saraswat Gaudiya Math—have rented spaces that they utilize as centers for their programs. Since these spaces are not owned, they do not look like typical religious buildings from the architectural viewpoint. These settings are not always conducive but the devotees try to recreate the settings of an ISKCON temple. Devotional programs are also conducted in homes and Hindu temples. In her contribution to this volume (Chap. 12), Francesca Tarocco explores how religious groups are not allowed to actively proselytize outside their officially registered premises in China but they retain a large amount of autonomy over religious activities that take place within the building's premises. To an extent the same is true of the situation in

[28] Dasa (2009); and Rathayatra UK, http://www.rathayatra.co.uk. Accessed July 7, 2011.

Singapore. Besides operating centers in rented sites, ISKCON has had to utilize the premises of Hindu temples, which have usually been welcoming. H. Das described that the Hindu temple president he approached was very cooperative:

> So far there has been no restriction. In fact they were very happy to have programs here and were almost waiting for us. We pay a very small rent to cover air-conditioning and lighting. We were also allowed to start cooking in the temple kitchen and use the temple's chariot.

It is likely that as the number of devotees increases, some of the larger congregations will attempt to establish a permanent temple to add to the existing centers. The need for a temple was expressed by K. Das: "There is no single place to congregate. Here people are always running from one place to another…In a temple they can learn about ISKCON practices easily." The lack of availability of a purpose-built, architecturally distinctive religious building which functions as an identity marker and an indicator of success has hampered the expansion of the movement in Singapore.

Conclusion

Currently ISKCON's proselytization methods are akin to conservative evangelism in Singapore, which is modeled on personal networking, as opposed to Pentecostal evangelicalism, which is modeled on "the facilitation of flow, emphasizing participation in public life to usher in crowds through open doors and through which they would flow back out as witnesses to the masses."[29] ISKCON's outreach to Indian immigrants through personal contacts, its muted version of *ratha yathra*, and its working within the Hindu domain are all evidence of this. It is likely that the increasing numbers of Singaporeans and Indian immigrants drawn to the movement will cement ISKCON's position in Singapore. The former, however, is increasing at a much slower rate. This is in tandem with ISKCON's growth at the global level, where it is undergoing rapid evolution from an NRM to a mainstream religion, but is composed mostly of people of Indian ethnicity as opposed to the local population.

In hierarchical societies with well-defined structures like Singapore, an act deemed to be offensive by the larger powers could restrict the expansion of NRMs. Most likely, the ISKCON groups that are able to maintain a balance of a front-stage performance of meeting the state's expectations of religious movements and simultaneously balancing faithfulness to Prabhupada's teachings are the ones that are likely to establish themselves in the long run. This is because such groups would have been granted the social and physical space by the state and at the same time would have gained the confidence of congregation members as an authentic representation of Prabhupada's movement, minimizing fractionalization. Increased acceptance from the state apparatus such as the government and regulatory bodies like the Hindu Endowments Board, coupled with an increase in numbers would shift ISKCON's position from a marginal NRM, monitored by the state to an established

[29] Daniel Goh, this volume (Chap. 7).

religious movement, approved by the state. As Anthony Giddens argues, social structures are neither inviolable nor permanent; agents have transformative power (Giddens 1984). The extent and shape of transformation depends on the movement's relationship with the state and the type of relationship with members. Based on Beckford's framework, this chapter argues that ISKCON groups cultivate an "adept" relationship with members and a "revitalization" relationship with society by strategizing performance in the back stage to produce a front stage image of a religious movement that works within the defined status quo and aligns itself with the state's objectives; in this way, such groups are likely to experience endurance and expansion. This particular profile bears some resemblance to present day ISKCON's global image, making it easier for Singapore's ISKCON groups to adapt their proselytizing under the local socio-political circumstances.

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Chapter 9
"We Are Not a Religion": Secularization and Religious Territoriality of the Yiguan Dao (Unity Way) in Singapore

Francis Khek Gee Lim

Most nation-states have policies for the management of religion. For those with diverse religious communities, the question of how to ensure the peaceful coexistence of the various religions becomes an important challenge for effective governance. This is more so under contemporary conditions of globalization, as the movement of diverse groups of people across nation-state boundaries could facilitate the creation of diasporas, thereby creating challenges in assimilating these new groups into existing social, cultural, and political orders. A significant concern for scholars and politicians alike is the problem of the management of religious diversity and the maintenance of social order.[1] As Linda Hogan states, "It is the plural nature of the presence of religion, and the fact that all citizens—and especially religious believers—have to contend with that pluralism, that makes the debate about the role of religious voices in the public square so critical, and so contested" (Hogan 2009). Many debates surrounding proselytization and its implications for pluralism deal with the question of the public role of religion in society and the possibility that contestation over scarce resources—land, money, and potential converts—could lead to social conflict.[2] Contestations among civil society groups over public issues are essential to maintaining a vibrant civil society in a liberal polity. However, unlike competition among non-religious groups that "recognize the legitimate existence of each other," religious conflict often "does not proceed on this assumption, but actually seeks to overcome, eliminate, or convert the other to extinction" (Buoma 2008).

For the management of religion, secular nation-states often actively delineate the "proper" domain for religion in society and attempt to harness religious forces for nation-building purposes (Martin 2000; Madsen and Strong 2003). This can be achieved by stipulating through legal or constitutional means the extent to which religion can influence public policy and politics. Nation-states similarly attempt to

[1] See Berger (2005).

[2] See, for example, Casanova (1994).

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guarantee the religious freedom to be enjoyed by citizens as part of their social rights within the boundary of the "private" sphere defined by the state. In an officially secular society like Singapore, for example, the state actively constructs the domain in which religion should operate (Sinha 1999; 2005). The form of secularism adopted by the Singaporean state is not the anti-theistic, militant type. Instead, it recognizes the importance of religion in people's lives and in principle accords equal treatment to all religions.

For the government, this policy is deemed necessary for the peaceful coexistence of the diverse religious and ethnic groups that make up the Singaporean population. Within this framework, people have the right to practice or not to practice religion and are protected by law from being coerced into a particular faith. In this context, apart from the case of Islam through the state-affiliated Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS), the Singapore government does not usually make pronouncements on the veracity of religious beliefs, nor is it the final arbiter of matters concerning religious orthodoxies. The secularism of Singapore also entails that the legitimacy of the polity is not founded upon divine or ecclesiastical sanction, but solely on democratic elections that serve as the foundation of "ultimate political authority" (Thio 2008). While spelling out what secularism in the Singapore context means, the state has in the process provided a narrow definition of religion. For example, Singapore's Court of Appeal has defined religion "as a citizen's faith in a personal God, sometimes described as a belief in a supernatural being." This way of delineating the domain of religion thus excludes from it philosophical beliefs such as humanism and patriotism (Thio 2008, 79).

Underlying the perceived relationship between active religious proselytization and the disruption of social harmony are often the assumptions that religious groups can be clearly identified, that religious boundaries are rigid, and that theological systems are ultimately incompatible. This gives rise to the view in both academic literature and popular discourse that religious pluralism can result in competition between religious groups for influence and new members due to their well-defined boundaries and incompatible theological systems, and hence can potentially create conditions for social strife. Further, the competition among religious groups is thought to occur mainly in the public sphere, whether this competition exists over notions of the common good, scarce resources of the state, or the seeking of new converts. However, the religious group I examine in this chapter, the Yiguan Dao, does not identify itself publicly as a "religion" in some important contexts; rather it chooses to adopt a more "secular" identity in its official dealings with the public and the state. Also, the group's effort to attract new members does not require member to renounce their prior religious affiliations due to the adherence to a theology that aims to dissolve religious boundaries. In addition, one of the Yiguan Dao's most important proselytizing efforts is not conducted in the public "religious domain" as defined by the Singaporean state. In this way, the group is able to overcome certain restrictions faced by other public religions and take advantage of the restrictions the state itself faces in civil society as it attempts to draw a structural distinction between the public and the private spheres. The group operates chiefly within the domain marked out by the state as "secular" and "non-religious," and is

engaged in a paradoxical effort of organizational secularization and sacralization of secular spaces.

In this chapter, I examine how the Yiguan Dao undergoes a process of secularization to accommodate itself to official visions of religion and to operate in an environment members perceive to be hostile. In so doing, I utilize the concept of religious territoriality to show how the group propagates through spatial practices that transform officially secular spaces into religious ones, while avoiding some of the severe limitations faced by other religions operating in the country. The syncretism of the Yiguan Dao profoundly qualifies conceptions of rigid religious boundaries that sometimes inform scholarly debate about religious pluralism and religious conflict.[3] The case of the Yiguan Dao forces us to re-think the underlying assumptions concerning religious pluralism and proselytization in modern society.

The Yiguan Dao in Singapore[4]

There are various interpretations of the history of the Yiguan Dao (translated as One-Thread Dao or Unity Way), a sect of popular Chinese religion that is sometimes referred to as Tian Dao (Celestial Way). To its adherents, the sect’s “modern” founders in the nineteenth century are part of a lineage of prominent saints that have appeared throughout history to lead mankind to salvation through being reunited with the primordial creator, the Dao. Prasenjit Duara has characterized groups like the Yiguan Dao as “redemptive societies” for their focus on offering “redemption” from sins for members (Duara 2003). Like many other Chinese sects, the essence of the Yiguan Dao theological system is the syncretism of the three major Chinese traditions of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism—and, in recent years, of Christianity and Islam as well.[5] Daniel Overmyer has argued, however, that sects like the Yiguan Dao should be considered a form of “folk Buddhism” due to their belief in the central role of Maitreya (弥勒佛) in human salvation, the influence of important Buddhist scriptures such as the Diamond, Heart, and Pure Land sutras, as well as its theory of cyclic decay involving the three periods of dharma (Overmyer 1976, 150).

The strong Mahayana influence is also reflected in the sectarian belief that the Venerable or Eternal Mother (*laomu* 老母) has sent numerous saints to save mankind, similar to the Mahayana conception of the role of the *bodhisattva*.[6] A central

[3]Ethnographic data for this chapter is collected from fieldwork among the Yiguan Dao that has been ongoing since 2008 and involves formal and semi-formal interviews with members, participant observation in worship sessions, and attendance at study courses, talks, and seminars held at the Yiguan Dao premises in Singapore.

[4]This section is just a brief summary of the history of the Yiguan Dao, which has been the subject of a number of studies. Some of these include Seiwert (1981), Jordan (1982), Jordan and Overmyer (1986), Overmyer (1976), Clart (1997, 2000), Song (1983, 1996, 2002), Lu (2008), and Soo (1997).

[5]Lu, *The Transformation of the Yiguan Dao in Taiwan*.

[6]Ibid., 154.

and attractive feature of sectarianism is its promise of salvation from death and subsequent rebirth in the paradise of a compassionate deity, a belief that shows the deep influence of the Pure Land school of Buddhism. For the Yiguan Dao, salvation is found in reuniting with the Dao, an act that is personified by the Venerable Mother.[7] An important means to achieve salvation is participation in congregational rituals, attending teaching sessions, and engaging in mutual aid. The Yiguan Dao also reverses the stages of eschatological progress commonly found in orthodox Chinese religions by offering "attainment before cultivation" (*xiande er haoxiu* 先得而后修):

> At present, the frequent occurrence of great calamities signals the decline and destruction of the human race. This is because social morality has declined and mankind has lost his belief and faith in God…However, under the grace of our "Heavenly Mother" who could not bear the destruction of innocent people along with the evil ones, the "Tao" is being disseminated to save those who are virtuous and good[8]

The term "attainment" in Yiguan Dao refers to the acquiring of the knowledge of the "right path or way" (Dao) to return to Heaven and be re-united with the Venerable Eternal Mother. One's "attainment" is assured when one is conferred the Three Treasures, namely, the Heavenly Portal (*xuanguanqiao* 玄关窍), the Divine Mantra (*koujüe* 口诀), and the Holy Symbolic Seal (*hetong* 合同) while undergoing the rite of initiation (more on this below).

Yiguan Dao's teaching on ethics draws mainly from Buddhist injunctions and Confucian principles about proper human relationships, underpinned by the doctrine of karma (Overmyer 1981). The Yiguan Dao utilizes both canonical texts of orthodox Buddhism and Confucianism (such as the Heart Sutra, The Great Learning, The Golden Mean, and the Three Character Classics), as well as a body of literature known as the "precious volumes" *baojuan*, a series of morality books written by spirit mediums under the possession of the various saints and deities worshipped by the sectarians. The Yiguan Dao, like many other Chinese sectarian religions, conceptualizes cosmological temporal development in terms of the three *kalpas* (*sanqi* 三期), with each *kalpa* presided over by a Buddha. Thus, the Green Sun Era (青阳期) was presided over by the Dipamkara Buddha, the Red Sun Era (红阳期) by Sakyamuni, and the current era, the White Sun Era (白阳期), will witness the coming of the Maitreya Buddha. This temporal reckoning is intimately tied to the eschatological hope for the ultimate salvation of humankind.

As evidence indicating the coming of Maitreya, Yiguan Dao members like to highlight recent natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods, as well as human conflicts such as wars and terrorist attacks, as obvious signs that reflect the dire moral degeneration of humanity. In a talk given to new members, the speaker, who was also a temple master, argued that the alleged high frequency of disasters and

[7] According to one Yiguan Dao catechism, apart from the term *laomu*, the Dao is also referred to as *mingming shangdi* (明明上帝), *wanling zhenzai* (万灵真宰), *weiyi zhenshen* (唯一真神), *zaowu zhu* (造物主), *lao tianye* (老天爷), and *shangdi* (上帝).

[8] *Elementary Class* (Singapore: Chong Hua Tong Tou Teck Hwee, n.d.).

conflicts as “compared to the past” prognosticated the imminent end of the world (*mojie* 末劫), and hence reiterated the urgency for mankind to repent, to re-unite with the Venerable Mother, and to become vegetarian. While in the past some sectarian movements had staged uprisings to overthrow governments to set up a “liberated area” for the arrival of Maitreya or the enthronement of a sectarian king (Overmyer, 160), the Yiguan Dao these days primarily emphasizes the attainment of the Three Treasures and moral cultivation for the purpose of individual salvation.

The “Secular” Yiguan Dao

When the Yiguan Dao was banned in Taiwan and mainland China, it turned its attention abroad, especially to the countries in Southeast Asia where there were sizeable ethnic Chinese populations. All the major divisions made efforts to proselytize in Singapore, and among them, the Baoguang Jiande (宝光建德) division has been the most successful. In 1971, the senior master of Baoguang Jiande, Lü Shugen initiated the first member of Yiguan Dao in Singapore while en route to Indonesia. Since then, Baoguang Jiande has become the largest Yiguan Dao division in the country, and Singapore is now the base for its missionary activity in Southeast Asia.

When Yiguan Dao was first transmitted to Singapore and Malaysia, some segments of the local press characterized it as an “evil cult” (*xiejiao* 邪教) managed by a group of transnational swindlers (Soo 1997, 157). The negative reception was partly stoked by the public pronouncements of some leaders of local Buddhist associations who questioned its interpretations of certain key Buddhist doctrines such as *samsara* and *triratna* (Three Jewels) and linked it with the White Lotus Sect. In July 1981, the Singapore government expelled and blacklisted 12 Taiwanese preachers. Such negative views echoed those propagated by the governments in mainland China and Taiwan in that period, where the group was suppressed partly due to its alleged close ties with the Japanese puppet government at Manchukuo during the Sino-Japanese war and partly due to the hostile views held by leaders of the more orthodox Buddhist groups. Since the founding of the People’s Republic of China, the Chinese Communist Party has branded the Yiguan Dao a “reactionary secret society” (*fandong huidaomen* 反动会道门) and an “evil cult” (Palmer 2008). The group is still currently banned in mainland China.

Partly due to negative views of the Yiguan Dao held by orthodox religions and its illegal status in mainland China and Taiwan, it was formally registered in Singapore in 1981 not under the name of Yiguan Dao, but as the Hua Yuan Hui[9] and in Malaysia as the Wuji Shengmu Gong (无极圣母宫).[10] In Malaysia, the various Yiguan Dao centers are considered venues for the dissemination of Confucian teachings and bastions of Chinese culture. In Surat Thani in southern Thailand, for

[9]This is a pseudonym.

[10]Song, “*Zongjiao chuanbo, shangye hudong yu wenhua rentong*,” 423.

example, the Fayi Chongde branch built in 1992 an impressive temple with the name "Temple of Master Kong, the Former Teacher, and the Great Completer, Supreme Sage" (大成至圣先师孔子庙).

As Soo writes,

> The Buddhist associations disapproved of the Unity Sect's teachings based on the beliefs that organized time into three successive cycles, each "controlled" by a Buddha. They also disagreed with the use of Buddhist terminology, and the borrowing of Buddhist texts. The general public, on the other hand, were against the members' practice of vegetarian diet and the "evil oath" they swear during the initiation ceremony.[11]

To avoid attracting negative attention from the public as well as from other religious organizations that view Yiguan Dao as heterodox and suspect, it often operates under a variety of guises that eschew the use of the name. In fact, the name of Hua Yuan Hui in Singapore both suggests an orientation toward Chinese traditional culture likely to appeal to the Chinese population, and also fits into the state's effort to cultivate moral citizens through reacquainting them with their "traditional culture." In other words, the Baoguang Jiande seemingly wished to establish a presence in Singapore by downplaying the more "religious" and controversial aspects of its beliefs and practices, and by registering as an institution that focuses on explicitly "secular" aims like providing social welfare services and activities that aid moral cultivation and promoting traditional Chinese culture.[12] By "secular" and "secularization" I mean, respectively, an orientation toward "worldly" non-religious affairs and the process by which a religious organization becomes more rational and secular (Fox 2010; Stark 1985). Hence, in this context, I do not use the term "secularization" in the sense formulated by Bryan Wilson as a process whereby religion in general loses its public significance in modern societies.[13]

An examination of the constitution of Hua Yuan Hui reveals that it does not include any matter that is usually considered "religious" by the state or the public. Here is the core passage of the organization's constitution:

The objects of the Association are as follows:

(A) 1. To promote moral values, righteousness and virtues based on the moralistic teachings of:

   (a) "The Great Learning"
   (b) "The Doctrine of the Mean"
   (c) "Confucian Analects"
   (d) "The Work of Mencius"

[11] Soo, *A Study of the Yiguan Dao (Unity Sect) and its Development in Peninsular Malaysia*.

[12] A rather similar proselytization strategy is adopted by the Tzu Chi Foundation, as described in Julia Huang's chapter, in its emphasis on good works and its appeal to ethnic Chinese, both in Taiwan and overseas. See also Juliana Finucane's chapter on the Soka Gakkai's focus on volunteerism and secular activities in its outreach efforts.

[13] For a succinct summary of the secularization thesis debate, see Hanson (1997).

2. To inculcate a sense of humility, courtesy, responsibility, loyalty and respect, and care for the Elders.
3. To provide assistance, aid and whatever relief possible to the less fortunate such as the orphaned, aged, homeless, widowed and distressed through free medical care and treatment and any other charitable means.
4. To induce members towards the quest for moral enlightenment and perfection.

(B) To achieve the above objectives, the Association may do all such things as are incidental or conductive to the attainment of the above objects; it may provide a place for members to have physical and mental relaxation.[14]

One of the reasons the Yiguan Dao has been successful in increasing its membership in Singapore is that it has been able to able to transcend the dialect and native place boundaries of Chinese Singaporeans.[15] During the colonial days, Chinese immigrants were divided and formed communities such as clan associations and temples based on their respective places of origin and dialect groups. The Yiguan Dao has been able to transcend the internal differences of the Chinese Singaporeans based on lineage and language to appeal to the Chinese population as a whole by focusing on the broader category of Chinese cultural identity.[16] The broader Singaporean political context has to be examined as well. The Yiguan Dao's growth in the country cannot be understood without consideration of the policies of the Singapore government in the 1980s to Confucianize Singaporean society and the government's discursive practice of cultivating "Asian values" to counter the supposedly morally corrupting influence of the "West." To provide a "cultural ballast" for Singaporeans in general and the Chinese population in particular, the People's Action Party (PAP) government initiated a series of policy measures such as the Courtesy Campaign, Religious Knowledge (including Confucian Ethics) in schools, and the Speak Mandarin Campaign. Hence, despite the initial setbacks to establishing its presence in Singapore, the Yiguan Dao was able to tap into the social and political trends of the time and register itself as a moral society with a focus on promoting Chinese culture and Confucian values. Values promoted by the Yiguan Dao, such as civility, respect for authorities, loyalty, and filial piety, are also highly valued by the state. The close relationship between the Yiguan Dao and the state is similar to the case of the De Jiao studied by Bernard Formosa and Tan Chee-Beng, who describe how the De Jiao's provision of social and relief services has endeared it to governments in China, Malaysia, and Singapore (Formosa 2010; Tan 1985).

To forge close links with the state, Yiguan Dao members have actively participated in national events, for example as performers during the National Day Parade and as ushers during the Chingay parade that takes place during the Chinese New Year period. In 1995, they won the Outstanding Volunteering award from the Ministry of

[14] Singapore Registrar of the Association.

[15] Song, "Zongjiao chuanbo, shangye hudong yu wenhua rentong," 2002.

[16] For a discussion of the complicated relationships that evangelical Christians have with their Chinese identity in Singapore, see the chapter by Daniel Goh.

Community Development.[17] The organization was the first recipient of this award. In his speech, the minister said, "Volunteers could play a very important part in changing the perception that Singapore was not a compassionate society." He lauded the members of the organization as having proved wrong the perception of selfish, "ugly Singaporeans" caught up in the rat race.[18] In 1999, the secretary of Hua Yuan Hui was awarded the Public Service Medal during the National Day celebrations.[19] The focus of the Baoguang Jiande on engaging in the provision of social welfare services, especially for the elderly in a society with a rapidly aging population, fills a gap in society created by the PAP government's ideological aversion to state welfarism. The PAP instead relies on the active participation of voluntary welfare organizations and calls on the family to be the bulwark of social support.

Another instance that illustrates Yiguan Dao's secularization is shown by its alignment with the scientism that holds sway in modern Singapore society. Speakers repeatedly note that the group's doctrines are "scientific" by alluding to "scientific studies" vindicating the Yiguan Dao's key assertions. For example, in a talk on the Three Treasures, the temple master mentioned—without giving any detail—a "recent scientific study that proves the location of the Window to the Soul." In a Basic Course talk I attended, the speaker, Mr. Chen, constantly emphasized to a hall full of neophytes that, "We are not talking without any basis and it is not superstition, but our views are justified by science" ("我们不是乱讲,不是迷信,而是有科学根据的"). In another seminar open to all Yiguan Dao members, the speaker, Mr. Zhong, used the science of climatology and its findings on ozone depletion to support the view that humanity's collective bad karma (*e'ye* 恶业) had resulted in the current dire state of climate change. This constant appeal to science by the Yiguan Dao members is an important proselytizing strategy that aims to make the group's doctrines more attractive to an educated Singaporean population.

In sum, the secularization of the Yiguan Dao religion has to be examined in the context of its historical development in mainland China and Taiwan, and more recently in Singapore and the Southeast Asian region. Often labeled as a heterodox movement by leaders of mainstream Buddhism, and in the past reviled by the public media and various governments as an "evil cult," the Yiguan Dao has undergone a process of transformation that emphasizes in the public domain its more "secular" elements (for example, the transmission of Chinese culture and the cultivation of morality), thus aligning it with the nation-building agenda of the Singaporean state. In an important sense, its growth as a formally secular organization has been contingent upon its conscious alignment with the political project of the Singapore government, most notably through its provision of welfare services and its support of the government's effort to cultivate moral citizenship through the Confucianization of society. This does not mean that the Yiguan Dao has completely escaped the negative views of some members belonging to the mainstream religions in

[17] *Straits Times*, October 21, 1995, "60 Years On, He is Still Eager to Help the Needy."

[18] Ibid.

[19] *Straits Times*, August 9, 1999, "The Public Service Medal."

Singapore, such as orthodox Buddhism. The above discussion suggests that Yiguan Dao’s “secular turn” has allowed it to present a more publicly-acceptable front, which in turn facilitates its propagation. At this juncture, we need to turn our attention to Yiguan Dao’s understanding and practice of proselytization to have a better picture of how the group propagates.

“Ferrying Someone Over”

To understand how Yiguan Dao propagates its teachings and attracts new members, it is necessary to examine two key concepts used by its members to describe its efforts. The first is “seeking the Dao” (*qiudao* 求道), which refers to the aspiration to acquire the knowledge of the ways of attaining salvation by undergoing the Yiguan Dao’s initiation rite. It is in this rite that the “utmost secret” of salvation, the Three Treasures, is imparted by the preacher to the initiate and the preacher submits the name of the initiate to the Venerable Eternal Mother so that the new member will be lifted out of the cycle of birth and rebirth (*chaosheng liaosi* 超生了死). Potential new members are asked if they wish to “seek the Dao,” and in fact, it is not difficult at all for one to do so. From my observation, anyone can go through the initiation ceremony to acquire the Dao after expressing an interest and paying S$10 as a “merit fee” (*gongde fei* 功德费). Members explain what some people might perceive as an “easy” way of gaining salvation as a manifestation of the Venerable Mother’s compassion for humankind, and her wish for as many people to be saved before the arrival of Maitreya at the imminent end of the present era.

The other important concept used by the Yiguan Dao members as they endeavor to bring more people to the religion is *duren* (度人), or “to ferry someone over.” The meaning of *duren* contains two inter-related components. One is the general goal founded upon the Buddhist ideal of “assisting” another person to gain enlightenment. At the same time, the concept of *duren* also entails a self-oriented sense of fulfilling one’s wish to do good deeds in order to accumulate positive karma. “To ferry someone over” is thus an act that simultaneously facilitates the spiritual attainment of oneself and others. Yiguan Dao members sense the urgency to “ferry someone over” given their belief in the imminent end of the present era and the arrival of Maitreya. In this sense, the imperative for members to bring salvation to as many people as possible parallels the effort by religious faiths with millennialist content, like those evangelical Christians who spread the message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

This outreach orientation is seen, for example, in the effort to bring members of the public (some of whom might be sitting or loitering in the ground floor public spaces of government flats) to attend the worship sessions in the domestic temples and to undergo the initiation rite. Yiguan Dao members say that the success rate of this method is quite low, and understandably so. However, in the domestic temple that I regularly attended, two Chinese nationals were recently initiated after having been approached and brought to the temple. They told me that a member, who was

also from China, had approached them when they were just sitting downstairs and had told them about Yiguan Dao.

Is the propagation of Yiguan Dao a form of proselytizing? Yiguan Dao's outreach does not require potential new members to abandon their old religious faiths when accepting its teachings on the Dao and Venerable Eternal Mother. As interpreted by Yiguan Dao, seeking new members does not really entail "proselytizing." This is because it considers all religions, especially Christianity, Islam, Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, whose founders are worshipped in some Yiguan Dao rituals as "Saints of the Five Religions" (*wujiao shengren* 五教圣人), to be manifestation of the ultimate principle, the Dao, and to share in its essence. This also implies the Dao encompasses all these religions under its fold, and ultimately dissolves the boundaries between them. Ms. Huang, a Yiguan Dao member for about 5 years, expressed this view as she tried to convince me to "seek the Dao," or to undergo the initiation rite:

> In this White Sun period, the Dao is available to everyone, not just to those monks and priests who have to go through difficult [spiritual] cultivation (*xiulian* 修炼). Even if you are a Muslim or Christian, you can seek the Dao, no problem. You don't have to give up your own religion. Dao is a like a treasure, a valuable thing, important for everyone to have to gain salvation (*dejiu* 得救). After you've obtained it, you can still believe in Jesus or God, go to your church. Some of us often attend the religious services of other religions too.

In a talk given to more than 200 new recruits with their sponsors, a senior member of the organization named Mr. Chen tried to explain the difference between Yiguan Dao and other religions:

> People often ask me what's the difference between Tian Dao [another name of Yiguan Dao] and other religions such as Buddhism, Daoism, or Christianity. I often tell them that we are not actually a religion, but more like a belief (我们不是一种宗教, 应该说是一种信仰).

According to the interpretation offered by Mr. Chen, the different groups that have been labeled "religions" are human elaborations of the revelations of the Dao. This view of "religion" is a significant departure from that adopted by the Singaporean state, and hence the latter's model of pluralism where the boundaries of religions can be clearly delineated. "Religion," in the Yiguan Dao's interpretation, refers to culturally and historically specific ways in which the Dao has manifested itself to different human societies in different times. "Faith," on the other hand, refers to the conception of ultimate reality and the means of salvation as revealed to the founders of Yiguan Dao by the Venerable Eternal Mother. Further, "religion" is a system of beliefs and practices that helps people in their quest for moral perfection (*xiuxing* 修行), while to have "attained the Dao" (*dedao* 得道) entails immediately gaining the right path toward salvation, interpreted as escaping the cycle of birth and rebirth and returning to heaven upon one's earthly death. In practice, this means that new members, after having gone through the initiation rite and acquiring the Three Treasures for salvation, would ideally continue their moral cultivation through intensive study of the key texts from all major religious traditions (interpreted through the Yiguan Dao's theological frames), as well as the books on morality. In one such study session I attended, the "Masses Class" (大众班), the audience was

led by the lecturer to read through a text line by line, repeated several times, and listen to exegeses of the meaning of the text and etymology of some Chinese words by the lecturer. The various religions (*jiao* 教) are considered by Yiguan Dao members to be valid and useful means for the attainment of salvation, but this is ultimately derived from their sharing in the essence of a superior Dao, as expressed in the phrase, “the Dao is superior to religion” (*dao gaoyu jiao* 道高于教).

Both scholarly and statist understandings of proselytizing commonly mean conversion from one religious faith to another, with the underlying assumption that religions are discrete, bounded, and mutually exclusive systems of beliefs and practices. The Yiguan Dao example forces us to reflect upon the possibility of further refining our analytical use of the term to take into account religious practices and beliefs that do not fit neatly into hermetically sealed theological systems. The Yiguan Dao’s discourse on the Dao and religion does not operate on the assumption of incommensurability between bounded religious systems that would require an act of conversion should one wish to move from one religious faith to another. From an external analytical point of view, the Yiguan Dao’s efforts to attract new members can be seen as a form of proselytizing, but only if the term is further refined to mean the acceptance of a new religious worldview (including ideas of salvation) with or without the need to formally convert.

Active outreach by Yiguan Dao members is not the only way by which the group propagates. Another important way is through its practice of religious territoriality. I would argue that the group’s territorial practices in the state-demarcated “private” realm enable it to function largely outside of the state’s purview, and can potentially disrupt the state model of pluralism that necessitates the state’s management of religion in the public sphere. Yiguan Dao’s religious territoriality, as a means of propagation, can be considered a special form of proselytizing in that it involves a process of “conversion,” in this instance, spatial conversion from a state-defined secular space into a religious one via encoding of religious meanings.

Contesting Territorialities

The concept of territoriality can be considered a form of cultural strategy “through which individuals and groups seek to exert control over the meanings and uses of particular portions of geographical space” (Stump 2008, 222). Territoriality involves a social ordering of space informed by prevailing cultural norms of various groups and individuals as they seek to express and exert their identities and influence in relation to one another. Like many secular states, Singapore adopts a functional conception of territoriality underpinned by the ideology of development and modernization. In other words, the fundamental principle that guides the state’s policy of land use is the efficient allocation of scarce land for the purposes of economic development and nation building.

Given the scarcity of land in Singapore, the state adopts a highly pragmatic and interventionist stance with regard to the allocation of land parcels to be used for religious purposes. As discussed by Lily Kong, each parcel of land in any of the new towns built by the Housing Development Board allocated for religious purposes "is open to tender to each particular religious group" (Kong 2002). For example, a site reserved for Hindus will not be open for tender by other religious groups. This is to ensure that each of the major religions in Singapore, such as Christianity, Buddhism, Daoism, popular Chinese religion, and other religious groups, would be represented in the various government housing estates. This system of land allocation for religious buildings not only demarcates the boundaries within which religious groups operate, it also establishes which religions are legitimate through recognizing their right to land.[20] Very often, in urban renewal efforts, old buildings and structures, whether commercial, residential, or religious, are torn down to make way for new developments. Sometimes, secular buildings can be converted to religious use. However, the main criteria to be considered are not based on the perceived needs of the specific religious communities, but on planning considerations "such as the location of the building, whether the area is a predominantly residential one, whether too much traffic is going to be generated" (Kong 1993).

However, there are important qualifications to religious freedom provided under the country's constitution. Most importantly, the constitution makes a distinction between religious beliefs and actions: while one can freely choose to adhere to any religious beliefs, one's actions based on such beliefs must conform to Singapore's laws pertaining to public order and public service (Tan 2008). For example, practitioners of Chinese religion who live in public housing are not allowed to burn joss papers and paper money in the confines of their flats or anywhere they wish in the shared public space. What had been previously done in front of altars at home is now mainly conducted using bins provided by the local town councils so that the ashes from the burning will not dirty the environment (Tong and Kong 2000).

While the spatial practices of the state do shape religious practices to varying degrees through efforts to enforce hegemonic meanings in geographical spaces, we should not think that religions and religious practitioners are always simply in a reactive or reactionary position. Place-making is inherently a dynamic process involving a contestation of meaning. Ordinary people in the lived city often negotiate, resist, or reject the totalistic modernist visions of the planning authorities by carving out spaces for themselves in expressions of self-determination (de Certeau 1988). This also means that a given geographical space can have different meanings for different individuals and groups within that space. In religious expressions of territoriality, spaces can be transformed into religious places by being imbued with the distinct worldview and ethos of the believers. It is useful to recall Jonathan Z. Smith's view of rituals as the primary means of creating sacred space. Contrary to Mircea Eliade's influential idea that sacred spaces are sites of hierophanies acting as

[20]I thank Juliana Finucane for suggesting this.

“centers” from which human activities acquire their transcendental meanings, Smith argues that it is often human actions, more specially, rituals, that create sacred spaces (Smith 1987). Ritual actions undertaken by ordinary people to resacralize state-imposed secular, profane spaces are seen by Georges Bataille as acts of *transgression* that seek to break out of the rationalizing tendency of society, but at the same time do not completely reject the limits imposed by it (Bataille 1985). Such ritualistic acts of transgression can be most evidently seen in Yiguan Dao’s effort to transform public housing spaces into sacred sites. This practice of religious territoriality is a key Yiguan Dao propagation strategy to establish its temples throughout Singapore, circumventing the state-imposed constraints on religious buildings.

As part of a congregational sect, Yiguan Dao members gather for religious activities and to receive teachings in *fotang* (佛堂), or “Buddha halls.” These are divided into the public halls (*gongtang* 公堂) and the domestic halls (*jiatang* 家堂). In Singapore, the Chong Hua Tong Tou Teck Hwee currently operates three public halls, which are massive three- to four-storey buildings painted in white and constructed with a nod toward Chinese architectural style. The building of these public halls was of course subjected to the state’s urban planning rules and regulations as described previously. However, the vast majority of Yiguan Dao’s Buddha halls are domestic and largely hidden from the public view. These domestic halls, led by a hall master (*tangzhu* 堂主), are the most basic unit of the Yiguan Dao organizational structure in Singapore and are located in the homes of the members. The first Baoguang Jiande Buddha hall to be established in Singapore in 1975, the Tianguo Fotang (天国佛堂), was a house in a private residential estate purchased with funds transferred from Taiwan.

The Yiguan Dao domestic Buddha halls are different from the altars found in the homes of practitioners of other forms of popular Chinese religion/Shenism. For the latter, while the altar marks the dwelling place of the deities or ancestors and hence a sacred space, the home in which the altar is constructed is not itself considered a temple or a religious place. However, the establishment of a Buddha hall in the home of a Yiguan Dao member transforms the home into a temple and a sacred place. This transformation entails a process of sacralization of a previously secular place into a sacred one.

Recall that in Singapore, the state is the ultimate arbiter of land utilization in its urban planning efforts. State bodies such as the Land Office, the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA), and the Housing Development Board (HDB) determine the appropriate sites for residential, recreational/cultural, commercial, and religious functions. Most Singaporeans live in public housing, which comprises standardized high rise apartments distributed in various high-density new towns or housing estates. The design of the apartments is primarily functional and, in line with the state’s official secularism, does not take into account the religious practices of various ethnic groups. This means that Singapore’s public housing estates are designed to provide a secular modernist environment that discourages the emergence of religious and ethnic enclaves (Chua 1997). According the HDB rules, government flats must not be used for religious purposes, a point confirmed to me by an HDB official in a telephone inquiry. Unlike the other mainstream religions, which have to compete either denominationally or with each other to secure limited

sites, the Yiguan Dao is able circumvent this problem as its organizational structure and mode of religious practice provide for a set of ritual process to transform what is officially demarcated as a secular residential space into a sacred, religious one.

A Yiguan Dao member who wishes to transform his home into a domestic Buddha hall will have to undergo a training program and seek the approval of one of the preachers within the organization. The various courses that constitute the training program are not exclusively for deeply committed members who wish to establish a house temple. Leaders of the Yiguan Dao strongly encourage *all* members, especially new ones, to attend a series of courses on the basic doctrines and rituals of the group. This emphasis on doctrinal training and the downplaying of spirit-writing are relatively recent phenomena. According to his case study of the Yiguan Dao in Taiwan, Lu Yunfeng argues that, due to its experience of state repression both in imperial China and also Kuomingtang-ruled Taiwan, the group traditionally lacked a well-organized and well-trained clergy to provide the necessary intellectual input to create a sophisticated theological system.[21] However, since the Taiwanese authorities revoked the ban on Yiguan Dao in 1987, the leaders of the group increasingly felt the need to develop an educational system to provide members and the public with a more coherent set of basic doctrines, both in response to the sect's critics and to attract more educated people.

When the training is completed, the potential hall master will proceed to convert his home from a state-defined secular space into a Yiguan Dao-defined sacred one. Whether the person lives in public or private housing, some form of renovation to existing living spaces and changes in amenities is required. First, a new altar has to be constructed in accordance with the Yiguan Dao stipulations. The most important items include the Buddha Light (*fodeng* 佛灯), a statue of Maitreya in the form of the Laughing Buddha, an urn for the burning of incense, holders for two large candles placed on either side of the altar, and vegetarian offerings (e.g., fruits, noodles, snacks, etc). Since the burning of incense and candles is an essential part of collective ritual practice in a Buddha Hall, new fans and other forms of ventilation equipment might be installed. The house has to be thoroughly cleaned before its official consecration by the preacher as a Buddha Hall on an auspicious day. Typically, the congregation that meets regularly at a specific Buddha Hall numbers between 20 and 30 people. The establishment of the Buddha Hall is not merely an installation of an altar, but the radical transformation of a formerly secular, residential space into a sacred one.

The sacredness of the house temple space can be observed here in the adherence to certain taboos and prescriptions that mark out the new space as extraordinary and different from other residential quarters. For example, a vegetarian diet has to be observed within the confines of the Buddha hall, and meat is prohibited from being brought in even if it is not to be consumed. Members of the congregation have to wipe their hands clean with wet hand towels at the entrance of the house

[21] Lu, *The Transformation of the Yiguan Dao in Taiwan*, 137.

temple upon arrival and greet one another with a respectful bow. The deportment and language of the congregation have become highly formalized. The reason given is that the sacredness of the place necessitates a switch from the everyday vernacular to speaking in “heaven’s words” (*jiang shangtian de hua* 讲上天的话). When addressing one another, members tend to use titles with surnames, such as “Mister Tan,” “Madam Lee,” and “Hall Master Lim,” rather than given names, which would signal a more informal, everyday way of address among peers. The preoccupation with modesty among members is reflected in the practice of referring to oneself as “junior student” (*houxue* 后学). Finally, the deep Confucian influence is seen also in the widespread use of formalistic language, such as saying *yong* (用) instead of the commonly used *chi* (吃), to refer to eating. Members refer to each other as “relatives of the Dao” (*daoqin* 道亲); male members are called *qiandao* (乾道), while female ones are the *kundao* (坤道).

In interviews with Song Guangyu in the 1990s, the leaders of Baoguang Jiande estimated that by 1997, there were 1,457 domestic halls.[22] By 1999, around 200,000 people had been initiated, among whom approximately 20,000 were active members. In my interviews with hall masters, I have been informed that there are currently 26 districts in Singapore, each of which has around 80 domestic halls with approximately 15–25 active members each. Extrapolating from these estimates, the Baoguang Jiande branch alone has between 31,200 and 52,000 active members. Members told me that the goal is to establish at least one Buddha hall on every floor of every block of public housing in Singapore.

Unlike the other major religions in Singapore whose venues for worship and other religious activities are conducted in officially demarcated sites and hence publicly visible, the overwhelming majority of the Yiguan Dao’s religious sites are hidden from public view, located in the officially demarcated secular spaces of urban modernity. In other words, the Yiguan Dao operates mainly within the state-determined secular, “private” realm. At the same time, it makes use of this modern statist distinction between private and public spaces to overcome the limitation of scarce land resources in an urban environment by sacralizing an officially recognized secular space, radically transforming it into a sacred space according to its own strategy of territoriality. The successful proliferation of a religious sect like the Yiguan Dao lies partly in its territorial strategy that involves the sacralization of domestic spaces as temples for religious worship. In modern secular Singapore where religious freedom is officially recognized and where the availability of land is severely restricted, the Yiguan Dao is able to thrive due in no small measure to its ability to replicate its most basic organizational unit through the transformation of the domestic, “private” space into a sacred one. Such a strategy of religious territoriality has equipped members of the Yiguan Dao with the capacity to transcend the limits imposed on religious activities by the secular authorities embodied by the state and to maintain a high level of coherence between members’ worldviews and

[22] Song, “Zongjiao chuanbo, shangye hudong yu wenhua rentong.”

their daily lives. In fact, the "private" domestic space in urban modernity can provide a favorable context for the transmission of religious knowledge, the conduct of religious activities away from state and public scrutiny, and the maintenance of tight control by leaders of its members.

Conclusion

Religious pluralism in many societies, especially in the context of nation-building in a globalizing world, has posed a series of challenges to nation-states. One such challenge is the question of how the "many" of religions—often assumed to have rigid boundaries and mutually incompatible worldviews—can be reconciled with the nation-state's efforts to cultivate "one" public national culture with strong consensus on the common good (Madsen and Strong 2003). The problem of religious pluralism is more acutely felt in a liberal polity where the public role of religion takes on greater social and political significance. Thus, proselytizing can become problematic in a plural society when religious groups compete for converts and resources through either violent or nonviolent means and seek to increase their influence in the public sphere. In Singapore, one way the state effectively manages religion is by delineating the domains in which religion can legitimately operate. One of these domains is the "private" sphere, where religious practices are deemed the "private" concern of citizens whose right to religious freedom is protected by law and guaranteed under the constitution. It is only in the structurally contrastive domain—the "public" sphere—where the state can exercise its legitimate power to regulate and manage religious activity, including proselytizing, in the name of a higher unity or common good for the country.

This discussion of Yiguan Dao's propagation in modern urban Singapore has shown that the group does not mainly operate in the religious domain defined by the state, partly due to the fact that it does not define itself formally or rhetorically as a "religion." On the one hand, the Yiguan Dao has established its public presence in Singapore by emphasizing its "non-religious" aspects, primarily its provision of social welfare and activities involving the cultivation of morality. At the same time, the Yiguan Dao's "secular" public activities have found a ready fit with some of the most important efforts of social engineering engaged in by the Singaporean state. On the other hand, the group stresses its more explicitly "religious" aspects mainly in the state-defined "private" and "secular" spheres, in the form of domestic Buddha halls or temples. This has allowed the group to avoid competition with other religions in the public sphere for resources, especially limited parcels of state land specifically allocated for "religious" purposes under the state's modernist urban planning.

In an important sense, the Yiguan Dao is a beneficiary of Singapore's policy of religious pluralism and secularism, in that the Singaporean state does not ban it on the grounds of sustaining a particular version of religious orthodoxy, despite the negative view toward the group held by members of other more mainstream religions

such as Buddhism and Daoism. However, the Yiguan Dao's conceptions of religious pluralism and proselytization depart significantly from those of the state. A key point to note is that the Yiguan Dao does not assume that the boundaries between various religions are impermeable and exclusive, and eschews the view that religions are hermetically sealed theological systems. Its conceptualization of the Dao as the origin of all religious insights—having manifested historically in different times and places, thus giving rise to the diversity of religions—effectively encompasses all religions under its fold. Such a theological positioning allows the group to proselytize without requiring new members to forsake their old religious affiliations.

The challenge of religious pluralism for a modern secular state like Singapore consists of finding effective and appropriate ways to manage supposedly discrete, bounded, and mutually exclusive religious systems, and to resolve potential problems that might arise when boundaries are crossed under the context of religious proselytization. For the Yiguan Dao, however, religious pluralism is affirmed with the understanding that religious boundaries are ultimately dissoluble and that all religions are encompassed under the Dao. The group's ability to dissolve and re-draw boundaries can also be seen through its practices of religious territoriality, which disrupt the state-imposed boundaries between secular and sacred spaces. Like an amoeba, the Yiguan Dao grows by encoding state-defined modernist secular spaces with religious meaning, and absorbing them under its formal organizational structure.

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Chapter 10
From Diasporic to Ecumenical: The Buddhist Tzu Chi (Ciji) Movement in Malaysia

C. Julia Huang

"Zulu Volunteers Touch the Heart of U.N. Audience" was the headline of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation's English website on February 26, 2011. Below the headline was a link to the Tzu Chi Da-ai TV news report. The event was a workshop on Breaking the Cycle of Poverty of Women and Girls through Education and Training, which took place at the United Nations' headquarters in New York from February 22 to March 4, 2011. The workshop was organized by Tzu Chi, featuring a presentation by two Zulu women, Gladys Ngema and Tolakele Mkhize of Durban, on their transformation from charity recipients to active volunteers through participation in the vocational training center set up by Tzu Chi South Africa (Tzu Chi USA 2010).

This news highlights a recent shift from a diasporic to an ecumenical orientation made by the Taiwanese Buddhist movement, Tzu Chi, which translates literally to "compassion relief." Founded in a backwater of Taiwan as a grassroots organization of fewer than 40 women in the 1960s, Tzu Chi has since grown to be an international humanitarian organization. As of 2011, it has some ten million members worldwide with branches in 47 countries and has delivered relief to more than 69 countries (Tzu Chi Foundation 2009a). In fact, such a shift from diasporic to ecumenical has long been taking place slowly as Tzu Chi's reach extended beyond the Taiwanese circle of devotees and charity recipients. While the group's early transnational expansion largely overlapped with that of the Taiwanese diaspora, its Malaysian division has been composed of a local Chinese—rather than Taiwanese immigrant—constituency (Huang 2009a).

The setting of Malaysia as the site for Tzu Chi's shift from diasporic to ecumenical is particularly significant for proselytizing and the limits of religious pluralism. This chapter describes the proselytizing efforts of Tzu Chi, a Mahayana Buddhist group, in the pluralist and Muslim-majority country of Malaysia. Elsewhere I have argued that the major appeal of Tzu Chi to local Chinese devotees

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in Malaysia lies in its "practical" Buddhist approach to welfare, which provides an alternate path to be socially engaged without being politically involved (Huang 2009b). This chapter will focus on another aspect of proselytizing—the social networks facilitating the local devotees' initial and significant encounters with the group. The chapter will also touch upon, albeit preliminarily and somewhat speculatively, the "limits" of religious pluralism as felt and understood by the group's local devotees in light of the Muslim/Malay vs. non-Muslim/non-Malay religio-ethnic "symbiosis (Shamsul 1994)."

Tzu Chi (or Ciji, in pinyin Romanization) is a United Nations-affiliated philanthropic non-governmental organization as well as—and supported in financial and manpower terms by—a lay Buddhist movement. Such a form of engaged Buddhism reminds one of the more global and high-profile Soka Gakkai from Japan, as presented by Juliana Finucane in this volume (Chap. 6). Indeed, both are lay movements under charismatic leadership. Yet, in contrast to Ikeda's lay leadership, Tzu Chi from the outset has been under monastic leadership. The group was founded by and continues today under the leadership of a Buddhist nun, the Venerable Cheng Yen (b.1937, and often referred to as Zhengyan in pinyin, which means literally, "witnessing" or "proving solemnity"). Tzu Chi was founded in Taiwan in the late 1960s and has been expanding transnationally since the 1990s. Of its ten million members worldwide, at least four million are in Taiwan and the rest primarily within the Chinese diaspora.

The timing, scale, and ethnic constituency of Tzu Chi's global development are similar to two other Taiwan-originated major and modernist Buddhist organizations, Foguan Shan (Buddha's Light Mountain), founded and led by the Venerable Hsing Yun (Xingyun), and Fagu Shan (Dharma Drum Mountain), founded by the late Venerable Sheng Yen (Shengyan). These three organizations are often seen as exemplary of "Buddhism for the Human World" (*renjian fojiao*, literally, "Buddhism among the people," often translated as "humanistic Buddhism"), a this-worldly path first traced by the Venerable Taixu around the 1920s in China, and significantly articulated and propagated by the late Venerable Yinshun in China and Taiwan.

Tzu Chi distinguishes itself from other types of "Buddhism for the Human World" in many ways. Not only is its founder/leader the only nun among the eminent monks who are her peers, but the group also features a predominantly lay constituency and places tremendous emphasis on (and invests heavily in) its secular humanitarian mission. Tzu Chi's mission includes charity, medicine, education, culture, international relief, bone marrow donation, environmental protection, and community volunteering. More specifically, the mission of charity includes delivering charity relief domestically and internationally. The mission of medicine includes running eight medical institutions in Taiwan and a total of 18 free clinics and dialysis centers in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, and the United States. The mission of education includes running a medical school and a complete system from kindergarten to university in Taiwan, and weekend "academies" for teaching Chinese language and culture in Canada, New Zealand, the United States, and Thailand. The mission of culture includes running a television station in Taiwan and other multi-media propagation. In addition to emergency disaster relief, Tzu Chi has

also built three "great love villages" in Aceh and rebuilt schools in China, among other things. Tzu Chi founded its bone marrow registry in 1993, expanded it into a stem cell center in 2002, and as of 2009, has completed 1,801 transplant cases in 27 countries based on a database of 319,274 volunteers in its bone marrow bank (Tzu Chi Foundation 2009b). Environmental protection mainly focuses on sorting garbage for recycling and has been successful in Taiwan and overseas, including in Malaysia. The mission of community volunteering is a relatively recent development since 1996 and is more limited to Taiwan compared with other missions.[1]

The elaborate list of missions is itself a way of propagating, in that it represents proselytizing by demonstrating deeds, since in Tzu Chi, only action counts in the last analysis.[2] In this vein, proselytizing and religious pluralism concern Tzu Chi in a peculiar way because the humanitarian mission is not a separate non-profit organization running parallel to the religious order, nor is it an outreach program managed by hired professional staff distinct from the discipling system of the Venerable Cheng Yen. Rather, the humanitarian mission is what Tzu Chi devotees do, and indeed, they do it religiously. The core practice of Tzu Chi is not chanting scriptures for ferrying the souls of the dead to the other shore or for securing one's own afterlife in the Pure Land. Rather, Tzu Chi seeks to build the Pure Land in this world through "doing Tzu Chi" (*zuo ciji*) to relieve sentient beings from suffering in this life and to cultivate oneself by causing the relief to materialize. In other words, doing is cultivating to the extent that Tzu Chi can be dubbed "Nike Buddhism," since one of the most popular maxims for the devotees is, "Just do it!"—or, literally, "Do it! Then it's right" (*zuo jiu dui le*). Carrying out relief work in person may be the source of profound religious experience–that is, it offers contact with suffering, and more importantly, the inspiration for repentance, confession, transformation, and conversion.

If "doing" humanitarianism is not just a means to a goal but an end in itself, it cannot be mediated or alienated like an auto-pay credit card donation. Rather, it should be direct and participatory so as to make the experience a profound one. The imperative is to carry out a humanitarian mission physically on-site and even personally in face-to-face interaction and to support the mission with contributions. Only action counts as religiosity in Tzu Chi, and in the last analysis, the action is to contribute to the mission by giving one's own time and money and by bringing in others' time and money. The second part is what we usually call proselytizing.

Proselytizing, practiced as encouraging and persuading others to bring in their time and money, are usually referred to in two terms in Tzu Chi. The first one is

[1] According to the Tzu Chi website, "The aim of this project is to enable the relationship of the volunteers be closer, expedite news circulation, promote cooperation at work, form a network for 'relieving the suffering at call.'" See, Tzu Chi Foundation (2009c).

[2] According to my fieldwork in Malacca, other Buddhist organizations may also emphasize action, for example, Seck Kia Een in Malacca, although the "action" there may range from concrete welfare building such as running an orphanage to symbolic blessings such as dharma ceremonies. Catholic churches, for example, St Teresa Church in Malacca, which have regular subsets for charity, e.g., St. Vincent, de Paul, do not seem to solely focus on deeds.

jieyin dade, literally, inviting the general virtuous, or, introducing the lay into the group. In the context I heard devotees using it, the term refers to explaining Tzu Chi to a non-member in the hope that this will lead to further interest and action. *Jieyin dade* seems to refer to one-sided talking, like a speech for publicity. The second term involves more interaction towards conversion, and was commonly used even before Tzu Chi's first period of rapid growth in the late-1980s. *Quanmu* (literally, persuading and recruiting/raising, or, persuasive recruitment) is the Tzu Chi term for proselytizing new members. To become a member, it only requires paying minimum monthly dues and providing one's basic personal information, including at the very least, full name and identification number, which is enough to establish new membership files and print out tax return receipts in countries like Taiwan and the United States. The monthly dues have always been low respective to its local context, for example, RM 5 (about US$1.30) in Malaysia in 2004.[3] In this form of "checkbook member," there does not seem to be a question of faith or conversion.

There are two overlapping layers of proselytizing or *quanmu* in Tzu Chi: one is fundraising, and the other, recruitment. The former can be understood as a mere monetary transaction since it refers in this context to the monthly membership dues. The second involves signing up for the internship training leading towards the status of hallmark core member, or commissionership (*weiyuan*).[4]

Earning the title of commissioner through proselytizing is essential to Tzu Chi adherents: 20 households are needed to advance a probationer to the rank of trainee, and 40 households to full commissioner (in 1999). Of course, there are other requirements, such as attending classes and carrying out relief work. Yet proselytizing is the *de facto* key. Commissioners are the core members who represent Tzu Chi in both practical and symbolic capacities. They are authorized to collect membership dues and monetary donations and carry the "Buddhist spirit" and Tzu Chi image on the shoulders. They are thus seen to embody Tzu Chi personhood.[5]

How does this model of proselytizing work under the circumstances of pluralism in Malaysia? It is because of the importance of proselytizing and volunteering for the relief work, I will argue that Tzu Chi, in the specific setting of religious pluralism in Malaysia, presents an anomaly between diasporic and ecumenical religion. On the one hand, proselytizing tends to make local development gravitate towards the diasporic framework—that is, ethnic enclaves and existing Buddhist networks. On the other hand, volunteer work motivates the followers to move across diasporic—both religious and ethnic—boundaries, and, the secular operation of relief work allows Tzu Chi to draw in non-Buddhist participants. The limits of religious pluralism nevertheless keep Tzu Chi's proselytizing and its ecumenical tendencies at bay, particularly when inviting Muslim Malays to further engage in volunteer programs.

[3] In 2004, 1 USD = 3.8034 MYR. http://www.oanda.com/currency/historical-rates/

[4] There are several titled groups in Tzu Chi. For a detailed list and explanation of each title, see Huang, *Charisma and Compassion*, 64–80.

[5] Huang, *Charisma and Compassion*, 70.

This chapter will be divided into three parts. First, I offer a brief background of Tzu Chi diaspora and cross-ethnic missions in multicultural Malaysia. Second, I discuss a brief history of Tzu Chi in Malacca, Malaysia, with a special focus on the networks for its proselytization. Third, I will summarize some of the issues concerning the localization of the Tzu Chi mission in the pluralist society of Malaysia, based on interviews and ethnographic observation from my fieldwork in Malacca and with reference to the legal framework for the freedom of religion in Malaysia. In conclusion, I will argue that the shift of a religious movement from diasporic to ecumenical is highly contingent on local social networks and legal frameworks.

Setting

Malaysia (population 28.25 million in 2010) is a polyethnic society (Department of Statistics, Malaysia 2010). Chinese citizens constitute the largest minority in Malaysia, although the percentage of Chinese has been declining. The proportion of Chinese among the total population was 34.2 % in 1970 and then 31.7 % in 1980 (Saw 2007). The share of Chinese among the total citizen population fell from 27.5 % in 1991 to 26.0 % in 2000, and to 25.3 % in 2005.[6] According to the same research, in year 2000, 29.1 % of the population in the state of Malacca is Chinese.[7]

The earliest Chinese settlements can be traced back to the Malacca Sultanate in the fifteenth century. But the majority of immigrants came between the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, mostly as laborers brought in by the British from the southeastern coast of China (Hefner 2001a; Li 1985; Yen 2000). When Malaysia achieved independence in 1957, the Chinese became citizens of the new nation-state, but soon found themselves excluded by the "sons of the soil" (*bumiputeras*). Throughout the colonial and postcolonial periods, the governments primarily left the Chinese to look after their own needs. As a result, Malacca, as well as other Chinese settlements even today, accommodates an elaborate array of guilds, organizations, and associations, as well as a long history of a Chinese-language education school system (Tong 1999). The Malaysian government launched its New Economic Policy in 1970 and has since successfully created a new Malay middle class so as to balance the economic privilege of the Chinese in the postcolonial period. In the wake of the economic reforms, the Malaysian government sought to promote a Malaysian national identity based on the language, culture, and religion of the *bumiputeras*. In the 1970s and 1980s, many Chinese turned inward to their community to seek social honor, which led to the revitalization of Chinese religious culture. Since the turn of the century, Chinese Malaysians continue to campaign for power and cultural identity through political and associative means while the

[6] Ibid., 70.

[7] Ibid., 72.

government's strategies for promoting a multicultural national image persists (Embong 2001; Hefner 2001b; Mandal 2001; Shamsul 2001).

The "symbiosis," as Shamsul A.B. calls it, of religion and ethnicity in Malaysia is partly due to the combination of the Malay race and Islam (Shamsul 1994). It implies that, in practice, non-Malays/non-Muslims need to respect Malays/Muslims when it comes to inter-ethnic and interreligious relations. This does not mean that a parallel symbiosis also exists for non-Malay ethnic groups. The Chinese practice a variety of religions including Islam, according to the 1970, 1981, and 1991 censuses (Soo 2004; Tan 2000). In other words, the importance of religion for the Chinese is not to serve as a marker of ethnic identity. Rather, it is, in my view, a foundation for associative life, and more specifically, principally important for organizing social and public life. Religion for the Chinese has been engaged since the colonial divide-and-rule policy when the Kapitan for the Chinese resided in the Cheng Hoon Teng temple. In the case of the early Chinese "civil society," surname and hometown associations are organized around religious rituals with an ancestor altar for the former and a patron deity for the latter (for example, the Goddess Mazu for Hainanese associations in Malacca). Religion also serves as the basis for voluntary welfare organizations such as the Moral Uplifting Society (Dejiao hui). In other words, religion is one of the primary foundations for Chinese organizations, which constitute one of the "three pillars" of the Malaysian Chinese society.[8]

Religion has long been part and parcel of Chinese civil society in Malaysia. Malaysia is one of Tzu Chi's largest overseas branches in terms of the number of local chapters. Tzu Chi Malaysia has a total of 77 branch offices and functions roughly as two overlapping systems: Penang and Kuala Lumpur-Malacca.[9] The Penang branch runs a dialysis center and a cultural center and coordinates local chapters in Ipoh, Kelantan, and Kedah of northern Malaysia. The Malacca branch has a splendid assembly hall, collaborates with Kuala Lumpur, and leads all the local chapters in central, southern, and eastern Malaysia. By 1997, Tzu Chi Malaysia had a total of 33 commissioners. The number of commissioners increased to 878 by 2009.[10] The majority of core members and participants are Chinese Malaysians.

Tzu Chi Malaysia has a relatively full-fledged realization of the central organization's "Four Great Missions" of charity, medical care, education, and humanity (or culture). Medical care is centered at the dialysis center in Penang, the free clinics in Malacca, Kuala Lumpur and Klang, and various mobile free clinics in central and remote parts of Malaysia held by the Tzu Chi's International Medical

[8]Malaysian Chinese society, especially the Chinese-speaking majority (as opposed to the English-speaking one, which constitutes 10 % of the 6.5 million Chinese Malaysians), continues to operate through "three pillars"—Chinese schools (1,291 public schools and 60 independent schools); Chinese organizations, or *hua zong* (both religious and secular, and including some 7,000 registered clan, guild, and business groups); and Chinese media (six newspapers on the peninsula and eight in East Malaysia). Jocelyn Tan, "One Race, Two Sets of Views." *Star* (September 23, 2007): F26.

[9]"2009 nian quanqiu Ciji fenbu guojia diqu ji fenzhihui lianluochu fenbutu [global distribution of Tzu Chi in countries and map of branch offices, year 2009]"*Tzu Chi Almanac 2009* (2010): 456.

[10]Ibid., 459.

Association (TIMA), which is modeled after Doctors Without Borders. Education is encompassed by the activism of both the Tzu Chi teachers' association and the youth corps, and broadened by the continuing education centers in Malacca and Kuala Lumpur, which are under the auspices of Tzu Chi University in Taiwan. Humanity includes the publication and distribution of Tzu Chi literature in print and online, the local production of Da-ai TV programs in Malacca and Kuala Lumpur, and the recently mushroomed Jing-Si (or, "still thoughts") Books and Cafes all over Malaysia.[11] In addition, the environmental mission of Tzu Chi Malaysia concentrates on sorting garbage for recycling and campaigning for the usage of personal bowls and utensils rather than disposables.

However, Tzu Chi does not confine itself to ethnic enclaves as do the majority of Chinese religious organizations in Malaysia. While practice of the missions of education and humanity more or less overlaps with their participants' Chinese ethnicity, Tzu Chi Malaysia moves beyond Chinese ethnicity in the missions of charity and medical care. Following the headquarters' categorization, Tzu Chi Malaysia distinguishes "international relief" from "charity." Charity refers to local practice. Across Taiwan and around the world, charity has been the cornerstone of local Tzu Chi practice. Both the Penang and Malacca branches see finding and caring for local, eligible charity recipients as their core practice. Although Tzu Chi is often seen and thought of as helping the Chinese and/or Taiwanese, their charity recipients belong to all ethnic groups. In fact, as the total number of the charity recipients of the Malacca branch has increased, the distribution between Chinese and non-Chinese has also changed significantly. For example, according to the statistics from the branch office, in 2001, 325 out of a total of 421 recipients were Chinese, and, in 2003, the total has increased to 1,225, among whom 478 were Chinese and 747 were non-Chinese, including 267 Malay, 174 Indian, and 306 others, largely composed of migrant workers, *orang asli*, and Indonesians. In addition, Tzu Chi also provides goods to primary and secondary *orang asli* students in Lampada and Kiulu (Taiwan Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation in Malaysia 2011). With regard to international relief, Tzu Chi Malaysia has not only raised funds for every appeal from the Taiwanese headquarters but has also joined its fellow Tzu Chi followers from Taiwan to help in international relief delivery, for example, in Hambantota, Sri Lanka after the tsunami in 2004, and in Yogyakarta, Indonesia after the earthquake in 2006.

The Tzu Chi free clinic is perhaps what distinguishes the group most from the local Chinese religious medical initiatives. When I first began my research in 2004, I was told that Tzu Chi was the only Buddhist group that provides Western medical

[11] They are similar to Borders or Barnes & Noble cafés with free wireless Internet, although with a quainter ambiance and an unabashedly exclusive collection of Tzu Chi literature and souvenirs. As of January 2008, there are a total of 11 Jing-Si Books and Cafés in Malaysia. Their locations are as follows: Malacca, Kota Kinabalu, Kuala Lumpur, Bukit Bintang, Klang, Penang, Butterworth, Jitra, Ipoh, Kelantan, Selangor, and Johor Bahru. *The World of Tzu Chi* 1 (January 2008): 80.

services. My fieldwork shows that the major distinction may not be between Western and Chinese medicine, since at least one small Buddhist group, the Amitabha Centre, also provides dialysis (for a fee). Rather, the major distinction is that Tzu Chi actively seeks to provide medical services to non-Chinese groups and even institutionalizes this outreach orientation. Indeed, the medical care mission has also been the major frontier for its outreach beyond the Chinese diaspora. The waiting area of the Free Clinic in Malacca is regularly filled with a mixture of Indian, Malay, and *orang asli*, with Chinese and a handful of Indian volunteers tending to them. In addition to visiting the Free Clinic in Malacca during my fieldwork in 2004, 2006, and 2008, I also participated once in the regular mobile free clinic, which frequents settlements of the *orang asli* in Tebong, Masjid Tanah, and Lubuk China in the state of Malacca. The clinic team consisted of fewer than ten people, including one nurse practitioner, and the rest were volunteers. The team left early in the morning from the Malacca branch office in one minivan carrying medical supplies and one compact car. As soon as they arrived at the estate, staff members were divided up to carry out different tasks, with the medical staff and volunteers directing volunteers to households according to the list of records from previous visits, checking on each patient in his or her house. The locals appeared to be relatively familiar with the Tzu Chi team, with adults conversing in Bahasa Malaysia while children curiously followed the team around, navigating the woods and houses. The entire visit was short and efficient, and strictly medical. There was no attempt to distribute Tzu Chi information.

In 2004 Tzu Chi began its first collaboration with UNHCR in providing medical outreach to the Myanmar Muslim Religious School. In 2005 and again in 2007, UNHCR further appointed Tzu Chi Kuala Lumpur as a partner, operating to provide medical and dental assistance on a monthly basis to the refugees and detainees in the detention camps.[12] In addition, the TIMA has been holding free clinic visitations, often large-scale, in various locations. For example, from March 9–11, 2007, TIMA of Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia jointly held the Ninth Free Clinic on Batam Island. More than 100 medical personnel and 300 volunteers were involved, and a total of 4,245 patients received treatment (Tzu Chi Medical Care 2007).

In sum, Tzu Chi in Malaysia apparently shifted from diasporic to ecumenical in its outreach programs, most specifically in medicine, charity, and environmentalism. Tzu Chi's medical outreach has become complementary to public medical care, and the group's charity and environmental initiatives have received awards from high ranking officials including the Chief Minister and the Prime Minister.[13] The shift shows that welfare is a niche for a breakthrough from ethnic enclaves.

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[12] *Tzu Chi & UNHCR: Collaboration & Activities*, Taiwan Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur Branch), not dated.

[13] The environmental mission has been so successful and timely that it has received awards from the Malaysian government, including an award presentation from Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi on Malaysia Environmental Protection Day in 2003. The charity mission of the Malacca branch was praised many times by Chief Minister Datuk Wira Mohd Ahmad Ali Rstam of the State of Melaka. The Malacca branch clinic has provided free surgery to low-income patients transferred from the Central Hospital. In 2002 and 2003, Tzu Chi Malacca received RM 10,000 medical funds each year from the state government. *Tzu Chi Malaysia Annals 2003.*

According to Kevin Tan and Li-ann Thio, the constitution of Malaysia provides limited freedom for propagation (see below), yet gives full rights to religious groups to own property and contribute to welfare (Tan and Thio 2010). In other words, welfare-oriented religious groups are not only legally safe but also politically correct under this neo-liberal regime. The possible cause and effect seems to be a perfect match and a win-win situation; both the government and the religious groups get what they want within a demarcated field of activities. But, the question remains, how clearly demarcated is it? And, what if the very act of providing happens to be the core of religiosity for the provider?

Proselytization

Tzu Chi established its Malacca branch in 1992, and it became the main office for all of Malaysia. The Malacca branch was founded and continues to be led by Mr. and Mrs. Liu. The Lius have long been pious Buddhists, taking refuge with a monk in Taiwan prior to their migration. Mr. Liu distinguishes Tzu Chi from his previous Buddhist practice, saying that: "Our 'Pure Land' practice used to involve only chanting scriptures every day. The *Dharma* gate of Tzu Chi, which we now identify with, is more 'practical.'"

The Lius emigrated to Malaysia in 1988 to set up their garment factory in Malacca at exactly the same time that most of the labor-intensive factories began to move abroad due to the change in Taiwan's labor market. On one of her visits back to Taiwan, Mrs. Liu read a Tzu Chi newsletter and then took a trip to its headquarters. She was very touched and wanted to begin fund-raising in Malaysia, but her actual initiative did not begin until 2 years later when she was introduced to the pioneer Tzu Chi practitioners through their lay Buddhist teacher in Kuala Lumpur. From these practitioners, the Lius learned how to perform locally by providing services instead of fund-raising. She and her workers began regular volunteer work by cleaning at houses of poor local seniors, most of whom were Chinese and Indians.

Mrs. Liu took her husband to visit the Tzu Chi headquarters, where he felt deeply moved by Tzu Chi's autonomous "way of cultivation" in this world. The Lius held the first charitable relief distribution at their factory in 1994, and built the Still Thoughts Hall in 1997 on its current parcel of land, which is located in the free trade zone.

Although the Lius are Taiwanese immigrants, the Malacca branch consisted primarily of local Chinese. None of the staff members I met at the foundation office were from Taiwan. The youth corps of the branch also consisted only of Chinese Malaysians. This is similar to the corps in Penang and different from the other two youth corps I visited in Boston and Japan, wherein members turn over periodically because the majority of them were Taiwanese students studying there and would leave for home upon completion of degrees. Nevertheless, the Malacca branch not only shared with other branches a growing attention to campus and youth, but it had also shifted its local development to education. When Mrs. Liu began to feel stuck

in Tzu Chi local development, she consulted a commissioner in Taiwan, who said, "Go to campuses." The results of introducing Tzu Chi into the Chinese educational system in Malaysia have been impressive. The branch has been able to hold Tzu Chi collegiate youth retreats of more than 2,000 students in recent years. Many of the foundation staff members are former Tzu Chi youths who have turned their volunteer participation into professional careers. In addition to the youth corps, the Malacca branch has succeeded in gradually influencing Chinese high school students. Despite her lack of teaching experience, Mrs. Liu has been demonstrating the Tzu Chi "Still Thought Pedagogy" in local Chinese high schools. Her efforts resulted in the formation of the Tzu Chi Teachers' Association in Malaysia, the first of its kind outside of Taiwan, whose members include Tzu Chi teachings in their students' curricula.

Except for its leaders, the Malacca branch has few Taiwanese members. Although there are many Taiwanese small shopkeepers and entrepreneurs in Malacca and in other cities with local chapters under the Malacca branch, they tend to contribute money rather than participate in Tzu Chi activities. Both Mr. and Mrs. Liu spent time within the Taiwanese circle when they arrived 12 years ago, and it was then a relatively small group. The Lius eventually distanced themselves from it because of their different lifestyles. Mr. Liu has raised funds among Taiwanese entrepreneurs for Tzu Chi but did not find further social involvement in the Taiwanese community appealing.

It is important to note that Mrs. Liu was a pious Buddhist as well as a transnational traveler even before joining Tzu Chi. Mrs. Liu disseminated Buddhist information from Taiwan prior to her visit to Tzu Chi headquarters. Her first instinct to carry out Tzu Chi in Malaysia by collecting money locally and sending it back to Taiwan was in line with her hitherto "traditional" practice of Buddhist charity, that is, through donations either to those in need or to those who could carry out the charity's mission. But soon she found the traditional Buddhist approach unfulfilling and found solace in Tzu Chi.

The branch started out as a team of a few office staff members led by Mrs. Liu. Through the staff members' networks, they learned about a nursing home that needed volunteers. In addition, the female factory workers informed them of individuals and families in need of help. "Because of their own living environment, they're more likely to know people who have been suffering, and they reported to us," as the former accountant of Mr. Liu's factory explained to me in 2004:

> We followed the address as reported to us… And when we visited one house, their neighbors were curious… Why had this deserted household suddenly gotten so many visitors? We told them we're here to help. They would report other families who also needed help. So we have more and more cases … Then we held a reception [*chahui,* literally, "tea party," Tzu Chi's term for reception] at Mrs. Liu's office, and told everyone to bring their friends and family here to learn about Tzu Chi.

A common theme running through the interviews conducted with local Tzu Chi members regardless of their class backgrounds is their commitment to socially engaged Buddhism. All seemed to view their engagement as important to self-actualization as opposed to as an obligation of livelihood, profit, or peer-group

approval. Apparently, they see the significance of hands-on charity as born out of their earlier belief in and practice of Buddhism.[14]

Tzu Chi Malacca has gone through a few stages in terms of expanding and tapping into social networks of non-members and members: The story traces back first to economic migration, as the Lius migrated from Taiwan to Malaysia for the advantages of the free trade zone. The initial migration was further combined with Buddhist transnational practice, as Mrs. Liu continued to carry Buddhist media between Taiwan and Malaysia. Moreover, the Lius' Buddhist practice became transnationally dyadic, as they became followers of a Buddhist monk, Boyuan Zhanglao, in Malaysia, at the same time they were frequenting the Tzu Chi headquarters in Taiwan. The Malaysia-based monk eventually connected Mrs. Liu to a handful of Chinese Malaysian Tzu Chi pioneers in Perak, who gave Mrs. Liu hands-on instruction in carrying out charity work. At this point, through a structural passageway—Boyuan, between two different social networks—the Taiwan-Malaysia transnational Buddhist network became connected to the local Buddhist network in Malaysia. However, according to Mr. Liu and Tzu Chi publications, the pioneers in Perak eventually disappeared and did not serve as a significant structural passageway between Taiwanese transnational Buddhists and Tzu Chi Malaysia networks. Rather, the connection to local trust networks took place in the workplace, namely, in the Liu's garment factory, from the clerks to the factory workers, and to the workers' neighborhood. However, proselytizing occurred mainly among the clerks, who, like the accountant, had already been responding to Mrs. Liu's Buddhist charitable causes even before developing her Tzu Chi connection. At the same time, information interlinks the pool of factory workers–both in discovering prospective charity

[14] Among the 14 local adherents this paper refers to (not including the Lius) were 10 females and 4 males. Seven were born between 1931 and 1956, four between 1960 and 1965, and three between 1972 and 1977. Seven first came to Tzu Chi before or during 1997 (the year when the local branch building was erected) and the rest after 1997. Age groups are distributed equally between the two periods. Except for 1 Caucasian from Australia, the 13 Chinese-ethnic interviewees included only 1 Taiwanese, and the other 12 were born locally with no relations in Taiwan. Four were from relatively lower-income backgrounds, the Australian was unemployed, and the other three had retired from jobs as a nurse, a tailor, and a barber. Seven were from middle-class backgrounds or had spouses who were small shopkeepers or professionals (accountant, secretary, educator, preschool principal), and three either were upper-middle class or had spouses who were (physician and entrepreneur). The Taiwanese was a first-generation immigrant, and the 12 born locally were at least second- and mostly third-generation migrants from mainland China. Except for one Straits-born Chinese who didn't know her ancestors' hometown, the ancestral origin or dialect group of the other 11 locally born interviewees were: five Hokkien, five Cantonese (four Teochew and one Hakka), and one Hainanese. Three out of five Cantonese descendents were from outside Malacca. The sample, therefore, reflects the local Chinese population quite well, as it is predominantly Hokkien and primarily composed of descendents of nineteenth-century immigrants. All of the 13 Chinese-ethnic interviewees worked for Tzu Chi more than 1 day a week, and the Australian had worked for 4 months. In fact, as they listed their activities, it was revealed that all of them worked for Tzu Chi every day, either coming to volunteer at the branch or participating in activities such as sorting garbage for recycling, visiting charity recipients and nursing homes, or going out individually to collect membership dues. Three of the interviewees were full-time staff members who also spent their free time as volunteers.

recipients and in publicizing the nascent Tzu Chi Malacca by expanding the number of participants for the "tea party."

Most devotees I interviewed in 2004 came to Tzu Chi during this early stage, which they often refer to as the "Shangqiao period," after the name of the Lius' garment factory. During this period, Tzu Chi's activities were held in the canteen of the factory complex prior to the completion of the Still Thoughts Hall in 1997. As early as 1995, Mrs. Liu began to tap into one of the most important Chinese Malaysian networks—the Chinese education system, *huawen jiaoyu* (Chinese written characters education), commonly referred to by the shortened *huajiao* (Chinese education). At this juncture, the connection between Tzu Chi and the Chinese education system is Mr. Z, a supervisor at the Bureau of Education in the State of Malacca, who met Mrs. Liu through the principal of a Chinese school in 1995. A pious and learned Buddhist, Mr. Z responded to Mrs. Liu's proposal for Still Thoughts pedagogy and began to promote the religion among the teachers of the Chinese education system while becoming an active devotee of Tzu Chi Malacca. Mr. Z was apparently a structural passageway between the Tzu Chi network and the local Chinese education network. The result was the formation of the Tzu Chi Teachers' Club, which extended the Lius' work-related and Taiwan-related networks to agents of Chinese schooling, which is one of the "three pillars" of Malaysian Chinese civil society.[15]

Slightly overlapping with, yet starting a bit later than, the utilization of the Chinese education networks was the growth of Buddhist study clubs in colleges, which Tzu Chi tapped into around 1997. The majority of staff in the Malacca office as well as in the Kuala Lumpur and even Singapore offices is former Tzu Chi college youths who relate easily to each other through class years and cohorts. They first encountered Tzu Chi through Buddhist clubs on campus, where they formed their own separate Tzu Chi groups and lived together off campus, a bit like a fraternity or sorority group, and mobilized students for Tzu Chi summer camps. Some became full-time, paid staff immediately upon graduation, and others worked elsewhere (even outside of Malacca) before they eventually "returned" to Tzu Chi. For example, Huiwan was from the second cohort of Tzu Chi youths during her college days. Eleven out of the 12 members in her cohort became full-time paid staff in Tzu Chi offices in Malacca, Kuala Lumpur, or Singapore. The one exception found other work due to pressure from his family who regarded Tzu Chi jobs as under-paid under-employment.

Overlapping with the above mentioned social networks are the local Buddhist networks. The remaining devotees who did not belong to any of these social networks came to Tzu Chi through public events, such as "tea party" receptions. Some of them learned about the group through small announcements about the receptions in local Chinese newspapers. The majority learned the information through a friend

[15] In 2003, there were 65 Chinese schools fully aided by government in Malacca. The total number of students was 21,082, and there were 1,090 teachers. There was only one independent secondary Chinese school in Malacca, Pay Fong Secondary School, which mainly relies on donations from the Chinese community. There were five more conventional schools in Malacca and one Chinese evening school (Choy 2003).

from another Buddhist social network, who they then accompanied to these events. Even those who learned about Tzu Chi through newspapers made their initial visits as a result of being encouraged by fellow Buddhist friends. In other words, as early as the "Shangqiao period," Tzu Chi Malacca had begun to tap into local Buddhist social networks.

The local Buddhists social networks in Malacca—as well as in Malaysia more generally—are well organized, compared with the more horizontal shape of Buddhist networks in New York where I have also conducted fieldwork with the local Tzu Chi branch. Local followers in Malacca come from four sources of Buddhist networks. The first source is the Buddhist study groups in neighborhoods, or "parks," as they are described locally (*huayuan* in Chinese, or *taman* in Malay). Sources also include Buddhist study groups at colleges/universities and *sutra* chanting classes and *dharma* events at local popular temples (mainly, Cheng Hoon Teng and Seck Khia Een). The final source includes a variety of Buddhist associations. These associations range from the most organized, active, nationwide monastic network—the Malaysia Buddhist Association (*Malaixiya fojiao zonghui*, commonly referred to by its abbreviation, *Mafozong*) and the equally organized yet far more intellectual and publicly outspoken Young Buddhist Association of Malaysia (*Malaixiya fojiao qingnian xiehui*, commonly referred to by its abbreviation, *Mafoqing*)—to many other groups of much smaller scale, including the Jingzong Xuehui, or Pure Land Study Association.

Most of the early cohorts of Tzu Chi youth came from the college Buddhist study club networks. Some Tzu Chi youth are connected with the Young Buddhist Association of Malaysia. Women of middle age and older mainly came from the local neighborhood Buddhist association networks. A few devotees did not connect with Tzu Chi through any of the above-mentioned networks. For example, some came to Tzu Chi through work-related networks, neighborhood and public event sign-ups, or personal networks. A closer look at members' personal histories shows that across all these types, most were either pious Buddhists or felt strong personal ties to Mr. or Mrs. Liu. In sum, the proselytization of Tzu Chi Malacca division was mainly done through Mr. and Mrs. Liu as network brokers or "structural holes" who belong to more than one network and use their connections to proselytize the Taiwanese, the factory employees, the local Buddhist leader, and the Chinese school system. In addition to the Lius' networks, the existing local Buddhist networks are sources for prospective followers through public events held by Tzu Chi.

The Limits of Religious Pluralism

When local followers are asked about the difficulties they encountered in promoting Tzu Chi in Malaysia, the answers range from self-criticism and tension with their families to criticism from local Chinese intellectuals and political activists and language barriers, especially related to translating into Malay. In fact, in the early stages of introducing Tzu Chi to Malaysia and Singapore, local devotees had

difficulties in clarifying the name of the group, since the pronunciation of "Tzu Chi" is very similar to the word *cuci* in Malay, which means "to wash."

When asked about concerns in delivering relief to non-Buddhist and/or non-Chinese, the answers are usually matter-of-fact, for example, more than one local core member responded with, "We don't say *amituofo*," or, more specifically, "We don't do joined palms to the Malay." This is similar to the response and the practice in Taiwan for Christian indigenous peoples. When pressed further for specific concerns with respect to bringing in non-Chinese followers, the answers are intriguing.

The coordinator of both Singapore and Malacca branches, Mr. Liu, said in our interview in 2004, that there are Muslim Malay members, but there are no Muslim Malay volunteers. Tzu Chi membership requires only a minimum monetary donation and no commitment or even conversion. The majority of the ten million members the group claims are what I called "checkbook members." There are two types of volunteers: temporary and regular. In many international relief work projects and free clinic tours, it is not uncommon to see veiled Muslim nurses clad with Tzu Chi volunteer vests, serving as temporary helping hands. However, to be a regular volunteer requires more than a minimum monetary donation: he or she is registered in the division's volunteer roster, and is expected to participate in charity events as well as ceremonies and training programs. In light of its action-oriented religiosity, making someone a regular volunteer is closer than a checkbook member to the act of proselytizing. He explained:

> Because the activities of volunteers involve prostration to the Buddha lah, training programs lah, right? The Buddhist etiquette and rituals are taboo to the Muslim. It's impossible for them to be volunteers. Although we don't have sensitive issues with religion, when we come back to *gongxiu* (cultivating together), Buddhism would be the primary curriculum.

As a solution, he created English *gongxiu* for non-Buddhists, including Hindus and Christians. The English group follows no Buddhist rituals. Nevertheless, it introduces the "spirit, practice, wisdom, and compassion" of Tzu Chi. But, how to make it non-Buddhist yet still Tzu Chi at the same time? Liu said to me in 2004:

> Because it all comes from our Cheng Yen *shangren* [the supreme person]… our entire mission comes from the Venerable Cheng Yen… There will be no Tzu Chi without the Supreme Person. Of course we need to respect her. This respect is certainly acceptable. You see? We have many physician volunteers for the free clinic who are Christian and Catholic. He has his God but he is also very respectful towards the Master. It is because the Master has very broad perspectives, and what she has been doing always transcends religion and ethnicity… We respect the [non-Buddhist] volunteers. We won't put them on the spot.

Such an approach to non-religious volunteering has become more common in Tzu Chi's global development. At least in branches where I participated as a researcher and a volunteer, including New York, Boston, Malacca, and Singapore, the Tzu Chi devotees emphasized that their work follows the thoughts of the Venerable Cheng Yen and that participation in volunteer works does not require conversion. Such an open-minded and quasi-secular introduction leads to an image of ecumenical participation in its relief work. Such participation in volunteer work is still different from entering further volunteer training programs that involve Buddhist rituals and the propagation of Buddhism.

The English volunteer training course (*jianxi*) for prospective commissioners in Malacca has reached beyond Chinese ethnicity such that in the March 2010 session there was an Indian participant among the 23 from Kuala Lumpur, Klang, Melaka, and Tampin. The course consists of the Buddhist ritual of chanting with joined palms and on knees, the teaching of the Venerable Cheng Yeng's books, including the *Jing Si Aphorisms* (The Still Thoughts), and a closing lecture clearly addressing the training as a "recruitment of Bodhisattvas (Tzu Chi Foundation, Malaysia 2010)."

However, the limits of religious pluralism may be felt more subtly for local Chinese Malaysians, especially when it comes to Malay Muslims. The following is an excerpt from an interview with a married couple. The interview was conducted in English since both husband (BT) and wife (EG) received higher education overseas in English-speaking countries. The wife received most of her schooling and college education outside of Malaysia, while the husband was only away for a few years to obtain a degree.

BT: Tzu Chi is the only one group [in Malacca that] reaches out. The only Buddhist [group]! There are other Buddhist groups starting to do these. So far, I would say Tzu Chi is the best.

EG: When I first started telling people, the patients couldn't believe the treatment they received is absolutely free. So through them, actually influence a lot more people to have faith in Tzu Chi. The more Chinese, the more faith in Tzu Chi. It is because when having the word "Buddhist" in front of Tzu Chi, a lot of non-Chinese has a lot of misunderstanding. But in fact, Tzu Chi's action changes the impression about Buddhist society.

JH: So the suspicion was from non-Chinese. Do you see that Tzu Chi could eventually become a trans-racial, trans-cultural? I mean in terms of believers. Of course, in terms of recipients, it's definitely trans-racial and trans-cultural. But in terms of believers, do you think it will appeal to non-Chinese?

EG: I think it's pretty difficult in Malaysia for them to, because it's a Muslim country. So for them to participate, it won't be a problem. But for them to fully believe [in Buddhism] and become Buddhists, it's quite impossible.

BT: You [JH] don't understand! In Malaysia… it is illegal to convert their [Muslim] religion. The government is very sensitive. If you try, you'll be in big trouble!

EG: In fact, one of my volunteers is a Muslim. When she tried to participate in our *Gongxiu*, her colleagues made remark on her. She really wanted to participate, but she couldn't stop the remark on her.

BT: You have to be very careful. Religion in this country is a very sensitive issue.

Just how careful? The educator, Mr. Z explained to me in our interview how careful they have to be in practicing social work in a pluralist society:

> Even when we discuss our Buddhism with [a Malay], we'll be very careful not to mislead him. Oh, for example, if I am talking to a Malay friend, oh, I talk about why Buddhism is good, and he talks about why Islam is good. What if, in the end, he says, oh, what you say about Buddhism sounds really good, I think I'll go with you! Then, you are in trouble. You are in trouble.[16]

[16]Compare with Embong (2001).

The above passage appears in a paper I wrote and was uploaded online for a workshop in Hong Kong. A woman came to me during the break before my session, introducing herself as a Malaysian national, a law professor in Australia, and a visiting scholar in Hong Kong. She was very friendly and warm in the beginning when she began to tell me how happy she was to find a paper about Malaysian Chinese in the workshop. Soon she moved on to her major, or perhaps the most urgent concern as she had to leave for a class before my session. She quoted the above passage and spoke hastily yet forcefully, "Why did you stop there? It's self-censorship! Can't you see it? … I was educated in Malay and I have nothing against Islam. But this is exactly what we live with. You must dig into it."

The Constitution of Malaysia addresses the freedom of religion in Article 11:

(1) Every person has the right to profess and practice his religion and, subject to Clause (4), to propagate it.
(2) No person shall be compelled to pay any tax the proceeds of which are specially allocated in whole or in part for the purposes of a religion other than his own.
(3) Every religious group has the right:

   a. to manage its own religious affairs;
   b. to establish and maintain institutions for religious or charitable purposes; and,
   c. to acquire and own property and hold and administer it in accordance with law.

(4) State law and in respect of the Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur and Lubuan, federal law may control or restrict the propagation of any religious doctrine or belief among persons professing the religion of Islam.
(5) This Article does not authorize any act contrary to any general law relating to public order, public health or morality.

The actual "limit" of religious pluralism in terms of propagation is clause 4. In practice, according to Professor Kevin Tan of National University of Singapore, the key is the Sedition Act of 1948.[17] After the riots in Kuala Lumpur on May 13, 1969, Section 3(1) was amended "so the constitutionally entrenched special position of the Malays could not be questioned in public (Emergency [essential Powers] Ordinance No. 45 of 1970)."[18] Section 3 currently states, "A 'seditious tendency' is a tendency—*(a)* to bring into hatred or contempt or to excite disaffection against any Ruler or against any Government… *(e)* to promote feelings of ill will and hostility between different races or classes of the population of Malaysia…"[19]

[17]Personal communication, February 17, 2011. Also see "Public Prosecutor v. Ong Kian Cheong and Another [2009] SGDC 163" (District Court, Singapore). "The accused were convicted under section 4(1) read with section 3(1)(e) of the Sedition Act (SA) read with section 34 of the Penal Code for randomly distributing religious tracts which were considered seditious and objectionable to Muslims and being in possession of such publications." Tan and Thio (2010, p. 1028).

[18]Tan and Thio, *Constitutional Law in Malaysia and Singapore*, 1203.

[19]"Laws of Malaysia: Act 15—Sedition Act 1948, Incorporating all amendments up to 1 January 2006." Published by The Commissioner of Law Revision, Malaysia, under the Authority of the Revision of Laws Act 1968, in collaboration with Malayan Law Journal SDN Bhd and Percetakan Nasional Malaysia Bhd, (2006), 5.

The legal constraint discussed above shows that the "fear" of proselytizing or even "self-censorship" expressed by the Tzu Chi followers is not ungrounded. In addition to the legal constraints, the arrest of missionaries attempting to proselytize Malay Muslim is not unheard of. There was a case in which the alleged members of a conversion mission were arrested, although no further information about the alleged "missionaries" beyond the point of arrest.[20]

Although the limits of religious pluralism as experienced by the Tzu Chi devotees stem from the legal framework and its actual implementation, the niche wherein Tzu Chi can shift from diaspora to ecumenical also comes from the legal framework. It is signaled by Article 11(3), which recognizes "the associative dimensions of religious freedom in the right of religious groups to manage their own religious affairs, maintain institutions for religious or charitable purposes and to hold property."[21] In other words, the core of Tzu Chi's practice, that is, welfare delivery is perfectly legal and even encouraged.

In sum, the importance of proselytizing and volunteering for relief work pushes Tzu Chi Malaysia in between diasporic and ecumenical under the particular setting and legal framework of religious pluralism. On the one hand, the outreach program fits within the legal framework and has successfully extended beyond the Chinese diaspora such that there are not only recipients, but also members and short-term volunteers who are not Chinese. Such concrete contributions to relief work have their value in Tzu Chi religiosity. In this sense, Tzu Chi is shifting towards the ecumenical. At the same time, the importance of "proselytizing"—in the sense of fundraising and recruitment of regular volunteers –allows Tzu Chi to gravitate towards the existing social networks of members and non-members within the Chinese civil society in Malaysia. Under the same legal framework, Tzu Chi followers would not "proselytize" the Muslim Malay for fear of breaking the law and of any detrimental results for the Buddhist community in general.

The case of Tzu Chi Malaysia presents a shift from diasporic to ecumenical in the sense that Malaysian Chinese society provides social networks including many varieties of Buddhist networks. Such a localizing or rooting development via local organic networks is similar to the local development of the Tabligh in West Papua, as discussed by Farish A. Noor in this volume (Chap. 4). Tzu Chi has tapped into Chinese civil society, but does not limit its service to this particular ethnic enclave. Pluralism stops before a profession of faith, but allows "secular conduct" such as welfare outreach programs. Since the Malaysian state espouses the strategic use of religion as welfare partners, Tzu Chi's proselytization and outreach can proceed in tandem.

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[20] In July 2010, nine people were arrested by police at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), allegedly on a covert conversion mission for Christianity. It is unclear what happened to these nine people. "Nine Students Arrested at UPM," *The Malaysian Insider*, July 15, 2009. http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/Nine-students-arrested-at-UPM/. I thank Lim Sok Swan for helping me in collecting the news clippings. http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2009/07/15/malaysia-free-9-christians-conversion-mixup.html.

[21] Tan and Thio, *Constitutional Law in Malaysia and Singapore*, 1199.

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Chapter 11
Conversion and Anti-conversion in Contemporary Sri Lanka: Pentecostal Christian Evangelism and Theravada Buddhist Views on the Ethics of Religious Attraction

Neena Mahadev

In October 2010, a group of Buddhist laypeople and monks who had been angered over the new wave of conversions to Christianity in Sri Lanka over recent years collaborated with a national Sinhala-language news team to conduct a sting operation to expose the "fraudulent" claims of a "fundamentalist" Christian pastor. The newscast showed a team of Buddhist monks and lay people aggressively confronting the pastor, who claimed to have the capacity to miraculously heal the sick. A day prior to the telecast, one of the collaborators, a Buddhist lay person feigning interest in getting healed, called the pastor to inquire if the rumors of his healing abilities were true. The pastor confirmed that he possessed this gift, and over the phone he instructed the young man to come to his prayer center the following day. The young man arrived on the pastor's doorstep, alongside several incensed young men, several Buddhist clergy in their distinctive orange robes, and a video crew. Under the pressure of the antagonistic crowd that had gathered to interrogate him, and the gaze of the nationalist media's video camera, the pastor was put in the uncomfortable position of having to defend himself by denying what he spent his days convincing his congregation and potential believers of: that he could channel the power of Jesus Christ, that he could aid in the healing of the sick, and that he could bring prosperity to those in need of the miracle of God's grace. His accusers were armed with an audio recording of the previous day's phone call, leaving the pioneering pastor in this predominantly Buddhist area to defend himself against accusations of lying and hostile questioning of his motives, on the nationally-broadcast Sinhala-language evening news. In the same news clip, the interrogators accused the pastor of cutting the branches and burning the root-base of a Bodhi tree—a tree that symbolizes the Buddha's achievement of *nirvana* ("enlightenment" or "awakening"). The pastor defensively averred that the cutting and burning of the tree was meant to reduce the amount of dengue-carrying mosquitoes in order to curb the epidemic in the area. A

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figure in the assembled crowd retorted, "If you were trying to prevent dengue, you could have cut the branches—but you needn't have burned the roots!"[1]

This incriminating sting operation that ventured to expose the pastor as a fraud and to demonstrate his cunning by pressuring him to publically deny his "grace" follows upon a broader set of suspicions among Buddhist nationalists that Christians routinely engage in "unethical" practices of religious propagation. With the heightened visibility of new forms of Christian evangelism, and of Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity in particular, a diverse set of Sri Lankan Christian practices have been subject to new or renewed reactionary responses within the political realm, as well as to violent responses outside the scope of formal politics.[2] Christian evangelism is under scrutiny in Sri Lanka largely because the practices it entails are perceived to be threatening to Buddhism.[3] It is alleged that within the conversion process, new recruits are required to participate in activities that denigrate the religion of their birth.[4] For instance, rumors that circulate among Buddhists nationalists suggest that evangelical pastors command their congregants to literally smash Buddhist "idols" as an act of commitment to Christ. In response, certain Buddhist nationalist organizations have collaborated to supply written reports to ministries of the Sri Lankan government to support lobbying efforts to enhance measures to protect Buddhism.[5]

This chapter critically considers Buddhist nationalists' claims about "unethical conversions" (*sadhacara nomætiwa virodhiwa harawa gænima*) to Christianity, which are sharply articulated in Sri Lankan nationalist discourses about the imperative to protect Buddhism. I will specifically explore the criteria of judgment used to delineate the ethics of attracting converts according to various actors who seek to

[1] LIVE@8 television news broadcast, Swarnavahini television, Colombo. Aired October 21, 2010.

[2] Throughout this chapter I use the terms "evangelical" and "Pentecostal." As I use them, "evangelical" simply means a Christian who is committed to "spreading the Good News" (*subaramciya prawaraya karannawa*). Pentecostals (or Pentecostal-charismatics) are by definition evangelical Christians. However, not all evangelicals are Pentecostals. Within Sri Lankan Protestant and Roman Catholic churches there are strands of evangelicalism as well as liberal non-evangelical Christianity. Also, although some classify Pentecostalism as a subset of Protestantism, the practices and ideologies of Pentecostal and Protestant religious practice are substantially different. See Martin (2002a).

[3] According to the 2001 census, Buddhists constitute approximately 76.7 % of the population, in comparison with the roughly 6 % of the population claiming to be Roman Catholics, and *significantly less than* the 1 % of the population was categorized as "other Christian." Not only are these figures dated, given that the census was taken during the civil war, they fail to consider predominantly Tamil areas, which were under control of the LTTE rebels, and which include large populations of Hindus, Muslims, Christians and only small numbers of Buddhists. As a result, the census figures grossly underestimate the number of religious minorities, and specifically Catholic, Protestant, and especially Pentecostal citizens of Sri Lanka there are. There appear to be no accurate sources for this data, in part because the numbers themselves are so easily attached to political agendas.

[4] Not only Buddhists but to some extent Hindus, Catholics, and Muslims in Sri Lanka also feel threatened and have reacted to evangelical Christian practice and preaching.

[5] *The Commission on Unethical Conversions Report* (2009, in Sinhala) by the All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress—a Colombo-based Buddhist lay organization—is one recent example.

set new parameters on the work of religious propagation by Christian evangelists. By examining the aspects of Sri Lankan Christian practice that are deemed to attract converts and the bases on which these practices are perceived to be offensive to Buddhists in the country, I will illustrate that features of Christian charitability and Pentecostal-charismatic faith-healing practices are especially contentious in Sri Lanka, in part, because they collide with locally-established conventions and ideologies that support religiosity and religious propagation.

Sri Lankans advocating for the protection of Buddhism in the public sphere argue that "force, allurement, and other fraudulent means" are involved in recruiting converts to Christianity.[6] "Deceitful strategies" (*kuta upakrama*) include the charitable and humanitarian activities of Christians (and also to some extent of secular Westerners), which Buddhist nationalists broadly assume to be evangelical in intent. Additionally, Pentecostal Christians in particular are targets of the criticism that their religious leaders are "fraudulent" (*wancanika*) in making what are viewed as dubious claims of being able to facilitate miracles, which Buddhist nationalists regard as "inducing" and "alluring" vulnerable people to join the church, and persuading them to forgo their commitment to the religion of their birth. Buddhist nationalists often contend that the features of Christianity that are most conducive to drawing converts hinge upon the promise of material gain. The common concern of established mainline Christian groups as well as Buddhists is that these conversions entail shallow opportunism. However, as I will elaborate below, implied in many Buddhists' criticisms of Christian "fundamentalist" styles of religious propagation is the view that evangelical practices discourage and distract vulnerable and not yet "awakened" individuals' from developing the spiritual aptitudes that can enable them to discern the true worth of a religion; in most cases, such aptitudes and awakening is a possibility only after much moral work by the individual in a future lifetime. This is just one example in which the implicit ethical concerns about conversion and religious attraction that are at stake in Sri Lanka are derived from Buddhistic norms and ideals. Thus, while the concerns about conversion are indeed largely about identity politics and shifting demographics, what will become evident is that however much the contemporary debate over conversion and anti-conversion in Sri Lanka is an expression of rivalry between different religious communities, one community's perceptions of the other are steeped in much more than politics of competition. The concern about the ethics of conversion in Sri Lanka is indeed not only a rhetorical practice of fundamentalist political maneuvering. In some respects, the grounds for the consternation over the ethics of religious attraction and conversion are expressions of the difference between Buddhist and Christian archetypes of conversion and religious initiation—a fact that comes into sharp relief when considering

[6]In efforts by a political party consisting of Buddhist monks who were elected to the Sri Lankan Parliament for a single term in 2004, they drafted. As stated in the draft legislation to ban what Buddhist nationalist activists deemed to be "unethical religious conversions," such conversions were allegedly induced by "force, allurement and other fraudulent means." *Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion Act* was publicized by gazette notification in Sri Lanka, May 28, 2004. See also: Owens (2007).

the particular bases for objection to evangelism by Buddhists, and by assessing these critiques alongside soteriologies and cosmologies that animate these living and evolving religious traditions.

Buddhist nationalists and Christian evangelists both see their respective religious legacies on the island as the work of salvational missions of dramatically different sorts, and metaphysical, cosmological and practical ideas about proper ways to pursue these missions strongly inform the respective concerns of Buddhists and Christians.[7] But it is more than the means, methods, and the types of targets chosen as subjects of evangelism by "Christian fundamentalists" (*Cristiyani muladharma warayo*) that Buddhist nationalists are critical of. Implicit within hardline Buddhist nationalist-protectionist discourse is the contention that the entailments of Christianity themselves are harmful to converts. Below, I will also discuss the conditions in which it has become common for Buddhist nationalists who are most ardent in their religious commitments to broadly suspect that the process of becoming enculturated into Christian ways of being has particular ill-effects upon Sri Lankan persons.

Buddhist Nationalism and Christian Evangelism and the Ambiguity of Sri Lankan Secularism

The surge in popularity of evangelical and especially Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity over the last two decades has heightened anxieties among Buddhist nationalists over the extent of Christians' economic, political, and social influence in Sri Lanka.[8] The resistance to Christian evangelism among nationalist segments of the Sri Lankan body politic is a socio-political sensibility that arose much earlier in reaction to colonial-era missionaries who, on early encounters with Theravada Buddhists, responded to Buddhist interlocutors with contempt (Harris 2006). Buddhist nationalists tended to perceive Christian influence, among other features associated with modernity, as a central force contributing to the decline of Buddhism

[7] There has been some scholarly disagreement as to whether propagation or proselytism was crucial in the establishment of Buddhism in India and in other parts of Asia, including Sri Lanka. Ashok Kumar Anand suggests that "conversion by evangelical method marks out Buddhism as making a radical departure from the traditionary lines on which the Indian religions brought new adherents into their fold" (in Anand 1996). However, in (Walters 1992), Jonathan S. Walters has convincingly challenged these received histories of Buddhist propagation, arguing that there was no foundational validation of "Buddhist missions" congruent to Christian evangelical ideas of "the Great Commission"—contrary to what Anglo-American discourses of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries projected onto them. Although Protestant Christian missionaries with their evangelical preoccupations misunderstood foundational Buddhist texts about the development of the monastic community, as well as the Ashokan history about the proliferation of Buddhism, as proof of a highly developed Buddhist missiology, Walters argues Buddhists in the pre-modern era themselves did not view them as such. It is only in the colonial encounter that Buddhism was characterized as having a highly-developed missiology.

[8] Pentecostalism was first established in Sri Lanka in the 1920s. See Somaratna (1996).

(Berkwitz 2008). Over the course of late colonial and postcolonial Sri Lankan history, nationalist activists viewed their ethnicity and religion as inextricably linked in their identity.[9] As a more tightly defined Sinhalese-Buddhist social identity was used to reclaim cultural pride in the face of Western colonial hegemony, a contingent of nationalists became politicized around a number of conservative measures to protect populist interests[10]. In turn, Buddhism and the Sinhalese ethnic and linguistic heritage of the majority were privileged, to the disadvantage of religious and ethnic minorities.

By the time of the writing of the Sri Lankan constitution in 1972, a clause was inserted that required the Sri Lankan state to give Buddhism "the foremost place," and was immediately followed by provisions that guaranteed freedom of "thought, conscience and religion, including the freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice"—implying that a citizen was free to choose to convert.[11] In contrast to the ambivalent secularism particular to the Sri Lankan case, in the Indian context there is no robust constitutional majoritarian-protectionism that profoundly challenges the secularism of the state.[12] Even so, the tensions between Hindu nationalists and religious minorities in India create complications for Indian secularism—much as it does in the Sri Lankan context. The secularism of the Indian state is constantly threatened by the more extreme versions of Hindutva ideology as advanced by various interest groups. In the Sri Lankan case, although constitutional provisions for freedom of conscience are able to hold anti-pluralist interests in check, civil society is similarly affected by the protectionism clause insofar as hardline Buddhist nationalist groups episodically put pressure on relatively moderate nationalists and attempt to sway popular sentiment in favor of majoritarian interests.

Numerous studies on the political history of Sri Lanka have documented how ethno-religious nationalism has impinged upon ethnic minorities and has episodically animated sectarian conflicts.[13] As with the case of Islamic activists in Indonesia that Michael Feener discusses in this volume (Chap. 1), Buddhist nationalist activists in Sri Lanka seek legal redress against groups who engage in proselytism that threatens the strength of their religious community. They sometimes do so by drawing upon anti-pluralistic arguments. For instance, in 2004 a Buddhist nationalist political party led by Buddhist clergy introduced a parliamentary bill to ban

[9] See: De Silva (2005), Malalgoda (1976), Spencer (1990), and Peebles (2006).

[10] K.M. De Silva (2005); Stirrat (1992)

[11] Article 10, 11 and 14 in the Sri Lankan constitution: http://www.priu.gov.lk/Cons/1978Constitution/Chapter_02_Amd.html. See also: Bartholemeusz (1999), Tambiah (1992), and Schonthal (2012).

[12] According to the Indian constitution here are, however, provisions for religious-based personal and family laws that are to be upheld by the state; this entails that differential codes are in effect according to one's religious affiliation. See Chatterjee (1995). Also Larson (2001).

[13] Silva (1986); Spencer, *History and Roots of Conflict*; Tambiah, *Buddhism Betrayed*?; Bartholomeuz and DeSilva (1998); Seneviratne (1999); Obeyesekere and Gombrich (1988); Little (1998); Roberts (1990); and Stirrat, *Power and Religiosity in a Post-colonial Setting*.

"unethical conversions." The bill was modeled after legislation introduced in various Indian states. When defending the bill, the Joint Committee of Buddhist Organizations stated that, "We do not accept Sri Lankan society as presently constituted as a pluralistic society, but this notwithstanding, the Bill in no way undermines or tampers with the right to one's conscience" (Perera 2009). Although this strident anti-pluralism is only evident among a small, vocal contingent of Buddhist nationalists who were involved in lobbying to ban unethical conversions, these concerns resonate strongly with the broader Sinhala Buddhist public, even among moderates. As I argue, this is because such forms of evangelical practice conflictingly bear upon Theravada Buddhist archetypes of religious experience and practice, and qualities of mind associated with religious freedom. By depicting the multivalent ethical concerns in this context, I will demonstrate that Buddhist nationalists' invocations of "unethical conversions" do in fact reach well beyond what a general paradigm of anti-pluralistic religious fundamentalism might suggest.

Continuities and Newness in the Dialogics of Evangelism and Anti-conversion

Given the long history of ethno-religious nationalism in Sri Lanka and the existence of a small but vociferous contingent of Sri Lankans denying the value of a multi-religious society, proponents of religious freedom have expressed skepticism about the appeal to "ethics" that apparently aims to undermine freedom of conscience. There is certainly a sense among Sri Lankan nationalists that the current expression of mutual contempt between Buddhists and Christians in Sri Lanka is the result of the continuities between contemporary Christian evangelism and colonial-era Christian missions (Harris 2006). However, to view the conflict over religious conversion in Sri Lanka today as no more than an extension of colonial-era relationships between missionary Christianity and a then-emergent Buddhist nationalism would be to neglect the specificity of the points of encounter and conflict. As Stephen Berkwitz has cogently argued, over-emphasis on the *long durée* and "the relative antiquity and coherence of Buddhist nationalism in Sri Lanka has perhaps overshadowed efforts to locate the more specific sources and effects of nationalist discourse at particular points in time."[14]

In a spirit of closely considering the more recent contingencies that have revived antipathies between Christian evangelists and Buddhist nationalists over the issue of conversion, here I examine contemporary materialist and ideological concerns pertaining to religious propagation and proselytism in contemporary Sri Lanka. In

[14]Berkwitz, "Resisting the Global in Buddhist Nationalism," 76. Berkwitz suggests that "rather than searching for the origins of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism or mapping out its genealogy, it makes sense, in David Scott's words, to change the problematic and to refuse 'the past's hold over the present' in order to see how specific articulations of the relationship between Buddhism and the nation arise and are wielded in response to present contingencies," (Scott 1999).

examining the particularities and peculiarities of the ongoing clashes over religious conversion in Sri Lanka, I would suggest that there has been a tendency by proponents of religious freedom to interpret the invocation of "ethics" of conversion in this context as merely a rhetorical extension of Buddhist nationalism in one of its more ardent forms.[15] Beyond interrogating these negative constructions of conversion in and of themselves, we can enhance our understanding of the Buddhist nationalist perspective on this dispute by understanding that Buddhistic paradigms of thought and practice differently render who are appropriate targets of, and what are appropriate means for, religious propagation.[16] For indeed, a robust understanding of the Sri Lankan Buddhist perspective on the problem of Christian conversion can get lost if viewed solely through consideration of secular paradigms of religious freedom—perhaps almost as much as it is lost in analysis that actively supports evangelism. It is not to say that these antipathies between Buddhists and Christians are necessarily immutable because they hinge upon ideological differences inherent in the two religions. Rather, it is simply to say that it is useful to critically consider circumstantial configurations of practical theology, cosmology, and metaphysics that create the grounds for the practices and politics of religious propagation and conversion in a given context. In this case, it is useful to understand the mechanics of religious attraction associated with Christian practices and styles of propagation and contrast it to the ethos involved in Buddhist forms of religiosity and propagation. At the same time, it is important to examine empirically how anti-conversion activists have come to understand conversion as an activity laden with side-effects deleterious to the well-being of converts. By highlighting some of the varied Sri Lankan perspectives on these practices, I will illuminate how spreading one's religion is censoriously rendered as proselytism by some, while for others, it is relatively sympathetically rendered as propagation.

Christian Conversion and the Alleged Denigration of Buddhism

Alarmed by the view that Christianity, with the force of its global network, could potentially supplant Buddhism, Buddhist nationalist activists have renewed their dedication to protect the Buddhist heritage of Sri Lanka over the last decade. The aforementioned efforts by a set of vociferous Buddhist clergy vowing to create legislative measures to ban "unethical conversions" are indicative of this sense of alarm. Although Sri Lankans generally assert the need for socio-economic development and to some extent for material aid to "uplift" the poor, most Buddhist nationalists are critical of Christian charity, and broadly view it as an "allurement" (*polmbawima*) that shallowly attracts the poor. Thus, Christian charity, humanitarian aid from secular Western sources, the Christmas consumerism particularly evident

[15] See Hresko (2006).

[16] Kao (2008). Kao has typified several premises for anti-proselytization.

among middle and upper class Sri Lankans (Christian and non-Christian alike), and the gospel of healing and prosperity that has emboldened Pentecostal Christian piety have all come to be regarded as active threats to Buddhism. Buddhist protectionists often deride Christianity in general, perceiving it to leverage only the kind of shallow power that appeals to materialistic "consumers" of religion. Indeed, segments of the Sri Lankan citizenry have absorbed "anti-conversion" discourse and in some cases actively resist such material "inducements" (*bhautikawa kæmæti karima*). Yet, these features and others that are associated with Christianity are powerfully attractive to many members of contemporary Sri Lankan society.

These concerns about Christianity's ties to material accoutrements of global and modern features of Western culture were brought into the common awareness of Sinhalese Buddhists through the vociferous discourses of a highly respected Sri Lankan Buddhist monk, Venerable Soma Thera. Through his discourses, this charismatic figure had generated the adoration of many Sinhalese Buddhists who viewed him as making true Buddhist teachings accessible and desirable for lay people, especially for Sinhalese youth. As Berkwitz has described, Soma Thera used Sinhala-language telecasts to broadcast his views on how globalization was impinging upon Buddhism and forcing its decline and insisted upon the need of the Sinhala public to reinvigorate its commitment to Buddhism (Berkwitz 2008). One aspect of the threat that Soma Thera emphasized was that posed by Christian evangelists. He prophesied that by the year 2025, Sinhalese Buddhists would become a demographic minority in Sri Lanka—a statement that played upon populist anxieties (Uyangoda 2007). When Venerable Soma Thera suddenly died in Russia in 2003, the circumstances of his death were shrouded in mystery and generated conspiracy theories. Although government probes and autopsy reports declared that he died of natural causes, fellow political and religious figures easily convinced the monk's adoring public that his death was the result of a Christian conspiracy to destroy Buddhism. It was on the subsequent wave of anti-Christian sentiment that the Jathika Hela Urumaya (National Heritage Party) was elected to Sri Lankan Parliament on the platform of creating legislation to ban "unethical conversions" in 2004. The party prescribed the ban to stop the Christian campaigns that were perceived to defame, denigrate, and destroy Buddhism. These "anti-conversion" efforts that commenced after Soma Thera's death have been sustained for several years amidst anxieties that the post-tsunami and post-war humanitarian aid to Sri Lanka from international secular and faith-based sources are infused with Western influence as well as Christian evangelical agendas (Matthews 2007).

While the more moderate Buddhist nationalists tend to more carefully distinguish between "fundamentalist" evangelical Christians and those Christians who are not ambitiously driven to evangelize among non-Christians, Buddhists of both moderate and hardline nationalist persuasions express that allowing conversions to go unchecked will threaten religious freedom. On the other hand, liberal Sri Lankan Christian ecumenists are also often harsh critics of the evangelical practices common to "fundamentalist" Christians and of the theological interpretations that evangelists draw upon to validate their missions. Nevertheless, Christians of evangelical and ecumenical orientations *both* concur that Buddhist nationalist

efforts to ban "unethical conversions" are problematic because laws that are capable of criminalizing conversions could be too easily manipulated and misused to threaten religious freedom. Although the various drafts of the "Prohibition of Unethical Conversions" bill that have been proposed to date have been deemed unconstitutional as of 2009, the concerns attached to the proposal remain salient. This is evidenced by the fact that in the many instances when new forms of evangelism surface within the public sphere, they so inflame Buddhist sensitivities, and in turn, the most ardent of Buddhist nationalist-protectionists engage in "anti-conversion" vigilantism whilst making declarations of their intentions to revisit the possibility of putting forth the ban on unethical conversions as a legislative agenda.

Gifts of Religious Attraction

The concerns that Christians wield material influence through access to charitable capital and their promises to heal and enable prosperity form the foundation of the conflict between Buddhist nationalists and Christian evangelists in Sri Lanka today. Indeed, two different forms of Christian gift are perceived to substantively attract converts: the charitable gift and the charismatic gift. Charity is of course a long-standing practice among missionaries and liberal Christian activists alike. To some extent, it is also deployed as a tool of mission within newer styles of Pentecostal ministering. The concept of "charisma," on the other hand, is derived from Christian *charisms*, or spiritual gifts, which hinge upon a living God who, through the power of the Holy Spirit, can effectuate miracles via his disciples even in the post-Biblical period (Schatzmann 1987; Martin 2002b). Concerns about charismatic Christian faith-healing form the contours of a dimension of Buddhist-Christian conflict that has surfaced in Sri Lanka only within the last decade.

Charitable work is widely viewed by Buddhist nationalists as a practice intended to encourage churchgoing among the poor. For evangelical Christians, charity is indeed attached to missionary agendas. However, for many progressive and liberal Sri Lankan Christians, charity is an act to uplift the poor and one that they insist is not laden with evangelical motives. These Christians struggle to assert that their generous engagement in charitable work and social justice activism is motivated purely by their love for God and thus should be understood as selfless acts intended to fortify their faith; charity, they insist, is an act through which they seek to contribute to a pluralistic Sri Lanka. Although such ecumenical Christians themselves object to "unethical conversions" and the act of tempting conversions among materially deprived people on principle and in practice, they stood alongside evangelical Christians to oppose the "anti-conversion" legislation on the grounds that it would be misused to undermine religious freedom in Sri Lanka rather than protect it.[17]

[17]Sri Lankan Christians use "anti-conversion" as common shorthand for the proposed "The Prohibition of Unethical Conversions" bill and other practices meant to curb proselytism.

In spite of this sharp difference between ecumenical and evangelical forms of giving among Christians both in Sri Lanka and abroad, the staunchest of Buddhist nationalists have tended to be as suspicious of the generosity of ecumenical Christians as that of evangelicals. These accusations of course follow in part from the perception that established "mainline" churches wield considerable power, influence, and status derived from their colonial parentage. Furthermore, contributing to the perception that evangelism is the primary motive of foreign charities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is the fact that a small handful of Christian missionary groups that came to Sri Lanka from the United States in the wake of the tsunami actually did so under the guise of doing humanitarian work (Schatzmann 1987). These groups "mix humanitarian objectives with religious objectives, yet claim to only be NGOs," states Bruce Matthews (Matthews 2007, 463). One church group based in Waco, Texas, independently set up temporary "tsunami ministries" in Sri Lanka.[18] This incident received international media attention, and in turn was used as an example of a foreign missionary group that exploited the humanitarian emergency to proselytize, adding further fuel to Buddhist nationalists' outrage over Christian evangelism. These foreign independent church groups began these disruptive ministries without having a grasp of Sri Lankan sensitivities, making Buddhists more hostile to Christian evangelism in general. As a result, even Sri Lankan evangelicals were displeased by the temporary mission activities of foreigners in the post-tsunami period.

A second feature that renders Christianity—particularly, neo-Pentecostal Christianity—attractive is the "gift" of charisma. Pentecostal faith-healers channel what believers regard to be miraculous works of God's grace, which bring healing and prosperity. As in Pentecostal Christianity in other parts of the world, these forms of Christian practice sometimes generate ecstatic experiences, characterized by practices such as speaking in tongues (*glossolalia*). These sensory experiences are seen to be manifestations of the Holy Spirit (*suddha atmaya*). The sense that individuals involved in these charismatic faith-healing practices actually feel as though they are being healed serves for many as proof of divine power. The preachers strive to secure exclusive religious commitment by buttressing this proof with evangelical and millennial discourses of Christian monotheism. The ecstatic experiences of talking in tongues and in some cases the casting out of demons are known to elicit "spontaneous conversions" and deep conviction. From the skeptical Buddhist view however, Christian charismatic gifts of healing are suspect: the rise in conversions to Christianity is seen as partly attributable to these "fraudulent means" of proselytism, wherein Christian preachers use assurances of miracles (*haas kam*)—which devout Buddhists presume to be false. Not only Buddhist nationalist activists, but also "mainline" Catholic and Protestant Christians, tend to regard these promises as manipulating gullible people in order to secure conversions.

In what follows, I will describe how these Christian "gifts" of charity and charisma are understood to attract converts, and I will delineate how these forms of

[18] (Rohde 2005); See also (Matthews 2007).

attraction are rendered offensive to Buddhists. As will become clear through further discussion of the mechanics of attraction involved in Christian charitability and Pentecostal-charismatic faith-healing practices, these forms of gift are threatening not only because they are powerfully attractive. These practices are also contentious in Sri Lanka because they create forms of religious attraction and spiritual development that are incompatible with Buddhistic norms, which are partly derived from both long-established and reformed practices and paradigms of religiosity and religious propagation in Sri Lanka.

How Charity Wounds

The complex of issues generated by the sudden influx of humanitarian aid in Sri Lanka in the aftermath of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami impelled several scholars to revisit Marcel Mauss's famous theory of the gift. Mauss suggested that even the apparently "pure gift" given selflessly and without any requirement of reciprocity implicitly compels reciprocity of some kind—as if by some unseen supernatural force inherent to human sociality (Mauss 1990). Given the complications of aid distribution, dissatisfaction among beneficiaries, and the ubiquitous suspicion that secular and faith-based humanitarian organizations are a vehicle through which Westerners could instill foreign values, social scientists studying this particular context recalled Mary Douglas's famous Maussian insight that "charity wounds (de Alwis 2009; Stirrat 2006; Korf et al. 2010)." De Alwis asserts that although charity is, on the surface, a "salve" to heal the wounds of war and natural disaster, poignantly, Sri Lankan beneficiaries are also subjects who are "aided and ad(minister)ed and disciplined in additionally wounding ways."[19]

The unwritten demands of reciprocity created by the charitable gift also have implications for the politics of religious affiliation. In a study on the politics of tsunami aid and religious patronage, Benedikt Korf, et al., detail the inescapability of the "patrimonial rationale" that drives the social relationships involved in the gift of post-tsunami humanitarian aid in the eastern Sri Lankan context (Korf et al. 2010). Even when religious leaders strive to uphold the purity and non-partisan nature of the charitable gift and earnestly give without expectation of conversion, the authors rely on a Maussian argument to suggest that charitable acts—wittingly or not—necessarily generate indebtedness, which in turn drives reciprocity. By this logic, in the quintessential gift of charity given by a figure of religious authority, reciprocity would entail a return of religious patronage. That is to say, conversion tendencies *could be* a practical inevitability in relationships of charitable exchange wherein

[19](de Alwis 2009, 122). Making a similar observation about the wounding capability of charity, Korf, et al., point to various reports by social scientists diagnosing that post-tsunami aid in Sri Lanka created conditions in which beneficiaries felt "humiliated," as they were rendered passive "victims" in the process of recovery from humanitarian crises (Korf et al. 2010, 60).

donor and recipient are of different religions. The trope of "rice Christianity" not being uncommon in describing earlier waves of conversion in Asia, the phenomenon of shifting religious allegiance based upon the availability of charitable aid is certainly not new, nor exclusive to Sri Lanka, nor to Asia more generally.

As Korf, et al., have described in their field sites in the east coast of Sri Lanka, the suspicions that Christians were facilitating "unethical conversions" were extensive. Yet as they suggest, many faith-based organizations strived to maintain the "purity of the gift" by refusing partisanship in giving. They did so in spite of the fact that many tsunami-affected congregants expected to be the exclusive beneficiaries of the charity made available by their churches, mosques, and temples.[20] Indeed, in this post-colonial, humanitarian aid milieu, both faith-based and secular giving of many kinds are perceived to carry the influence of international flows of charitable capital and are suspected of being intentionally persuasive tools of Christians who threaten the foundations of Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

My own research in the southern coastal areas of Sri Lanka indicates that conversions were, in very limited circumstances, caused or facilitated by charitable work. During the period of post-tsunami recovery in these rural areas where less than 5 % of Sinhalese were Roman Catholic, Protestant Christian, or Pentecostal, often so-called "converts" merely switched to another Christian denomination or shifted from one church to another. There were rumored cases wherein Buddhist beneficiaries of faith-based charity temporarily converted or experimented with Christianity before returning to their own forms of worship or non-participation in religious practices after humanitarian aid resources dried up. In many cases, having been amply warned about the presumed religious agenda of people bearing aid, some Sri Lankan villagers in tsunami-affected areas were readily wary of ulterior motives. Many Buddhist villagers rejected such blanket accusations against people involved in humanitarian operations, and usually were able to discern the faith-based from the secular agendas of various aid organizations and church groups. Despite the tensions over post-tsunami conversions, in one particular southern village I studied, most conversions had actually occurred nearly 30 years ago, when the first Assembly of God pastor in the area began door-to-door evangelization in towns more than 20 km from his church.[21] In other areas in Sri Lanka that were not affected by the tsunami, there have been more recent pockets of conversions to charismatic Christianity; in the areas where Pentecostal faith-healers seem particularly adept, there is a greater density of converts. These conversions especially antagonize Buddhist and Hindu communities, as well as Roman Catholic and Protestant religious communities, whose members object to wanton changes in affiliation and affinity that affect the demographics of their spiritual communities.

[20] (Korf et al. 2010). See also (Matthews 2007), which discusses how evangelical groups have often been conflated with both non-proselytizing faith-based *and* secular NGOs in the post-tsunami humanitarian context.

[21] Assembly of God is the most prominent of the Pentecostal denominations in Sri Lanka.

Charity and the Theravada Buddhist Construction of Suffering and Subjectivity

Thus far I have described the empirical conditions that have contributed to Buddhist nationalists' perceptions that Christian charity is liable to unethically allure socially and economically disadvantaged Sri Lankans into adopting Christianity. In this protectionist view, when a conversion is elicited under circumstances in which charity is given to someone who is materially impoverished, or otherwise socially disadvantaged, the decision to convert is interpreted as being a decision undertaken under conditions of duress. The concern about impinging upon those who are considered to be vulnerable resembles concerns that we have seen in the legal case in post-Suharto Indonesia carefully attended to by Melissa Crouch in this volume (Chap. 2), wherein Christian proselytizers were considered to be exploiting the vulnerability of Muslim orphans. Just as childhood is regarded as constituting vulnerability in the Indonesian context discussed by Crouch, conditions of poverty, war, and natural disaster in the Sri Lankan context are similarly regarded as constituting duress and vulnerability to proselytism. In the construction of vulnerability discussed by Crouch, the defining factor is childhood—measureable by a preset biological age that is, in theory, a determinant that can be universally stipulated.

In the Sri Lankan case, however, there is an added dimension to the issue of why it is problematic that charity might persuade one to reject one's religion in order to adopt another, which complicates secularist understandings about religious freedom. Extending the logic that equates impoverishment with mental and emotional duress, Sri Lankan Buddhist activists insist that such a decision to convert is an imposition upon an unfree conscience.[22] As it will become clear, this extrapolation is made through the implicit application of a Buddhistic philosophy of mind. Through a comparative focus on the material and ideological aspects of religious giving, we will see that Buddhist and Christian cosmologies differently render the nature of suffering and the stakes of alleviating it. Yet Buddhist nationalist protectionists often translate their concerns about conversions persuaded with the aid of charity into colloquial Sinhala equivalents of human-rights discourse in an attempt to make it compatible with the secularist logic that provides the framework for human rights-based guidelines for ensuring religious freedom.

While many Sri Lankan Buddhist moderates often express admiration for Christians' generous engagements through charitable works, most also complain that charity is being used to convert non-Christians, and tend to see Christian faith-based charity as something that approximates a bribe.[23] Very often these critics reflect upon

[22] Other perspectives also inform the debate over religious freedom from the margins. For example, secular social justice activists in Sri Lanka are generally ambivalent about charitable conversions, often conceding that conversion is a "natural" response to charity that is packaged with religious teachings and implying that it is inconsequential that the new faith is adopted genuinely or for pragmatic reasons. See also Caspersz (2002). Such lines of argumentation are typically regarded by staunch Buddhist nationalists as dubious rebuttals put forth by Christian apologists.

[23] The allegations that charity allures converts away from Buddhism bears a resemblance to allegations by Hindutva activists in India that Christians use "trickery" and "bribery" to convert Hindus, as described by Menon (2003).

the fact that there is no traditional Theravada Buddhist practice equivalent to Christian charity precisely because the materialist aspect of Christianity does not fit within the paradigms of Buddhist morality, however much Theravada Buddhists value generosity. Buddhist nationalist-protectionists' objections to conversions that are ostensibly "induced" by charity, partly stem from cosmological and soteriological ideas about the relationship of subjectivity, spiritual development, and the material world which are quintessential to Theravada Buddhism. Unlike in Christianity where virtuous giving is directed to the poor, classically in Theravada Buddhism giving in the religious context, or *dana*, is directed from lay people toward monks, like the Buddha, who have chosen mendicancy to pursue spiritual development. To participate in giving to monks constitutes an act of merit, an action (*karma*) that helps one attain a better rebirth and acquire qualities of personhood including heightened moral and spiritual adeptness in the next lifetime.[24] Dependence upon *dana* for sustenance enables the monastic community to pursue *nirvana*, or release from worldly sufferings—putting an end to the cycle of deaths and rebirths (*samsara*), which is conceived of as a long, arduous, and often non-linear spiritual evolution.[25] Release from *samsara*, according to Theravadan thought, is possible only after innumerable cycles of death and rebirth, after which an aspirant must have gradually attained certain moral perfections over many lifetimes.[26]

Soteriological notions about the spiritual development of the person encoded in these Buddhist conventions of giving form a foundational principle of Buddhist moral community.[27] Giving *dana* is central to religious life among Buddhists in Sri Lanka and other Theravadan countries; the fact that laypeople give *dana* to monks in exchange for *bana* (preaching of the Buddha's teachings) binds the monastic order (*sangha*) to the laity, mutually reinforcing Buddhist morality and sociality.[28] Of course, Christian charity is a form of giving quite distinct from classical Buddhist giving in form, content, and purpose. Generally for Christians, the trajectory of ethical personhood necessitates "turning toward" God, or conversion, and the giving of charity is often conceived as essential to the construction of a "moral self" that "orients individuals toward the value of salvation."[29] As recorded in historical sources on missionary encounters with Theravada Buddhists, Christian

[24] Egge (2002) and Findly (2003). The karmic development of spiritual adeptness has been discussed by Bechert (1992).

[25] Bechert (1992); Premasiri (2003).

[26] Egge (2002) Premasiri, "The Ultimate Goal of Early Buddhism and the Distinctive Characteristics of Buddhist Meditation."

[27] Egge (2002); Findly (2003).

[28] Although *dana* is archetypically the donation of provisions to the Buddha and mendicants monks, who are generally viewed as the appropriate recipients of meritorious giving (Findly 2003), scholars have shown that under certain conditions Theravada Buddhists also give charity to, and perform services for, the poor—reinforcing the ethic of compassion toward all who are suffering. See: Bowie (1998) and Hallisey (2007).

[29] Allahyari (2000). See also Hughes III (2005) and Robbins (2007).

missionaries in Sri Lanka and in other Theravada countries often misrecognized these differences in religious giving (Harris 2006). Missionaries assumed that Theravada Buddhists' focus in giving *dana* was on the reward of "merit" accrual and viewed the apparent lack of the charitable ethos to be an indication that Buddhism inclined religious subjects toward "selfishness."[30]

The ideal-typical relationship between spirituality and materiality, as well as the criteria used for judging the ethics of proselytism and conversion, are evidently gleaned from features of the historical Buddha's biography. Stories of how the Buddha came to his philosophical vision (*darshanaya*) and how he proceeded to preach the *Dharma*, have fashioned Theravada Buddhist norms and ideas about the forms and purposes of religious giving, about who are appropriate recipients of these gifts, and about what righteously generates religious attraction and contributes to the spiritual development of a person. Theravadan thought and practice classically tends to morally orient the person aspiring for *nirvana* toward renunciation of material concerns. In fact, a Theravada Buddhist adage proclaims that "suffering is a teacher only second to the Buddha"; that is to say that suffering—including the sufferings of the poor—is, ideal-typically, a pedagogical tool. More precisely, suffering is positioned within Theravada Buddhist philosophy as a spur that impels one to develop the compassionate disposition that is instrumental in setting oneself on a meritorious path toward enlightenment or *nirvana*.[31] That the experience of one's own suffering is necessary for the moral reformation of the self is not merely an idea confined to the realm of Theravada Buddhist philosophy, however. Many ordinary Sri Lankans estimate that one's spiritual progress accords with one's apparent quality of life. Indeed, generally Sri Lankan Buddhists regard poverty, emotional difficulty, and other hardships to be karmically governed—that is, they are viewed as being the result of righteous or sinful actions committed by the person in a past life.[32] What is more, they often regard a person's inclination to engage in the work of spiritual progress to be indicated by one's station in life—that is, it is seen as dependent upon the degree to which one experiences suffering. Given this karmic eschatology wherein the morality or immorality of action dictates the quality of rebirth, those who appear to be experiencing a great deal of suffering are sometimes viewed as if they are in their spiritual infancy—a point from which much moral work and much time are required to make a spiritual ascent. Out of this logic, some

[30] Ibid. Harris shows that during British colonial era missionary encounters in Sri Lanka, Christian missionaries viewed the "laws" of karma as contributing only to moral depravity and selfishness. She demonstrates that while Christian missionaries and Western Buddhologists in Theravadan countries during the early phase of British colonialism tended to be unconvinced that Buddhism was an effective moral system, there was a positive attitudinal shift in favor of Buddhism among those who arrived in the latter phases of colonialism.

[31] Southwold (1985); Bond (1988); Premasiri (2003).

[32] Obeyesekere (1968). This karmic causality (theodicy) was often used to explain the misfortune of the tsunami in Theravadan Thailand and in Sri Lanka. For instance, see: Merli (2005).

upper class Buddhists and Hindus of Sri Lanka contend that charity presents a problem because these external means to alleviate suffering do not allow people to feel their suffering, thereby causing the poor to lack sufficient inspiration to attain a better rebirth.[33] Inversely, as Martin Southwold has shown in his 1985 study, relatively poor "village Buddhists" frequently assert that it is wealthy and powerful people who are unlikely to attain better rebirths in their next lifetimes because they could not possibly be suffering enough to impel them to perfect their conduct (Southwold 1985).

It is clear that the Theravada Buddhist archetype of giving ascribes liberative qualities to states of freedom from material attachments. Accordingly, the trajectory of nirvanic spiritual ascent that is contingent upon a sort of moral and ethical progress may potentially be contravened by material accoutrements such as charity or excessive wealth. While indeed, Sri Lankan Buddhists' concerns about freedom of conscience are underscored by the foundational premises of Theravada Buddhist subjectivity and materiality, these concerns are implied and not expressly articulated in modern forms of legal and political discourse over religious conversion in Sri Lanka. As such, objections by Buddhists against "unethical conversions" are often dismissed as baseless claims mired in nationalist ideology and as mere indications of jealousy of Christians' cultural and socio-economic capital. This is not to say that the claims about "unethical conversions" are not at all motivated by these impulses. Rather, it is to point out that in conceiving of protecting religious freedom either from the vantage point of asserting a right to protect one's religious community from intrusive efforts of proselytism *or*, on the other hand, out of interest in asserting a right to propagate one's religion, it is clear that Sri Lankans do not rely solely on secular conceptions of ethics. The practical discourses on the ethics of conversion are mutually constituted in the contestation between the particular Christian practices that attract converts and also by the ways in which religious subjectivity and righteous forms of religious attraction and propagation are locally constructed by, and embedded in, local, religious-based paradigms of ethical action.

Faith-Healing and Its Dawning in Buddhist Nationalist Perception

Based upon the nationalist discourse against Christian proselytism, one would be inclined to think that Christian missionaries and faith-based organizations simply give gifts to people of other religions and ask them to "come to Jesus," and that this

[33]The former position, a kind of karmic-neoliberalism, tends to only be expressed in among certain social circles. Many Theravada Buddhists engage in social service and charity work, valorizing the alleviation of suffering as compassionate action consonant with Buddhist principles. Since the renewal of the concerns about "unethical conversions," many Buddhist protectionists are newly engaging themselves in charitable work, stating their aim to ensure that poor Sinhalese Buddhists do not become swayed to Christianity by evangelists bearing charity.

was enough to induce people to come to church, permanently change their religion, and disparage the religion of their birth. That charitable giving is actually *not* the primary means through which the new wave of Christianity in Sri Lanka has attracted converts has only begun to dawn within public perception quite recently. "Non-denominational" or independent Pentecostal faith-healing centers, located predominantly in coastal suburbs of Colombo, involve markedly ecstatic faith-healing practices that easily draw newcomers. The forms of worship that allow Pentecostal Christian preachers to extol their healing abilities have been brought into public awareness through various forms of Sinhala language media. Rather than distributing written materials extolling how commitment to Christ can generate positive transformations as many denominational Pentecostal ministries such as Assembly of God churches do, non-denominational Pentecostal ministries sometimes draw attendance by circulating audio-visual media in DVD format to broadly disseminate spectacular visual evidence of their capacities to exorcise evil spirits and to effect miraculous healing.

Upon seeing these videos, Sinhalese people unexposed to Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity often express surprise that Christians engage in the removal of malignant spirits, largely because they have traditionally conceived these practices as the exclusive domain of Sinhalese folk healers. Sinhalese folk healers, called *yakadura* or *kattadiya*, are customary figures in southern villages and are known to possess ritual knowledge that enables them to cast out *yaksa* (translated as "demons" or "devils," but incomparable to Christian categories).[34] Whereas in Sri Lankan Christianity *yaksa* and other classes of spirits are considered to be utterly evil agents of Satan, Sinhalese Buddhists typically view these spirits as capricious yet capable of possessing and maligning the bodies, minds, and personalities of vulnerable individuals, but without the connotation that they are ultimately irredeemable.[35] As Aloysius Pieris aptly put it, these Sinhalese folk rituals of exorcism entail "taking the devil seriously, and laughing him out of existence."[36]

A second medium that has generated broad awareness of charismatic Christianity among Sri Lankans is Sinhala-language news broadcasts and television segments that aim to generate skepticism about the efficacy and intentions of Christian evangelists. As we have seen with the sting operation discussed in the opening of this chapter,

[34] See Scott (1994) for a useful critique of this translation of "*yaksa*." These ritualists are considered to be Buddhist, because although they call upon other powers to remove evil spirits and Lord Buddha is not central agent in the *yaktovil* ritual, within the wider cosmic order Lord Buddha reigns supreme. However, since "protestant Buddhist" reformers under the British colonial period considered these practices syncretic or pre-Buddhist accretions that don't correspond with "true" Buddhism, the practices are viewed with much ambivalence (Obeyesekere and Gombrich 1988).

[35] After all, possessing agents have future rebirths in which they could potentially be less malevolent. (Stirrat 1992, 78–98), clearly describes how Catholic belief and Sinhalese-folk belief differently categorize these spirits.

[36] Pieris (2005: 26). Bruce Kapferer makes a similar point about the psychological release enabled by laughing at the demons in these Sinhala Buddhist rituals in *Celebration of Demons: Exorcism and the Aesthetics of Healing in Sri Lanka*. See also (Berg 1991).

Buddhist nationalist activists put forth much effort to counter the tools of mission that encourage newcomers to make an exclusive commitment to Christianity. By influencing television news media offered by certain nationalist broadcasting outlets, these activists draw negative attention to charismatic Christian claims of miraculous healing and to Christians' zealous demands for exclusive religious commitment.

Faith That Heals and Faith That Hurts

Charismatic Christian faith-healing practices have drawn their sharpest opposition in recent years with the deaths of two women at a faith-healing service in late October 2009. This series of Pentecostal faith-healing meetings took place in Viharamahadevi Park (Victoria Park)—one of the most public places in Colombo. Hosting such a public Pentecostal Christian ministerial event is an uncommon and bold move given the simmering antagonisms towards missionary efforts in Sri Lanka. Several months after the legislation to ban "unethical conversions" had been deemed unconstitutional, this tragic and inflammatory episode renewed agitation among Buddhist nationalists, thereby reviving discussions of the need to criminalize unethical conversions. Those who had already been passionately politicized against conversion to Christianity were quick to hold the faith-healing pastor of the "praise and worship" services culpable for the deaths of the two women who the protesters decidedly cast as "Buddhist."

Outraged by the turn of events that led to the deaths, in the days that followed a faction of Buddhist nationalist activists staged a protest at the parent prayer center in suburban Colombo where the pastor regularly ministered. The protest quickly turned into attack on the premises, launched by the Buddhist monks and laymen who convened there. The vigilantes smashed and leveled the prayer hall within the view of news cameras and threatened those who were associated with it. Although they denied their involvement, the monks involved are alleged to be the very figures from the political party that had been elected to Parliament to push forth the legislation against conversion a few years earlier (Kannangara 2009). A Buddhist nationalist lay organization, members of which took a strong position in support of the bill to ban unethical conversions, condemned the aggression as "a black mark on the sacred robe (Kannangara 2009)." At the same time, they, like the vigilante proponents of the anti-conversion bill, used the example of the two "Buddhist" women who died in a faith-healing service as an example of how "gullible people" are exploited by "charlatans," arguing that the incident was symptomatic of the broader harm that can be done by "illegal conversions."[37] Ecumenical Christian organizations and progressive Buddhist monks alike sharply condemned vigilante violence

[37] "Demons in Divine Garb Carry on Merrily," in *The Buddhist Times* online, February 1, 2010. http://www.buddhisttimes.net/2010/02/01/demons-in-divine-garb-carry-on-merrily/, accessed April 17, 2011. Also Kannangara (2009).

undertaken by these Buddhist protectionists, while also calling upon the police and legal system to censure the public missionizing activities of the pastor.

Evidently, the two women arrived separately to attend the widely publicized faith-healing event in Viharamahadevi Park held on Saturdays in central Colombo. The faith-healing pastor and his ministry delivered the gospel in the Sinhala and Tamil languages, drawing thousands of people from all over Colombo city and its outskirts. The participants were generally from lower and lower-middle class socio-economic backgrounds. Most were relative newcomers to Pentecostal Christianity—regarded as new "witnesses" to divine power. As the allegations against the pastor and his charismatic ministry have it, the two women were not taken to the hospital even though they became seriously ill during the service. Those who made the accusations of negligence attributed their deaths to the fact that the faith-healer and his assistants did not direct the women to medical treatment. His accusers conjectured that the pastor refrained from sending the two women to the hospital because doing so would appear to diminish the pastor's own faith in his abilities to channel divine power.[38] The pastor countered with a statement to the press indicating that though he had the power to call down God's grace to miraculously heal patients, these women had come to the service in a state of severe illness, not by force, but on their own volition.[39] He insisted that the women's access to medical treatment was not obstructed by anyone. While the Buddhist protesters accused the pastor of having not helped the families seek medical attention for the women, he avers that as soon as the two women were recognized as needing treatment, he and his assistants directed the relatives of the women to admit them to the nearest hospital.

Understanding the nature of Sri Lankan Pentecostal faith-healing practices and the structure of belief associated with them sheds some light on the mystery of these deaths. During certain interludes within these faith-healing services, committed believers in Christ talk in tongues and experience deep emotion expressed by tears and bodily swaying that they attribute to the presence of the Holy Spirit. At the same time, it is typical that over the course of this particular faith-healing service, demonic spirits (*yaksa atmaya*) that plague and possess adults are understood as being unable to fight the presence of the Holy Spirit (*suddha atmaya*), and in turn the demons are rendered powerless to conceal their presence.[40] Those congregants who express signs of possession by *yaksa atmaya* involuntarily begin to dance, convulse, scream and sometimes even vomit and faint. The behaviors of possessed women and men draw the attention of the pastor's assistants, who typically restrain the possessed so that they will not harm themselves or others. The assistants (*sevakayo*, or "servants

[38] Some of the staunchest Pentecostals indeed refuse medication and stress reliance only on the healing power of God. This aspect of Christian devotionalism is rare in Sri Lanka, though not unknown. Most denominational and non-denominational Pentecostal healers, like the pastor in question, see God as working through the medical technologies and treatments sought by Christians who have access to the Holy Spirit through their devotion.

[39] Kannangara, "JHU Vows Legal Action against Prayer Services."

[40] Stirrat, *Power and Religiosity in a Post-colonial Setting*, describes comparable phenomena in particular Catholic folk ministries that existed in certain regions of Sri Lanka between the 1970s and 1990s.

[of God]") guide the possessed to a separate area proximal to the pastor so that he can easily "pray over" and bless them. He then spectacularly exorcises the evil spirits by commanding the demons to get out, which gradually calms them out of their possessed states.

As the pastor narrated the particular episode in the park, possession caused the two women whose deaths are in question to dance and convulse violently. However, within the crowd of thousands, the deep possessions of these two women were not identified quickly enough for him or his assistants to reach them. The pastor insisted the women's deaths were ultimately the result of fatigue resulting from very aggressive possessions. His claims are allegedly backed up by autopsy reports that declared that the women died of exhaustion, which enabled Christian supporters to aver that the women died of natural causes, and thus, that the pastor was not at fault.

Given the custom of attributing maladies to sorcery and a local pantheon of evil spirits in Sri Lanka—much as such phenomena exist in various parts of Africa—the capability of faith-healers to expose and purge demons from possessed persons is a major draw to Pentecostal Christianity.[41] There is evidently a perceived need for this type of healing among many Sri Lankans who are ill or plagued by financial woes or familial problems. The pastor is recognized by many charismatic Christians as one of the few effective healers and evangelists in Sri Lanka. As such, he expresses fear for what may happen to his followers should the public's contempt for, and attacks against, his church continue. Remarkably, after the relocation to a new prayer center, the church continues Saturday healing services at the church and also offers regular Sunday services, which still draw upwards of one thousand people at any one time. After a time, the church temporarily returned to use the space in the park for healing services, but intimidation against the pastor and his ministry resumed and members were advised by officials to discontinue public faith-healing meetings. The pastor described a later incident wherein some of the monks involved in the attack against the old prayer hall picketed outside of the new prayer hall in protest of his ministerial work. In that particular instance, he was under pressure to shut down the healing service for the day, requiring him to "wipe away the tears" of people who came to him "out of a desperate need of Jesus's healing and blessing." The pastor strives to hold his ministerial services in spite of occasional intimidation and threats to which he, his assistants, and his close followers are episodically subjected, if only in the privacy of his rented prayer hall.

Reconsidering Antipathies over Religious Attraction

In this chapter I have sought to delineate some of the key issues that have generated threats to religious pluralism in Sri Lanka in the cross-cut between rivalries of Buddhist nationalism and Christian evangelism. I have sought to describe the

[41] These Sinhalese folk-Buddhist customs are described by Kapferer (1983); Scott (1994); Brow (1996).

socio-political milieu that has generated Buddhists' aversion to Christian practices of religious propagation. In exploring the concerns about proselytism that are articulated by certain nationalist authorities on protecting Buddhism, it becomes clear that what is at stake in the debate over religious conversion is more than a question of antipathies over the "mass conversions" that took place under the sway of colonial era missions. The concern is also quite centrally an issue of the contemporary interreligious encounter and the controversies associated with attraction to Christianity as it is generated through new religious practices and styles of propagation.

As we have seen, staunch Buddhist nationalists view Christian charity and Christian charisma as cut from the same cloth: both are aggressive acts by "fundamentalists" who seek to attract Sri Lankans of other religions and persuade them to accept their brand of Christianity through questionable means aimed at inappropriate targets. Critics estimate that within the conversion process, new recruits are "allured" by charity or monetary gifts, or by what are viewed to be dubious promises about miracles and healing given through the grace of God. Christian evangelism is threatening and "unethical" in the Buddhist nationalist perspective because it is viewed as including practices that denigrate Buddhism and other religions, and as relying on manipulation of unfree minds and untamed emotions. Yet, as I have argued above, these discourses about charity as material "allurement" speak not only to Buddhists' concerns about "sheep-stealing." Antipathies to proselytizers over the matter of religious conversion are buttressed by conventions in Buddhist practical, material and ideational culture that are deeply embedded in Buddhist cosmology and soteriology. Thus, although only a small contingent of ardently politicized Buddhist nationalists act to pass legislation and episodically engage in vigilante activism to dissuade conversions and curb the practices of religious propagation by those who aggressively seek to advance Christianity in Sri Lanka, the invocation of the ethics of religious propagation has a strong popular resonance among most Buddhists of Sri Lanka.

At the same time, within the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist imaginary, Christianity has associative valences that have given rise to the concern that the entailments of conversion to Christianity are dangerous to society and to individuals. First, there is the assumption that Sri Lankan Christianity maintains close socio-political associations with "the West" and that Western entities are responsible for corrosively influencing Sri Lankan sensibilities. Thus, the practice of evangelism and eliciting conversion heightens anxieties that increasing numbers of Sri Lankans are being enculturated into new social and political orientations that are potentially dangerous to the religious and ethnic heritage of the island. Secondly, as in the case of the two women who died during the Pentecostal prayer meeting, the bodily harm that resulted from the Pentecostal-charismatic practice has been construed as indications that these practices are deleterious to the well-being of participants—thereby giving Buddhist nationalist-protectionists an occasion to criticize Pentecostalism, and giving the most ardent nationalists an occasion to vilify Sri Lankan Christians in general.

Pentecostal Christian evangelists offer the rejoinder that their form of Christian practice attracts Buddhists and people of other religions because people see that through their exclusive devotion to Christ, they are able to encounter "the living God" who benevolently and powerfully intercedes in their world. They are emphatic that newcomers willingly come to the church, rather than by force as Buddhist protectionists allege. They insist that believers recognize that their worship of Christ enables them to tap into supernatural power and enables them to be "saved" from evil elements in their lives before what they believe to be the impending "End of Days" (*antima kaleya*). These Christian evangelists often assert that the efforts of Buddhist nationalist protectionists to dissuade and undermine conversions are simple acts of jealousy. From the more hardline view propagated by firmly committed Christian evangelists and especially by Pentecostal leaders, this jealousy is the work of Satan, for which acceptance of Christ among "non-believers" is the only cure.

Not surprisingly, religious authorities and devout adherents of Sri Lankan Buddhism and "mainline" Christianity find evangelicals' zealous demands of religious commitment, their unsympathetic views of other religious traditions and belief systems, and in some cases, the valorization of contemporary Christian martyrdom, to be deeply offensive. Among Pentecostal Christian evangelists, the zeal of the demands for religious commitment is packaged with charismatic "praise and worship," which involves emotive and often quite boisterous expression of devotion. In its more sensory and sensational forms Pentecostalism entails possession and exorcism, which can in some circumstances be physically explosive. Many religious authorities representing Buddhism and even non-charismatic streams of Christianity oppose these ecstatic practices, seeing them, at best, as ineffective and aesthetically unappealing, and at worst, as deceptive, "fraudulent," morally reprehensible, and potentially harmful to individuals and to the body politic. Nevertheless, the Pentecostal-charismatic stream of Christian evangelism in Sri Lanka is certainly growing—partly because of its promises of prosperity and healing, but in the main because it offers styles of worship that are deeply cathartic. The ecstatic eventfulness of new forms of Pentecostal religious expression has certainly enhanced the attractiveness of certain varieties of Christianity.

By entering into the internal logics of the debate over the ethics of conversion, I have shown how the fact that conversion is a concern for Buddhists is primarily, but not only, about identity politics and the management of the anxiety that Christianity might displace Buddhism in Sri Lanka. I contend that taking seriously how ethics are religiously, culturally, and socio-economically defined can help illuminate the contemporary impasse between the Christian evangelical and Buddhist nationalist communities in Sri Lanka. While currently, the ardency of Buddhist nationalism and Christian mission seem unshakeable, further perspectival consideration of ethical and aesthetic otherness from within and between Buddhist and Christian communities can illuminate spaces for dialogue that may also contribute to the establishment of a more solid foundation for pluralism in the country.

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Chapter 12
Pluralism and its Discontents: Buddhism and Proselytizing in Modern China

Francesca Tarocco

Since the mid-1950s, the Chinese state has exerted tight ideological and administrative control over the religious activities of its citizens. And yet, as Daniel Overmyer has observed, wherever and whenever local conditions allow it, religious practices come to the surface. Lay Buddhist movements, Confucian revivalists, evangelical Christians, and members of body cultivation movements, among others, have been active outside the officially sanctioned institutions (Overmyer 2003). A politically and ideologically engineered secularization and carefully micro-managed "religious pluralism"—to be understood here merely in the sense that there exist five officially sanctioned religions—create the context in which Chinese practitioners negotiate their existence vis-à-vis the state and each other. In recent years, the state, on its part, has helped promote religious sites, Buddhist ones in particular, as tourist destinations. These facts raise a number of important and as yet little explored questions. In particular, what can a Chinese practitioner or group of practitioners lawfully do? More specifically, what do the terms "religion" (*zongjiao* 宗 教), "superstition" (*mixin* 迷信) and "freedom of religious belief" (*xinjiao ziyou* 信教自由) mean in the rapidly evolving context of contemporary China? What is the relationship between religious pluralism, secularization, proselytizing and the Chinese Communist Party's quest for a "harmonious society" (*hexie shehui* 和谐社会)?[1]

Ultimately, proselytizing practices lurk on the borders of the religious, political and market forces at play in today's China, thereby illuminating their sheer blurriness.

[1]The notion of "harmonious society" was "placed on the top of the agenda" by the Chinese President Hu Jintao during the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2007. According to an article in the official newspaper *People's Daily*, "All people should co-exist harmoniously, love and help each other, encourage each other and make an effort to contribute to the building of a harmonious society." See: The 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, "Harmonious Society," September 29, 2008. Cf. http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90002/92169/92211/6274603.html. Accessed July 7, 2011.

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The rhetoric compounding the prohibitions against "forcing others to profess a religion" (*qiangpo taren xinjiao* 强迫他人信教), "printing and distributing religious propaganda" (*yinfa zongjiao xuanchuan pin* 印发宗教宣传品), "spreading cults" (*chuanbo xiejiao* 传播邪教), and many such limitations to religious activity is always present, from Internet-based discussion boards to the sign boards hung in front of schools and religious buildings.[2]

In order to explore the dynamic relationships between proselytizing, religious pluralism, and secularism in modern China, I will first briefly survey the religious world of late imperial China until the fall of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). Second, I will look at the emergence of a new terminology to regulate the religious field from the last decades of the Qing dynasty (1840–1911) to the advent of the Sino-Japanese war in 1937. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the policies of the Nationalist regime (1912–1937) and its attempts to regulate and control religious activities present quite a few continuities with those of the socialist state and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Then and now, Buddhist activists—often thanks to help and financial resources from Taiwan and Southeast Asia—have shown great resourcefulness in responding to less-than-favorable socio-political circumstances, not only by finding novel ways to get their message across using a variety of media but also by restoring existing monasteries and pilgrimage sites and building new facilities.[3]

I will conclude with a discussion of the Chinese state's promotion of Buddhist sites as tourist destinations vis-à-vis the efforts of practitioners to place these sites at the center of their outreach and proselytization efforts and to use them as places of religious worship.[4] Large-scale open-air statues of Buddhas have started appearing at various locations in southern China including on the island of Putuoshan and in the city of Wuxi. Even if one of the primary motivations behind these efforts may be a desire on the part of local governments to attract tourists and pilgrims, this phenomenon looks nonetheless similar to early Buddhist efforts to appropriate existing religious sites and erect pagodas and other such religious structures in an attempt to "sacralize China" and construct a Buddhist sacred geography on Chinese soil.

Religion, Religious Pluralism and Proselytizing in Late Imperial China

Late imperial China was characterized by the more or less pacific co-existence of very many deities and worthies and by the presence on the territory of countless religious sites, including temples, lineage halls, Buddhist monastic institutions,

[2]Cf. "Wang Lixiong: The 23 Behaviours of Illegal Religious Activity" available online at http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2009/07/wang-lixiong-the-23-behaviors-of-illegal-religious-activity/. Accessed August 11, 2011. There are numerous examples of exchanges on these and similar issues on the portal Sina and on other Internet discussion boards; for a small example cf. http://iask.sina.com.cn/b/12878043.html (accessed August 11, 2011).
[3]Cf. Ashiwa and Wank (2006). See also Wank (2009).
[4]Cf. Barrett (2001). Cf. also Shinohara (1999).

pagodas, Taoist abbeys, shrines, mosques, and churches. The large majority of the population attended to a vast and heterogeneous trans-local pantheon of anthropomorphized potent local spirits and other forces that included Buddhist and Taoist deities and a host of female and male gods, many with bureaucratic and royal titles including Tianhou the "Heavenly Empress" (天后), the Jade Emperor, the Medicine King, the Dragon King, the Wealth-god, and many others.[5] Popular piety and imperial patronage were embodied in the significant number of religious buildings, structures and sites that dotted the Chinese landscape. For instance, in her masterful study of religious structures in Beijing between 1400 and 1900, Susan Naquin mapped out the social and religious life of some 2,500 temples. "A fundamental pluralism of belief," she argues, "was not easily standardized," noting that, "as the world of the gods was plural, so was that of the believers."[6]

As no single overarching system that organized all the gods of Chinese religion existed, there was also conspicuous variation over space and time. By Ming times (1368–1644), Chinese worshippers had numerous ritual options. "Religious pluralism in China," writes Adam Chau, "is not manifested as the co-existence of, and competition between, confession- and membership-based denominations and churches but rather as the co-existence of, and competition between, various ritual service providers with different (though convergent) liturgical programmes' (Chau 2011: 566)." It was the quest for ritual efficacy (*ling* 靈) that prompted practitioners, for instance in the context of a funeral, to hire ritual specialists from various traditions in order to secure the potency of the rite. This fact fuelled competition among ritual specialists and temples to secure attendance at rituals, donations, and sponsorship of religious festivals. As per elite attitudes and ideologies, Joachim Gentz has argued that the discourse of the Unity of the Three Teachings (*sanjiao heyi* 三教合一) of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, represented a case of "regulated pluralism." Exponents of the three teachings were seldom in a position vis-à-vis the state to openly antagonize one another, but when they were, they certainly tried to do so (Gentz 2011).

One particularly telling example is that, throughout the late imperial period, Buddhists, Neo-Confucians, Quanzhen Taoists, Manicheans, and other forces often sought not only to re-define China's sacred geography but quite deliberately to appropriate the buildings and sites of other groups and put them to use for their own ritual purposes.[7]

Doctrinal exclusivity was not unheard of. Millenarian movements, especially active in China during the late imperial period, were keen proselytizers, and thereby regarded as very dangerous by the authorities (Seiwert and Ma 2003). Among the non-indigenous religions, Islam was brought to Chinese territories in the

[5] See especially the chapters in the second volume of Lagerway (2004).
[6] See Naquin (2000: 38). See also Goossaert (2007).
[7] Cf. Robson (2011).

eighth century and was well established by Ming times, a time that also witnessed the arrival of Italian and Portuguese Jesuit missionaries, who reached the imperial court in Beijing in 1601.[8]

Similarly to modern communist party officials, late imperial period bureaucrats were extremely fearful of religiously driven political uprisings yet very adept at co-opting religious forces to serve their purposes. For instance, the imperial project of the Manchu rulers—the Qing (1644–1912)—was characterized in the eighteenth century by the rigorous control and co-optation of religious forces, especially those with international ties such as the Buddhism of the Yellow Hats in Tibet and Islam in the newly re-named Xinjiang. The Qing emperors attempted to exert a monopoly on all religious activities and exerted as tight a control as they could over anyone who claimed to have a special relationship with or access to the spirit world (Waley-Cohen 1998). Since the role of ritual was central to legitimizing the dynastic mandate to rule as well as to reinforcing state authority and power on all levels, Qing officialdom was determined to protect its prerogative to communicate with the spirits as well as to dictate how others should do so. Philip Kuhn's poignant analysis of the sanctions against sorcery, magic, and witchcraft in the Qing penal code reveals the extent of official anxieties toward the world of Chinese "sectarian" religions.[9]

The last decade of the nineteenth century brought great changes to the world of Chinese religion. The late Qing state and its republican successors' nation-building strategies sought to confiscate temple properties to replace the institutions of local religion with schools and police barracks. Moreover, by falling under the influence of Western secular models of church/state separation and negotiating with a limited number of officially recognized membership-based religious traditions to the exclusion of community-based and other ritual modes, argues Vincent Goossaert, "the modern Chinese state has attempted to reconfigure the religious field, thereby creating new dividing lines between politically acceptable and unacceptable forms of religion. This reconfiguration narrowed the scope of politically acceptable religion, and what was excluded was targeted by violent, destructive action (Goossaert 2005: 1)." Coupled with increasing pressure from European missionary and Western imperialistic activities, this process witnessed the consolidation of the modern Chinese state's discourses on religion.[10]

[8]For Islam, see Lipman (1997). For Catholic communities in late nineteenth century rural China, see Litzinger (1996). Cf. also Standaert (2001).

[9]See Kuhn (1990). In the Confucian tradition the combination of right thought and right action is called *zheng*, meaning, "correct, legitimate." This is contrasted with the "heterodox principles" (*yiduan*) of non-Confucian religious systems, notably Buddhism and Taoism, and, even more strongly, with sectarian cults and rituals that are regarded as potentially subverting the moral order, and therefore are considered "heretical" (*xie*) or "licentious" (*yin*).

[10]For the first full-fledged state campaigns against popular religion in modern China see Duara (1991).

A New "Religion"

The 1903 edition of the influential Shanghai Commercial Press *English and Chinese Dictionary*, which was aimed at a Chinese readership and was influenced by English-speaking Protestant missionary views, still used the traditional pre-modern term *jiao* ("to teach," or "teaching") to designate various indigenous and missionary religions present in China. These included the "teaching of Jesus," "the teaching of the Mohammedans," "the teaching of the Romanists," "the teaching of the literati," and "the teaching of Buddha." In a similar vein, it also addressed the terminology of conversion and proselytizing: to "propagate a religion" or "do missionary work" is *chuan-jiao* (传教). The highly flexible *jiao*, however, was eventually replaced by another term, the more complex and intractable disyllabic compound *zongjiao* (宗教), now the official translation of the English term religion in modern Chinese and Japanese. *Zong* is a slightly tricky term, originally a kinship term meaning the main ancestral line, which came by extension to indicate anything else one looked back to and identified with, so that in more abstract contexts it is often translated as "principle."

In the writings of the Zen Buddhist patriarch Zongmi (780–841), *zongjiao* is used to indicate something quite inclusive, the teaching of the entire lineage of Zen masters stretching back to the Buddha himself, a usage no doubt prompted by the prominence in Zen of pseudo-familial terminology. It is this usage that re-surfaces at the time of Christian proselytizing activities in the colonial era in a 1838 Chinese-language missionary periodical publication seeking to convey some elements of European history to a Chinese readership. Faced with the need to characterize the unusual status of the papal state in the Italy of those days, the German missionary Karl Friedrich August Gützlaff (1803–1851) chose to describe it, fatefully, as constituting a *jiao-zong* state. Similarly, Wei Yuan (1794–1856), famous for his 1844 *Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms*, a compilation of various materials that summarized a lot of the knowledge on Western countries then available to Chinese officials, shows how educated Chinese persons who were not Buddhist monks themselves could construe the totality of the Buddhist religious tradition in his time. Specifically, *zong* and *jiao* seem to be used by Wei to cover those activities that were proper to the Buddhist clergy, and the terms might be brought together to constitute a sort of shorthand summary of the intellectual world of the religious professional. Perhaps the combination of characters was intended to indicate something close to the notion of "clerical" rather than, more broadly, "religious," for later on, in an explanation of the rise of the influence of the Catholic Church in European affairs, he speaks of the influence of "men of *zong* and *jiao*."[11] In all likelihood, it was the necessity to find a fitting translation in the eyes of Chinese elites who attended to the religious-political nexus of the Episcopal jurisdiction of the Catholic Church in Rome and of its complex relationship with the making of modern European states that contributed to the making and re-making of the Chinese terminology for religion, finally settling on *zongjiao*.

[11] Cf. Barrett and Tarocco (2011). For Buddhist activists' promotion of the term see Tarocco (2008).

Echoes of these earlier semantic and discursive struggles still resound in today's Chinese language, as *zongjiao* is more easily associated with the practices of post-Qing China. It conveys a sense of an organized institution of beliefs and textual authority. In this sense, it is a poor translation for many Chinese religious practices and reflects the fact that "religion" was established in modern China through the concurrent efforts of elite Buddhists and Christians to the exclusion of the daily practices of many. The triumph of *zongjiao* over *jiao* marks an end to the traditional Chinese religious field. The policies of the modern Chinese states can be seen as the implementation of new political ideals that favored certain institutions and religious practices over others that were at variance with those favored by the imperial state and by the majority of the population up to 1900. The creation of the notion of "superstition" (*mixin*) during the first decades of the twentieth century was also instrumental in this process.[12]

The use of this terminology is now widespread amongst scholars, journalists, and legislators, even if many Chinese practitioners still contest it and resist it because they rightly perceive that since the time of its adoption to fit this role, it has fatally skewed the meaning of "religion" in the direction of the beliefs and ideologies of the professional clerical groups representing religions such as Buddhism and Christianity rather than creating a semantic sphere that could include the practices and rituals of the majority of the Chinese population.

Buddhism, Christianity, and the Modern Chinese State

Despite their ability in surviving the end of the imperial order and in influencing the emerging discourse on religion, Buddhists and Christians did not go unchallenged. In fact, the 1920s witnessed a series of "antireligious" campaigns. In 1922, the Great Anti-religious Society was set up in Beijing and similar associations were founded in other parts of China. Some of these groups demanded the complete abolition of the Buddhist monastic order, a prohibition on performing rites for the dead, and the elimination of gatherings to chant the sutras.[13] Hu Shi, a very influential intellectual and leader of the New Culture Movement, accused Buddhism of having caused the "Indianization" of China thus making the country a potential victim of colonial aggression.[14] Perhaps unsurprisingly, throughout the twentieth century, some suggested that Chinese Buddhism would not survive. Chan Wing-tsit, author of the influential *Religious Trends in Modern China* (1953), argued that Buddhism was irrelevant to the majority of Chinese people and disappearing altogether from society, especially, but not only, because it could not speak the language of nationalism and nation-building.

[12] Cf. Nedostup (2001).
[13] Cf. Goossaert (2008).
[14] See Hu Shi (1937).

The secularizing ideals of the new elites and the state campaigns against religion were not the only problem for Buddhists. Christian missionaries, and, later, indigenous Chinese evangelists, with their new schools, hospitals, and preaching activities, also represented a threat. Thousands of European and North American missionaries had gone to China starting in the middle of the nineteenth century and had kept busy with a score of proselytizing activities, including, in the colorful words of The London Missionary Society's Griffith John, "filling the air with the music of the cross and saturating the minds of the people with the story of Jesus (John 1882)." With few exceptions, Christian missionaries were quite vehement in their attacks against Buddhism.[15] But despite claims to the contrary, throughout the twentieth century as well as today, the cultural and economic resources of Chinese Buddhism have proven quite resilient and capable of re-invocation and reinvention. In particular, they have adapted their proselytizing strategies to the new socio-political and economic environment. Furthermore, there is plenty of evidence that exponents of the clergy as well as lay practitioners did support and were supported by the modern Chinese nation-state at various critical junctures.[16]

As I have shown elsewhere, Chinese Buddhists readily embraced new technologies, including the modern press, sound recording, and photography, as well as adapted earlier practices for proselytizing purposes.[17] Decades before the Internet became a widespread tool for the diffusion of religious teachings, republican-period Buddhists had already developed a great interest in the mass-mediated communication of religious ideas and found the economic means to fund such new enterprises thanks to donations and elite support. In Shanghai, the paradigmatic modern Chinese city, for instance, Buddhists had their own radio station called "The Buddha's Voice" (*Foyin diantai* 佛音電台). Founded in the early 1930s, this was among the first Buddhist radio stations in the world. Both clerics and laypeople created new compositions in an effort to combat one of the favorite Christian proselytizing techniques, namely, the use of choral music and song. Public collective singing had established itself as a technology for instructing and enforcing belief as well as a means of social and political mobilization compelling Buddhist cultural activists to create their own compositions. Some of these are still part of today's soundscape especially in Taiwan and Southeast Asia. The novel Buddhist anthems were disseminated through books, journals, and the wireless. Later, in the 1930s, the Shanghai publishing world offered its readers more than just Buddhist canonical literature. A remarkably varied offering of printed materials was made available as the number of private presses and bookshops devoted to printing and distributing Buddhist texts increased dramatically throughout China.

If reading Buddhist texts had historically been an essential part of basic Buddhist piety, in the climate of heightened religious competition of the late Qing and the

[15] See Welch (1968), especially 222–253. Cf. also Lian Xi (2006/7).
[16] See, for example, Nedostup and Liang Hong-Ming (2001). See also the classic studies by Welch (1962, 1965, 1967, 1968, 1972).
[17] For what follows, cf. the sources underlying Tarocco (2007), especially Part Two.

early Republican periods, religious periodicals were perceived as formidable and necessary weapons, which were a crucial part of the development of a new set of popularizing and proselytizing activities intended to disseminate Buddhist-inspired vocabulary and imagery.[18] The establishment of a readership community offered a degree of visibility to a new breed of Buddhist cultural activists at a time when traditional Chinese religion was coming under increasing pressure. It not only gave them an edge over other exponents of the traditional Chinese religious world, at least in the eyes of the intellectual elites and government ideologues, but also over the expert proselytizers competing for a slice of the Chinese religious markets, the Christian missionaries, some of whom were already targeting Buddhists as potential converts.[19] A special emphasis was placed on the "Chineseness" of Buddhism and on its influence, not only over China's religious ideas, but over its cultural and intellectual life. The Buddhist "sacred geography" of China was continuously evoked in the pages of modern Buddhist magazines and specific references were made to important monasteries, pagodas, and pilgrimage sites (Tarocco 2007: 75–88).

In their pursuit of visibility, Buddhists also adapted their traditional buildings and building skills to the needs of the new era and of emergent modern Chinese cities, also adapting the shape and size of monasteries and recitation halls to the urban fabric. At least 149 new monasteries and halls were built in Shanghai alone during the late Qing period and the Republic. Before 1949, the city counted at least 300 Buddhist buildings staffed by some 5,000 clerics. According to a directory of the Shanghai Buddhist Association, by the late 1940s many of the city's almost 300 monasteries and temples were located inside the dwellings in the alleys where most had conducted their everyday existence since the 1870s. One of Shanghai's richest men, the Baghdad-born Silas Hardoon, who was the husband of a pious Buddhist benefactress, also contributed to the expansion of Shanghai's Buddhist-inspired built environment by erecting a monastic complex in his expansive gardens.[20]

This relative flourishing of religion came to an abrupt end after the proclamation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, when government ideologues came to view secularization as the key to modernization and the religious field as an area open to political intervention. In the 1950s, all religious activities became confined and restricted to designated areas.[21] Initially, the state restricted the number of sites open for religious activities, and eventually all religious buildings were closed down during the Cultural Revolution. Since 1979, only a limited number of temples, mosques and churches have been reopened for religious activities, but the state has

[18] Cf. Goldfuss (2001).
[19] See for example Lai Pan-chiu (2009).
[20] Cf. Pan Mingchu (2003), Lu Hanchao (1999), You Yuwei (1988).
[21] See for example Macinnis (1991). Control was extended from central government level right down to county level through CCP-controlled Trade Unions, Women's Federations, Communist Youth Leagues, and other organizations. The five "official" religions were given strictly limited toleration: Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism were encouraged to set up "patriotic" organizations. All foreign missionaries were expelled by 1952.

closely watched these re-openings. In 1983, some religious buildings were reopened, but the majority were treated as "historical" and "cultural relics" (*wenwu* 文物) or tourist sites under the administration of government agencies other than the Bureau for Religious Affairs. The assumption remained up to this point that, since no proselytizing activities had been allowed since the early 1950s, there were no new converts and no need for new religious spaces (Yang Fenggang 2010). Up until the present, the Chinese state has continued its uncomfortable relationship with religion. Local governments are alarmed by, and occasionally crack down on, overt religious proselytizing activities, not only those of sectarian movements (e.g., Falungong) and clandestine Christians, but also those of the five official religions.[22]

Buddhist Proselytizing Strategies in the PRC: Freedom to Do What?

The issue of "religious freedom" in the PRC is discussed in a policy document often referred to as "Document 19," issued in 1982. "The basic policy of the Party regarding the religious question," it states, "is to respect and protect the freedom of religious belief." This language clearly reflects non-indigenous linguistic models when it comes to understanding "religion," and yet even though the descriptors are the same, things are actualized rather differently in the Chinese context. In fact, the document goes on to clarify that: "This is a long-term policy, one that must be continuously implemented and put into practice up until that time in the future when religion naturally dies out."[23] The document then goes on to discuss the party's policies to "win over, unite and educate [politically] the religious professionals" as well as to redress injustices perpetrated against them.[24] While it calls on party cadres and other officials to help religious organizations recover and restore some of their places of worship, it limits the religious activities that they are allowed to carry out in the re-appropriated venues. Buildings and physical locations are, it is thought, easier to manage than human activity. The establishment of a physical location, a perimeter, a border, also helps to circumscribe the greatest majority of traditional religious practices taking place *extra moenia*, pilgrimages and funerary processions in particular. Thus, the most obvious connection between being forced to register a site with the authorities and all community-building activities, including proselytizing, is that members of an officially registered location are not allowed to carry out any religious practice outside of the registered premises without permission (Paglee 2010).

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[22] See for example the web page of the local government of the designated tourist area and world heritage site Mount Lu, a site historically connected with Buddhism. Cf. http://www.china-lushan.com/lushanzhuanti/nulituijindangjianshidagongcheng/2011-05-09/2258.html. Accessed August 12, 2011. There is a conspicuous literature on Falungong, cf. for example Cheris Shun-ching Chan (2004).

[23] Cf. Suqian City Religious Affairs Bureau (1982).

[24] Ibid.

The state severely controls and restricts religious education and forbids young people to join a religion or a religious order. Since 1994, all officially registered religious personnel receive a "patriotic education," thereby integrating traditional forms of religious training with political indoctrination. The intention to train young clergy who would be loyal to the CCP is clearly outlined. Finally, the document reiterates the principle that party members cannot be religious believers and includes a clause protecting the freedom *not* to be religious. Crucially, this means that any form of proselytizing is *de facto* illegal, as it could be seen as forcing religion on others. Moreover, it is also illegal to impart religious education to children, who cannot be part of any ritual activity that makes them part of a religious community or be baptized before they reach the age of 18. The main effect of this is that faith and religious knowledge cannot, at least in theory, be handed down from generation to generation (Leung 2005).

Publications that contain religious content must follow a set of regulations (*xuyao zixi shenshi*). The first rule is that they must not contain anything "which damages the harmonious relationship between believers and non-believers." The vagueness in this statement gives the government a lot of room to maneuver because it gives no specific indication of what exactly would damage the harmony of society.[25] In recent years, moreover, the government has taken steps to reduce the diffusion of information about religious activities through the Internet. Article 19 of China's regulations on registering Internet domain names, which went into force in September 2002, bars the registration of domain names if the site is used to "harm state interests." In particular, Clause 5 of the regulations bans websites that violate "state religion policies or propagate cult and feudal superstition" (Corley and Hornemann 2004).

After the initial relaxation of religious policies of the post-Mao period, the state's planning, management and control of religious sites continued into the 1990s. A 1991 policy document, while stressing the importance of religion in the context of international relations (particularly with Buddhist and Muslim countries), also renews the warnings of the potential dangers of foreign infiltration by Chinese religious organizations, clearly an issue for pro-Vatican Catholics, Protestant missionaries, Muslims in Xinjiang, and Tibetan Buddhists followers of what the government describes as the "Dalai Lama clique." It also encourages more control over "unregistered religious activities" and the "management of religious groups." Thus, while friendly relations with foreign religious groups are encouraged, the basic policy of Chinese independence remains unchanged.[26]

Article 2 of the 1994 document "Regulations Governing Venues for Religious Purposes" again makes clear that venues for religious activities include monasteries, Taoist abbeys, mosques, and churches with clearly definable areas, and that formal registration is required to establish such venues.[27] Interestingly, central planners generally believe that the existing number of religious sites is sufficient to meet the

[25] Liu Peng (2006). See also Spiegel (2004).
[26] See the appendixes in Britsch (1995).
[27] Ibid.

demand. To counter this claim, again using parameters derived from the North American model, the Chinese scholar Yang Fenggang argues that: "The existing religious sites have been insufficient to meet the demand." He goes on to show that, on average, there are 6.5 government-approved religious sites for every hundred thousand Chinese (85,000/1.3 billion), whereas there are about 117 religious congregations for every hundred thousand Americans (350,000/0.3 billion). "Even if one insists that the Chinese have never been a very religious people, whereas religious oversupply is a problem in the United States, a difference of 18 times fewer religious congregations in China is at least indicative of a certain level of religious supply shortage (Yang Fenggang 2010)."

Local authorities do not hesitate to destroy communities and places of worship, particularly, but not exclusively, local Christian churches. On December 21, 2000, *Christian Solidarity Worldwide* reported a "worsening campaign against Christians." Reports emerged of the closure, confiscation and destruction of hundreds of churches since the beginning of November 2000. According to China's *Wenzhou Daily* of December 12, 2000 ascited by *Christian Solidarity Worldwide*, between mid-November and December 5, 2000, sizeable numbers of churches were destroyed, banned, or taken away to be used for other purposes, particularly in rural areas, where local authorities mobilized villagers against Christian communities, but also in the large urban area of Wenzhou, where some 26 Protestant churches were bombed and completely destroyed.[28]

Still, during the last 25 or so years, despite strict regulation and occasional repression, Buddhist groups in many parts of China have been actively reassembling networks of practitioners and reconstructing religious sites. The creation and re-creation of pilgrimage sites, large-scale monastic institutions and gigantic Buddha statues seems to me to be one of the few possible proselytizing activities still open to Chinese Buddhists, both nationally and trans-nationally, and one that affords a degree of flexibility in the management of Buddhist "salvation goods." Why are local governments encouraging Buddhists to be active? Is this in contradiction with religious policies? Are Buddhist proselytizing activities being tolerated and even encouraged, and why? A possible explanation, as noted by Ji Zhe, is that "though the official religious institutions are maintaining their relatively dominant position, the offerings of the religious marketplace have become more diversified (Ji Zhe 2008)." Such resurfacing of a plural world of nonofficial religiosities rather worries the authorities. Ironically, it transpires, the more the state seeks to manage and control the "institutionalized" religions, the more space underground sectarian and community-based forms of religion are able to make space for themselves and their proselytizing activities. The state is thus forced to grant more autonomy to the officially sanctioned institutionalized religions, both at national and at local levels, if it wants them to continue to exert a monopoly of the Chinese religious marketplace.[29]

[28]The Christian Solidarity Worldwide (2000). Cf. also Dunch (2001).
[29]Ibid.

Tourism and Proselytizing

> "A tourist is half a pilgrim, if a pilgrim is half a tourist."
> Edith Turner and Victor Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 1978

Between 1983 and 1995, Buddhists were able to regain control of many sites they owned before 1949. Yet, the process at the local level can be very slow and difficult, and local authorities can be unwilling to evict the current occupants of the premises—factories, the military, and so on. In one well-documented case, however, that of the southern coastal city of Xiamen in Fujian province, all pre-revolutionary temples have been returned to practitioners. Moreover, local authorities have approved huge increases in the scale of buildings in existing temple compounds and many have been rebuilt two or three times their original size (Ashiwa Yoshiko 2007). Some temples were even relocated to larger plots of land on very visible parts of the city on the hills. In this context, Xiamen's Buddhist community has undergone a remarkable revival. Wealthy overseas Chinese tourists and pilgrims from Southeast Asia and Taiwan go to visit their ancestral villages in southern Fujian. Xiamen is the port of entry into China and all the monasteries and temples there receive conspicuous donations and offers from the visitors.

The tourism market in China has been steadily increasing for many decades. The domestic market in particular has risen fast since the beginning of the reform period in 1978, when the market was nearly nonexistent. China now has the largest domestic tourism market in the world (Wang Lei and Lu Jiehua 2009). The newly created State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) now interacts with clerics and laypeople to facilitate the promotion of religious sites as ideal tourist attractions by emphasizing their cultural and historical significance. SARA's duties primarily involve "educating religious adherents in Marxism, mobilizing them toward state goals, censoring foreign religious publications distributed domestically, monitoring foreign religious visitors in China, and giving foreigners a good impression of religions in China (Ashiwa and Wank 2006: 343–344)." According to Huan Zhanwei, SARA actively promotes Buddhism as an ideology in line with China's dream of building a 'harmonious society' (Huan Zhanwei 2009).

As well as financing the physical reconstruction of temples, the state has actively promoted Buddhist religious sites as places of cultural importance and as interesting tourist destinations. The government has successfully lobbied UNESCO to have various Buddhist sites recognized as World Heritage Sites, thus solidifying their attractiveness as tourist destinations (United Nations Educational and Scientific and Cultural Organization 2010). Through the construction of roads and railways, it also encourages tourists to visit areas that were previously difficult to reach.

While on the one hand the authorities help to build infrastructure, they do take away a portion of monastic revenue. Some of this income is reinvested in the buildings' renovation and expansion, some pays for the (often substantial) wages of those employed by the board to oversee this process, and some funds are spent outside the temple. Nanputuo Monastery monks openly disagreed with the authorities over the use of revenue, especially when money generated by performing rituals was

used to pay the salaries of petty managers put in place by the state even though the abbot wanted to build a meditation center and library. While the monks felt that this was crucial for the well-being of monastic practice, the officials criticized the proposed meditation center as a place for lazy monks to sleep. In the end, officials proposed an alternative plan to invest the income in a high-class vegetarian restaurant, hotel, and tour buses in order to develop the temple's tourism potential, thereby contributing to Xiamen's market economy. This is far from being an isolated case (Ashiwa and Wank 2006, 349).

The recognition of major sites and the economic aid provided by the state, I argue, afford Buddhists the chance to be visible and attract potential worshipers, as well as channel funds and donations thanks to traditional technologies of salvation through merit making (*gongde* 功德). Yet the renovation and promotion of Buddhist temples as tourist destinations rather than places of active worship has also led to conflicts inside and outside the Buddhist world. Monks and nuns are often unhappy with both the changes in their monasteries and their roles within them. In some cases, the museification of monastic property and the mass influx of visitors have caused major disruption to regular temple life and activities. At Famen Monastery (famous for possessing a "finger-bone" relic of the Buddha), the monks were reportedly protesting both the sixfold raise in entrance fees and the construction of a wall that would have restricted their access to their own temple door. It is not only monks who have expressed dissatisfaction. The religious activities of laypeople and pilgrims have also been affected, as documented in a recent study of the promotion of a historical pilgrimage place. "Traditional pilgrimage has continued with the advent of tourism… Pilgrims express frustration with tourism, which… disrupts traditional practices such as incense burning… The bustling tourist crowds, no matter how much good they have brought to this isolated mountainous region, remain outsiders without any bond to local society."[30]

One could argue that were it not for the government's investment in promoting Buddhist monasteries as ideal tourist destinations, Chinese Buddhists, within the confines of current government policy on religion, would have struggled to increase awareness of their religion and beliefs outside of the regular devotees who attend temples for religious services. Even though the government's reasons for involvement in monastic affairs is not necessarily to ensure Buddhism's survival in China, nor to give Buddhists a means of proselytizing, the economic revenue and opportunities they provide do go some way to achieving this. So Buddhism and the state are today involved in a complex relationship; a game in which each must take account of the other. In China's vast capitalist frontier, it is probably not possible to completely disentangle the regime of state control of religion, Buddhists' desire for promoting their religion and the irresistible pull of flexible accumulation.

[30]Kang Xiaofei (2009). For pilgrimage and popular culture from a global perspective, including pilgrimage in non-religious settings, see the essays in Reader and Walter (1993). For pilgrimage in modern Japanese society see Ian Reader's work, including Reader (1987, 2005).

Freedom to Build? Buddhist Proselytizing and Its Discontents

Famen Monastery is one of the most striking examples of the promotion of a religious site for tourism via the use of grandiose architecture. Arguably, its case is both exceptional for its scale as well as typical of some of the processes that take place in today's China. In the medieval period, the Famen Monastery was known chiefly as the home of the soteriologically powerful "middle finger" bone relic of the Buddha, rather than as, for instance, the home of pious clergy or of an important monastic library. Relics, then and now, are useful not only in that they generate revenue from pilgrimage and the donations of prominent patrons, but also for the general sense of importance they confer to the monastic and the lay community that supports them.[31]

While today's Famen site presents itself as primarily a religious one, the use of architecture and exhibitory space as part of the circuit of pilgrimage and worship indicates broader trends in the changing role of museums and the peculiar museum mode of display and "enshrinement" across the globe today. The blurring of the boundaries between museum and place of religious worship is emblematic of the shift of political and cultural institutions in response to the needs of the new cultural economy.[32] Also, it is inevitable that, as organized religions undergo profound changes, the religious institutions they build must be designed to perform new tasks and to address new audiences. This, in turn, leads to a new kind of religious institution that combines traditional cosmology and eschatology with modern architecture, engineering and communication technologies. Nowhere is that more clearly visible than in some of the new sites of Chinese Buddhism.

Since the early 1980s, religious revival, commercial development, and tourism have advanced in parallel. Yet, their interrelationship is still hard to grasp on a national scale. China's relative decentralization has produced varied and sometimes inconsistent official policies. Local conditions and historical memories have prompted a wide variety of responses to the advantages of liberalization and the constraints of official control. In the case of Famen Monastery, local authorities have greatly extended the area of the pre-existing monastic complex, rebuilt the pagoda and created a huge "Buddhist-inspired" amusement park. This contains statues of the famous pilgrim Xuanzang who traveled between India and China in the medieval period and went on to become the hero of popular novels and films, monks on their daily rounds collecting alms, and gigantic *dharma* wheels. Almost everything

[31] John Kieschnick mentions a seventeenth-century Chinese writer who complains that Guandong province is full of *stupas* built for geomantic purposes, and that this was not the intention of the Buddha. See Kieschnick (2003). For Chinese Buddhist understanding of images and relics cf. Faure (1998).

[32] For the use of religion to affect a process of political consolidation see Appadurai (1996) and Ashiwa (2000).

in the area looks both new and oversize, including the structures that typically house the bell and the drum. The whole complex, the "cultural scenic area," encompasses the Temple Gate Square, the Foguang Avenue, Famen Temple, and the Namaste Dagoba building, a large angular structure that is supposedly inspired by the shape of hands joined in a prayer gesture. The scale of the project is relentlessly monumental. Notably, the architecture and master plan are by the famous Taiwanese architect C.Y. Lee, an American-educated architect based in Taiwan and responsible for other massive buildings, including Taipei 101, the world's tallest building when it was constructed. Lee also designed what were then Taiwan's tallest buildings between 1992 and 1993, and between 1997 and 2004. His Buddhist credentials started with the construction of the Chung Tai Monastery at Nantou, which was the world's tallest Buddhist building between 2001 and 2006. All of these projects clearly rely on an organizational structure derived from modern corporate capitalism, characterized by the involvement of prominent architects and other professionals, including managers and tourism developments consultants, to aid the project.[33] The monks of the original Famen Monastery did resist the project all along and have so far refused to allow their monastery to be under the full jurisdiction of the tourism board, which wants to include entrance to both sites under one entry ticket (currently, they own the control over the entry ticket to the monastery, and one million RMB is donated monthly to the monastery).

The Famen monastic and tourist complex is only one of the newly emergent museum-like institutions that have been sponsored by the government and/or Buddhist groups, organizations, and private individuals, and that are fully invested in identity politics. In these sites, we see the epistemological apparatus of the museum put to new use. Buddhists' desire for visibility combined with market logics and compounded by political pressure has resulted in the creation of spectacular complexes whose architecture blurs the distinction between the museum, the theme park, and the traditional Buddhist structure. A reconfigured, architecturally grandiose museum form is being used here by Buddhists to reinforce their traditional soteriological claims but also to produce a different kind of social and political space in the context of China's ostensibly secular state. Thus, the monastery/museum is emerging in twenty-first century China as one of the key cultural forms through which religious revivalism and cultural nationalism are attempting to consolidate both their statements and their constituencies.

The making of Buddhist inspired buildings and other "buddhascapes" can be read as a means of developing new local and trans-local connections and outreach platforms while, at the same time, evoking more traditional technologies of salvation. By its involvement and investment in these processes, the Chinese government attempts to achieve many things at many different levels. In particular, it may hope to engender a sense of cultural identity and unity via the appropriation of the past

[33] Cf. http://www.famensi.com/; http://www.archdaily.com/364645/famen-temple-zen-meditation-center-winning-proposal-oac/; http://www.sei.gov.cn/13xqh/en/project133.htm; http://www.chinatourprop.com/SightView.asp?SightId=137 (all sites accessed in July 2011).

as well as to generate revenue through the development of religious and cultural tourism. Ultimately, it may also hope to control and limit the rise of indigenous Christian churches and of sectarian groups, fearful as it is of their powerful message of salvation and their alternative eschatologies.

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