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IDENTITY CRISES:
Pressures on Ethnic and Religious Identity in 20th Century Tanzania

Devin Kesner

In Ethnic Groups in Conflict, Donald L. Horowitz writes that ethnicity transcends identifications based on color, language, and religion, concluding with the assertion: “ethnic conflict is one phenomenon and not several” (53). Comparably, Azar Gat comments on the significance of religion as stemming from “its historical role as a major element of culture, and hence of ethnicity” (25). Horowitz’s and Gat’s treatments of ethnicity are accurate representations of the approach to ethnicity seen across much of the literature relating to postcolonial interethnic and interreligious conflict in Africa. This collapsing of distinct categories is especially problematic because in reality “there is no clear agreement about what constituents make up these units [of ethnicity] nor are there very decided notions about what the boundaries are” (Cohen and Middleton 4). Without a solid and universally-accepted definition of ethnicity and with the societal and cultural significance of religion being swallowed up as a mere subset of ethnicity within much of the literature, meaningful comparison between interreligious relations and interethnic relations becomes difficult (Stewart 1). In turn, independent consideration of the causes and solutions to both of these issues is not easily possible (Stewart 1).

This paper will discuss religious identity and ethnic identity as two distinct concepts. The definition of an ethnic group as “a population of shared kinship (real or perceived) and culture” will be utilized for its simplicity and implications of flexibility (Gat 3). A religious group, on the other hand, will be defined as a population with a transcendent allegiance to some form of religion (i.e. a belief in and worship of a transcendent figure or ideal). The use of these distinct definitions is justified with the hypothesis that it is possible for mobilization along religious lines to occur in isolation from (or in spite of) mobilization along ethnic lines, and that the very absence of ethnic mobilization may lead to an even greater possibility of religious tensions. Tanzania under the rule of Julius Nyerere (1961-1985) will be used as a case study to examine the interplay and relationship between ethnicity and religion, with the ultimate aim of the paper being to discuss how the colonial legacy, Nyerere’s policies as the first President of Tanzania, and globalization have affected the religious and ethnic landscape in Tanzania.
I. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This paper seeks to differentiate between ethnic and religious identity in the process of asking the question: ‘How did Nyerere’s Ujamaa socialist policies change the religious and ethnic landscape of Tanzania?’ It will examine the religious and ethnic landscape within Tanzania by looking through the lenses of three frequently discussed potential causes or agitators of inter-identity conflict in Africa – colonial legacy, nation building, and globalization. Colonial legacy changed the ethnic and religious terrain of African countries by creating or further entrenching identities and contributed to unequal socioeconomic factors across groups (Ranger 120; O’Brien 200). Education under colonialism was often dominated by missionary schools, leaving Muslims behind in terms of educational attainment and thus potential for socioeconomic advancement (Kasozi 229). In turn, globalization promotes the spread of ideas and resources internationally and consequently impacts preexisting divisions influenced by these other factors. Before discussing these three factors within the context of Tanzania, an analysis of the literature regarding all three causes of inter-identity conflict will be considered.

The legacy of colonial rule is a factor mentioned across much of the literature concerning identity and conflict in Africa today. Frans Wijsen suggests that “one must view religious dynamics in Africa against its wider background,” and this wider background has been significantly influenced by the history of colonialism in the context of Africa (32). While the impact of colonialism is a substantially complex and multifaceted issue, the existing literature concerning postcolonial interethnic and interreligious conflict in Africa largely focuses on two main consequences of colonial rule. One such consequence is the way in which the processes of colonialism have defined, created, and solidified ethnicities, religious groups, and other social classifications, and in doing so have created a basis of differentiation which has ultimately led to conflict. In the words of Colin Leys: “Modern tribalism is a creation of colonialism. It has little or nothing to do with pre-capitalist relations between tribes,” which suggests that the processes of colonialism actually created new identities that came to have meaning for a particular population (Ranger 120).

The second major consequence of colonialism is the variation in educational levels, and consequently socioeconomic levels, within postcolonial states. These inequalities are commonly and substantially attributed to the extensive missionary projects that functioned under the colonial regime. Missionary work often involved an education component, as missionaries found this to be “the most promising instrument of evangelization” (O’Brien 201). This in turn provided particular social groups as well as the resulting Christian convert group with an edge up in terms of education, making them better candidates for jobs and consequently advancing their
socioeconomic position. Ultimately, their higher educational attainment led Christians to constitute the national political elite in states that had a heavy missionary influence during colonialism. Often, Muslims were left behind in terms of education as missionary projects backed by the colonial regime and uneven economic development created a very real distinction between different identities.

After taking power from colonial governments, it was necessary for newly formed independent states to navigate and manage this new terrain of previously disparate populations organized into a single nation-state. Depending on the particular approach and policies undertaken by the state in the process of nation building, identity-based rivalries could be exacerbated, diminished, or replaced. The success or failure of a particular government’s attempts at nation building can be evaluated according to the level of integration achieved (i.e. creation of a unifying ‘national’ identity that is capable of overcoming potentially discordant divisions along sub-identities) (Mazrui 104). This insistence on the unity of these new nation states was especially important considering the diversity in many postcolonial states, a result of the arbitrarily drawn colonial boundaries and other colonial processes (Yakobson 363). State policies such as skewed power relations and benefit allocation can stem from, agitate and/or create conflicts between different identities, and this paper will examine how state policies particularly affected inter-identity relations in Tanzania (Gat 4-5). In specific reference to religion, Gellner adds that religion “can appear as the alternative to nationalism, or, on the contrary, as that which over-excites nationalism and makes it intolerable (and intolerant)” (xi). Religion’s impact within a new nation state has much to do with processes of nation building and policy decisions.

Finally, this paper will consider the impacts of external forces and pressures on inter-identity relations, which are processes that are somewhat out of the control of the national government and may in fact act in opposition to state efforts of unification and integration. In particular, processes of globalization such as the improvement of communication technology can bring populations into contact with new, potentially dangerous ideas, and populations can begin to feel threatened by encroaching ‘Westernization,’ leading to conflict (Wijsen 33). An observed result of globalization is the formation of links between multireligious developing states and Muslim-majority states, allowing for Islamic revivalism and the provision of resources to otherwise poor Muslims to enable them to defend their identity, which can lead to conflict with non-Muslim groups (Turner 15). Additionally, globalization can unevenly benefit certain groups, heightening preexisting socioeconomic inequalities and providing grounds for conflict (Samuelson 128). While globalization is largely referred to as affecting interreligious relations more directly than interethnic relations, it is still an important theme across the literature and may be helpful in evaluating how religious conflict and mobilization can
evolve in contrast to rather than as a part of ethnic conflict and mobilization. By examining how these three factors relate to the case of post-independence Tanzania, a conclusion can hopefully be reached in terms of a) how all of these processes have specifically affected ethnic and religious relations in Tanzania and b) how interethnic and interreligious conflicts can generally be differentiated from one another.

II. TANZANIA: BACKGROUND

Tanganyika’s path to independence was distinctively peaceful and united. In 1954, seven years prior to official independence, the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) was founded on the bases of African nationalism and racial equality (Young 247). In 1959, the British colonial administration abandoned its historical position of multiracialism and set the path for a peaceful governmental transition with universal suffrage (Young 248). These two factors – peaceful transition and unifying rhetoric - were significant in the creation of an atmosphere of inclusive nationalism on the eve of independence in 1961.

Despite an overriding nationalistic feeling at the time of independence, Tanganyika’s population was anything but homogeneous. As with most of the African continent, the conception of a state and its corresponding arbitrary borders were colonial imports (Young 90). Resident populations within colonial jurisdictions very rarely possessed a preexisting sense of a common identity or of a common destiny, both of which are commonly noted as essential to the formation of a nation (An’Na-im 15). In the case of Tanganyika, as with many other states in Africa, this solidarity developed as populations strove towards a common goal: independence. Once independence was achieved, a number of factors would determine whether this overriding sense of national identity would remain or if divisions would emerge.

One such factor is the degree of ethnic fragmentation that existed within Tanganyika, a result of the arbitrary borders drawn during the colonial era. At the time of independence, Tanganyika consisted of approximately 120 distinct ethnic groups. The largest of these groups, the Sukuma, made up only 13% of the population (Berg-Schlosser and Siegler 73). For this reason, “no single group [was] large enough or powerful enough to aspire to political dominance” (Court and Kinyanjui 11). It is a common claim that the high diversity of small, self-contained ethnic groups within Tanganyika was the reason for the country’s relative success at integrating and developing a meaningful national identity (Young 222). However, it is important to remember that “ethnicity is not enduring and unchanging; it’s shaped and given form,” and thus the potential for the development of problematic ethnic divisions still existed, regardless of high ethnic fragmentation (Wright 260). Decisions made by the state under the first President Julius Nyerere during the process of nation building were hugely important to the simultaneous
rejection of ethnic identities and promotion of a unifying national identity.

Religious divisions were much more distinct and polarized than ethnic divisions. At independence, 20-25% of the population of Tanganyika was Christian and 20-25% of the population was Muslim. Based on these proportions, Christians were overrepresented in government and Muslims were underrepresented (Ludwig 53). The pervasiveness of mission education during colonialism had left the Muslims in a comparatively disadvantaged position, adding a socioeconomic element to the ideological divide.

Frances Stewart elucidates two factors that determine whether mobilization will form along ethnic or religious lines in a particular context: socioeconomic inequalities/political favoritism, and the relative size of groups (14). Ethnic groups were relatively small in size, and all insufficiently large to dominate by sheer numbers. The fragmented nature of ethnic groups contrasts sharply with the almost equally large sizes of the two major religious groups in Tanzania. Referring back to Stewart’s second factor, it is clear that the relative size of religious groups when compared to ethnic groups made religion a more divisive force than ethnicity as Tanzania grew as a nation. Adding to this, the socioeconomic inequality existed largely between Christians and Muslims as opposed to between different ethnic groups, which Stewart’s first factor then helps to predict the split along religious lines rather than ethnic lines in Tanzania.

In particular, several factors contributed to how ethnic and religious divisions did or did not form following independence. The factors that are to be discussed in this paper include nation-building efforts under Nyerere (e.g. language and education policy), administrative and party structuring, and later, globalization. The controversial and economically disastrous Ujamaa villagization campaign, in which millions of Tanzanians were forcibly relocated to planned villages, will not be discussed in detail as its effects on identity are unclear. However, it is important to note that the process severely handicapped Tanzania’s productivity and may have contributed to further economic divides between different groups in Tanzania. Additionally, the union between Tanganyika and Zanzibar (together, Tanzania) in 1964 has been a hugely important factor because of Zanzibar’s majority Muslim population and its lack of real integration into the country (Shivji 96).

**Colonial Legacy**

The legacy left behind in Africa by colonialism consists of countless devastations, inequalities, and identity fabrications. Despite its peaceful transition to independence, Tanganyika is not an exception. Resulting from both high colonial exposure and a favorable ecological setting, the Chagga of the Mt. Kilimanjaro region were “the most conspicuously successful [ethnic] group” in Tanganyika (Young 235). However, the Chagga were not in direct competition with other groups, did not play a particularly active role in the independence movement, and made up only 3% of the population (Young
After independence, less privileged groups were unaware of their relative deprivation, partially as a result of TANU’s emphasis on pan-African deprivation as opposed to ethnic deprivation (Young 237).

Due to these realities, the colonial legacy wore distinctly religious, not ethnic, garb. The colonial administration provided post-elementary education to a small, elite group of Africans to the extent of the British administration’s needs for the purpose of managing the colonial state (Chande 176). As the education of the majority of Africans was not a priority of the British administration, the vast majority of the population was left to seek education elsewhere. In many cases, the best option for this ‘elsewhere’ was in the expansive system of mission schools across the country. Not surprisingly, “the proportion of total student enrollment in missionary schools far exceeded that in government ones” (Chande 178). The colonial government acknowledged the important societal position of these mission schools by providing financial support and curricular guidance (Chande 182). These schools were state supported and extensive, resulting in Christian hegemony of educational attainment. For Muslims, these schools were unacceptable because the central focus of mission schools was literacy for Bible reading. Thus, as argued above, under colonialism “Muslims were being outpaced by Catholics and Protestants [in the race for education] (Chande 183).

Education levels have a direct and substantial impact on socioeconomic status and in this way can contribute to identity-based rivalries if inequalities exist. Ethnic conflict is commonly explained to occur or be exacerbated due to the overlapping of social classes with ethnic group boundaries and the resulting unbalanced competition for resources (Horowitz 101-2). Due to the fact that Christian mission education was the architect of unequal educational attainment in Tanganyika, this statement can be altered slightly to refer to the headstart of particular religious groups—namely, Christians. After independence, even Nyerere acknowledged the persisting inequalities that the colonial legacy had nurtured between Christians and Muslims:

It so happened the Tanzanians who had the opportunity for higher education under the colonists were mostly Wahaya, Wachagga, and Wanyakyusa. And because most of the education was provided by Missionaries, most of these people are also Christians. That was our inheritance. These conditions will change, but they have not changed yet. And for these reasons, when we get rid of the Europeans who were doing responsible jobs, and give these jobs to Tanzanians, the people who get them come mostly from one or the other of these three tribes (Chande 194).

While this statement ostensibly refers to ethnic imbalance within the government, for the reasons mentioned above the important division alluded to in this statement is the Christian-Muslim one. These ethnic groups indi-
vidually disproportionately benefited under colonialism, but what they had in common was their Christian religion and education. Thus, larger and more substantial inequalities came to be perceived in terms of religion, and not ethnicity.

III. NYERERE’S TANZANIA: STRIVING FOR EQUALITY AND A NATIONAL IDENTITY

As the leader of TANU and Prime Minister during the independence movement, Nyerere had widespread support and was elected President of the independent nation in 1962 (Berg-Schlosser and Siegler 68). A pivotal policy shift occurred in 1967 with the introduction of the Arusha Declaration. The Arusha Declaration “outlined a new development orientation with a socialist program that had been largely influenced by Nyerere,” and had as its central tenets self-reliance and socialism (Berg-Schlosser and Siegler 69). Under this new manner of governance,

Economic growth for its own sake – which Nyerere regarded as the mindless pursuit of money, resulting in ‘the exploitation of man by man’ – would be subordinated to the quest for a more equitable and socially just society. Such a society would be achieved through the combination of a benevolent state, which would take over and run ‘the commanding heights’ of Tanzania’s economy, and self-reliance (i.e., sacrifice) on the part of the Tanzanian people. State and society would in turn be led by a benevolent party, TANU, which would be the guardian of socialist values and the supreme institution in the land (Barkan, “Comparing Politics” 15).

Nyerere’s public emphasis on equality and social justice was not just rhetoric – the clear prioritization of these qualities is evident in the state decisions made under his rule. These decisions include buttressing the use of Swahili in administration and education, attempts at equalizing educational distribution and attainment, and the political restructuring of the government and TANU. All of these factors in turn impacted ethnic and religious identities within the nation.

SWAHILI AS NATIONAL LANGUAGE

Language is an extremely decisive factor in the perpetuation of a colonial legacy. As a result of the educational structure under colonialism, only a small elite group entered independence with a functional knowledge of the colonial language of administration. For freshly independent nations that continued to utilize the language of their previous rulers, only the privileged groups under colonialism had access to many employment and educational opportunities (Simpson 3). Tanzania prevented this element of colonial legacy from taking hold through the conscientious and deep promulgation of the Swahili language throughout the country. For an indicator of Tanzania’s success at promoting Swahili as the national language, in 1942 only 52% of
the population spoke the language but by the 1970s approximately 90% knew Swahili (Young 223).

As a consequence of the government’s efforts to promote Swahili as a national and official language, Swahili “is generally regarded as having had very positive effects on nation-building in the post-independence era, and was extremely important for the creation of a sense of allegiance and belonging to a single, new Tanzanian nation” (Simpson 19). Swahili came to be used comprehensively throughout the nation – for education, government administration, and inter-ethnic communication (Simpson 10). The spread of Swahili and its use in all administrative matters lent a degree of transparency and accessibility to the government, contributing to a sense of equality within a national whole.

Swahili is not aligned with any particular ethnic group and the fact that it became the medium of communication for the vast majority of the Tanzanian population helped to downplay ethnic differences (Miguel 335). Young notes that language “has been a crucial agency of integration,” and as an integration agent, Swahili played a major role in ensuring that any sense of ethnic belonging was subordinated by the larger sense of national belonging in Tanzania (263). The use of Swahili by almost the entire population has been extremely significant in preventing the dominance of one advantaged ethnic group and has facilitated discourse as a single national entity.

**EDUCATION**

According to David Court, there are two ways in which education was utilized during nation building in Tanzania. The first is through educational provision, in which social inequalities were to be reduced “by broadening the base of educational provision and removing ascriptive barriers to access” (Court 216). The other use the state found for education was by increasing “the political and socialist content of what is taught as a way of developing common basic attributes of Tanzanian citizenship among students” (Court 216).

In regards to educational provision, primary school fees were abolished and “relatively more resources [were] directed toward meeting basic needs, and less [...] to producing a small, highly educated class” (Court 216). Nyerere sought for the entire population to have at least the same amount of minimum education, hence his central focus on strengthening primary education rather than on higher levels of education. Presumably based on the knowledge that “schools in most societies are the main channel of social mobility but in Africa they are the almost exclusive means of access to wage paying occupations and elite roles,” Nyerere needed to ensure that particular groups or regions were not being left behind because of a lack of basic education if his vision of an egalitarian, socialist nation was to become reality (Court and Kinyanjui 8).

While the main focus was on primary education expansion, Tanzania also
employed a system of equalization policy for secondary education. Before this policy was put in place, groups historically privileged under colonialism such as the Chagga and the Haya (who were also, coincidentally, Christians) were able to send disproportionate numbers of students to state secondary schools (Horowitz 661). With the equalization policy, “secondary-school places are allocated to each region on the basis of its proportionate share of total number of primary-school leavers eligible to attend secondary school” (Horowitz 661). Additionally, test score cutoffs were made higher for the historically privileged groups so as to curtail their domination of secondary education institutions.

Once ensuring equitable distribution and access to schools as much as possible, the other task was to develop a curriculum that could aid nation building within these schools. Some of the ways in which this was done include stressing common Tanzanian history, culture, and values (“inculcating students with a strong sense of national and Pan-African identity”); testing political education on national exams; and requiring all teachers “to serve on the paramilitary national service organization, which indoctrinated them in the ideals of the regime” (Miguel 335-6).

To attest to the relative success of this national inculcation, Edward Miguel compared villages identical in essentially everything other than their respective locations in Tanzania and Kenya. Ultimately, he found that Kenyans had an attitude of ‘us versus them’ and placed their primary allegiance in ethnic identity (Miguel 359-60). The perspective of the Tanzanian community, on the other hand, was that of ‘We are all Tanzanians’ and their primary identification was overwhelmingly as Tanzanian, not as a particular ethnicity (Miguel 359-60). These various educational advancements towards equality and a common national identity were momentous in ensuring that national identity preceded ethnic identity. Mobilization along ethnic lines consequently became extremely unlikely.

**Political Parties and Political Structure**

Based on his firm belief in egalitarianism, Nyerere ensured that access to unequal power or influence within the political system was just as unattainable as it was meant to be within the educational system. Soon after independence, Tanzania became a one-party state, solidifying TANU’s supremacy and preventing any other groups (e.g. ethnic organizations) from posing competition (Berg-Schlosser and Siegl 94). Ethnic associations were banned shortly after; this prevented these groups from developing into ethnically-backed political entities (Barkan, “Comparing Politics” 20). While a one-party system generally leads to problems with public accountability, Tanzania avoided this issue to a certain extent through a formula of having a one-party system while still holding competitive elections (Horowitz 433). Essentially, “legitimacy-building participation [was] made possible but so structured as not to mobilize cultural pluralism” within Tanzania’s politi-
Importantly, there were many restrictions placed on power potential. While five-year election terms remained, candidates were screened by TANU, a strict leadership code was enforced for MPs and all other governmental figures, and 40-50% of seats were appointed by the President or given to a particular office (Berg-Schlosser and Siegler 84). The leadership code prevented government leaders and other civil servants from owning stock in corporations, obtaining rental income, or receiving any additional salaries (Barkan, Beyond Capitalism 8). Representative institutions including the state apparatus, Executive, civil service, National Assembly, and the judiciary were largely subordinated to TANU (Barkan, “Comparing Politics” 5). This subordination left the representative institutions with very little power or influence, rendering “direct control by the mass of participants…not possible,” while the population still felt capable of participating in politics (Barkan, Beyond Capitalism 29).

All of these factors stifled the possibility of the development of a patronage system or for any particular group to become entrenched politically and influence decisions. TANU was “an extensive, disciplined, and ideologically committed political party from the apex of the political system down to the grass root,” and its position as the center of governance allowed TANU to “mobilize the country’s population to achieve socialist development and [increase] their participation in the governance of their society” (Barkan, Beyond Capitalism 10). Insomuch as “the contours of the party system in an ethnically divided society have a profound effect on the ethnic outcomes of party politics,” the contours of TANU seem to have fully excluded ethnic influence (Horowitz 293). On top of all of this, Nyerere’s example of a modest lifestyle, self-limiting power, and outspoken detestation of inequality further legitimized everything that had been put in place to prevent the political system from being taken advantage of (Miguel 337).

**Religion and State**

These various initiatives undertaken by the Tanzanian government during the formation of the nation were hugely important in preventing any particular ethnic group from dominating the state. But what of religious groups? In theory, Nyerere and his government were just as adamant about equality among religious groups and the prevention of a particular religious group from becoming too powerful. Nyerere was well aware of the importance of the separation of church and state (in terms of both Christianity and Islam) in a multi-religious Tanzania and TANU made sure to stress the secular principles of ujamaa socialism (Ludwig 106).

When the state took control of all primary schools, Nyerere emphasized that these schools – many of which were previously Christian or Islam run – should be generally secular in nature for the good of the nation (Ludwig 55). In 1961, it was made illegal for public schools to reject any pupil based
on faith (Ludwig 87). State addresses, the national anthem, and the opening prayer of parliament sessions used religious terminology, but in a conscientiously ambiguous manner so as not to directly align with one religion or another (Ludwig 56-9). For example, the national anthem begins: “God bless Africa / Bless its leaders / Wisdom, Unity and Peace / Should be what protects / Africa and its people,” showing a clear attention to religion in general but not employing exclusively Christian or Muslim terms (Ludwig 56). Both missionaries and Islamic leaders who were viewed as a threat to national stability were deported or detained on several occasions (Ludwig 63; Chande 192). Additionally, the pivotal Arusha Declaration contained no reference to the role of the church in the nation (Ludwig 94). All of these efforts substantiate the Nyerere government’s attempts to handle both Christianity and Islam in an equal manner.

However, unlike with ethnicity, religion in general openly remained an important part of the state and of the process of nation building. As evidenced by the religious tinge of the national addresses, prayers, and anthem, “religion was clearly expected to give legitimacy to the new order” (Ludwig 59). Despite his calls for separation of religious institutions and the state, “the Tanzanian President also realized that he needed the support of the churches to carry out his programme” (Ludwig 106). The church and its related organizations took on a substantial burden of the financial share in improving the educational and health sectors during the process of nation building because the state lacked the means and resources to meet its own standards (Ludwig 90). Overall, there was much cooperation between churches and the state, with representatives of different churches often addressing their concerns directly to Nyerere, who was a practicing Catholic (Ludwig 64).

Because the subject of Islam was “a highly controversial and emotional one in Tanzania, [Nyerere] often left the execution of the political decision reached by his government [in terms of Islam] to highly placed Muslim members of his government,” such as Prime Minister Rashidi Kawawa (Chande 147). The All-Muslim National Union of Tanganyika (AMNUT), which had been formed in 1957 in opposition to TANU and strongly advocated for equal opportunities for Muslims and the curtailing of Christian influence, was banned and disappeared when Tanzania became a one-party state (Ludwig 54). The public Muslim voice persisted in the form of the East African Muslim Welfare Society (EAMWS), which was not a political party and was thus not banned at that time. The stated aim of this organization was to reverse the educational backwardness of African Muslims (Chande 134). With the Arusha Declaration, a divide developed within EAMWS between Asian Muslims (mostly businessmen with capitalist interests) and the rest of the organization. This eventually led to the state-orchestrated dissolution of EAMWS and the creation of the state sympathizing Baraza Kuu la WaIslamu wa Tanzania (BAKWATA). Chande comments on the questionable motive
of this dissolution:

The EAMWS had been Pan-Islamic and non-sectarian, with its activities being felt all over East Africa. For this reason it was capable of unifying Muslims, especially coastal elements, into a bloc that could pose as a threat to TANU. It is, therefore, not unreasonable to suggest, as David Westerlund does, that ‘an originally minor split was used by TANU and the government to engineer great changes in order to bring all Muslims under firm control in the new organization’ (139).

BAKWATA was very pro-government and many believed that it was essentially just a branch of TANU (Chande 139). Due to the limitations placed on it by the state as well as ineffective leadership, Chande concludes: “what the council has accomplished so far stands out as a poor contrast to what Christian organizations have achieved” (Chande 158).

In sum, the state took definitive measures to secularize governance but continued to work directly with, and acknowledge, both Christian and Muslim organizations. Christian contribution to the development of the state was arguably more substantial owing to the considerably greater financial resources that they were able to commit to nation building. As few Muslims had the opportunity to receive higher education, the first national government after independence was made up of eleven Christian Ministers and only four Muslim Ministers despite the two groups constituting essentially equal proportions of the population (Ludwig 40). Nyerere acknowledged this imbalance and warned “that this difference could have an explosive effect on the young Republic, pointing out that some people were already attempting to use this fact to further their own political ambitions” (Ludwig 55). Due to the preexisting imbalance between Christians and Muslims and the continued importance and influence of religion vis-à-vis the state, the Tanzanian state was far less successful at subduing religious identity in favor of national identity.

**ZANZIBAR**

It is crucial to include the union of Tanganyika and Zanzibar under Nyerere in the discussion of identity, ethnicity, and religion in Tanzania. On April 26, 1964, mere months after Zanzibar had gained its independence, the union began. Doubts concerning the motives and logic behind the union are frequently voiced, because “the process of the formation of the Union was fraught with legal manipulation and political expediency” (Shivji 99). The Revolutionary Council of Zanzibar as a whole did not approve of the union, and it was legally drafted almost entirely by legal officers of Tanganyika, in Tanganyika (Shivji 93). The union was at first designated to be for an interim one-year period while Zanzibar regained its stability after a tumultuous independence movement. However, this interim period was extended for thirteen years before a permanent constitutional framework was ratified by Tanzania.
The piecemeal materialization of the union attests to the fact that the union did not begin as a representation of solidarity between the two countries but rather as a hasty, makeshift decision made largely by a few members of government in the name of ‘Pan-Africanism’.

Perhaps for this reason, “neither partner has ever been entirely comfortable with the union” and “leaders on both sides have believed that they have given more than they have received” (Barken 9). This dissatisfaction is exacerbated by the religious divide between Zanzibar and the mainland. At the time of the union, 300,000 Zanzibarits, 98% of whom were Muslim, were joined with 10 million mainlanders, including among them a larger and more advantaged Christian population (Shivji 76; Turner 7). Because of the stark divide between the mainland and Zanzibar in terms of religion, modern day religious conflicts in Tanzania are easily framed in terms of Christian Tanzania and Muslim Zanzibar, although much of the Tanzanian coast is populated by Muslims as well. One example of this is the friction caused by Zanzibar’s independent application and acceptance into the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). For reasons political (i.e. feelings that the union had been breached) as well as religious, there was significant public backlash regarding the decision and Zanzibar was ultimately forced to withdraw its membership (Shivji 232).

Adding to this discomfort is the fact that the intensive national integration efforts of Nyerere were not a part of Zanzibar’s history. Zanzibar had a different colonial history, a different independence movement, and continued to operate with separate political parties and government representation (Barkan, “Comparing Politics” 9). Additionally, Zanzibar and Tanganyika are not geographically contiguous, a factor that Gat notes “is likely to result in separation of ethnonational identities” (Gat 25). Zanzibar’s lack of true integration into the Tanzanian identity, and thus the development of differing national identities, and the dominant Muslim majority have consequently been grounds for secessionist movements and it is clear that the issue of divergent identities is an important and serious one with regards to the Tanganyika-Zanzibar union (Berg-Schlosser and Siegler 85).

IV. EXTERNAL INFLUENCES AND RELIGIOUS REVIVALISM

With religious identities and differences continuing to play significant roles throughout Nyerere’s term, it is no surprise that religion was a strong enough social force in Tanzanian society to be influenced by external factors. Muslims continued to perceive themselves as relatively disadvantaged, but this inequality was not solely a matter of perception. To highlight continued Muslim disadvantage, in 2004, 80% of Dar es Salaam’s population was Muslim and yet only 20% of secondary school students in the city were Muslim (Loimeier 148). Similarly, the number of Muslims has grown substantially throughout the 20th century, but there has been no noticeable increase in the number of Muslims with positions in politics, education, or economics.
Additionally contributing to continued Muslim inequality in terms of education - and thus socioeconomics - is the period of economic liberalization which was begun at the behest of the IMF and World Bank in 1985 which, in Loimeier’s opinion, “seems to favor Christians who are disproportionately better educated and trained” (143). Thus, the vicious cycle in terms of education continues.

At the same time, external influences have contributed to a spread in Islamic ideology and the provision of resources to Muslims within Tanzania. This is especially notable in Zanzibar, where two of the three universities are funded by Saudi Arabian and Kuwaiti individuals and include compulsory courses in Islamic economics and law as part of their curriculum (Turner 15). There has also been an increase in the practice of providing scholarships for students to study in other Islamic countries abroad, funded by the same patrons behind the funding of mosques, madrasas, health clinics, and educational institutions (Turner 8). These students then return to Zanzibar or the mainland with ideas about Islam derived from these foreign countries. Processes of globalization have also made global Islamic TV channels, Internet sites, literature, CDs, and DVDs easily available to the population, contributing to religious revivalism.

Muslim attempts to gain footing within the state have sometimes resulted in conflict with Christians – as when Christians framed the first Muslim minister of education’s demand for preferential selection of Muslims for secondary school education as a push for ‘jihad’ (Loimeier 147). Christians have also seen an increase in public preaching, especially through the spread of the Pentecostal Church, which puts the two religions in even stronger competition within the country (Loimeier 145).

In essence, Muslim-Christian relations continue to be a critical – and contentious – factor in Tanzanian society, with several contributions in this respect from processes of globalization. These contemporary factors have become especially potent in Zanzibar in recent years, where there have been multiple attacks on churches and priests, fueled by Muslim feelings of relative disadvantage as well as growing resentment with the union.

**CONCLUSION**

In this overview of Tanzania under Nyerere and beyond, it is evident that ethnic identity and relations became irrelevant to state and societal matters while religious identity and relations remain heavily influential and a significant part of Tanzanian society. Partially because visible inequalities arose and were perpetuated along religious lines and not ethnic lines, religious identity has remained as a potential instigator of conflict and continues to play a very substantial role in national politics.

Returning to the initial question posed in Part I (How have these processes affected ethnic and religious relations in Tanzania?), it is apparent that religious identity has been solidified in a way that ethnic identity has not in
From this examination of Tanzania, it is clear that the colonial legacy and processes of globalization can and do impact different types of ethnic and religious identities in a number of ways. It is also discernible that the state’s role is an important one in preventing and correcting particular ethnic or religious dominance within a country, especially during the process of post-independence nation building. Tanzania’s success at doing so in terms of ethnicity is fairly obvious but is much less clear in terms of religion, despite legitimate attempts by Nyerere to separate church and state and assist the Muslim population. All of these factors are important, but no single factor is identifiable as the main impetus for strained Christian-Muslim relations within Tanzania.

As for the latter part of the original inquiry, namely how interethnic and interreligious conflicts can be differentiated from one another in general, there are a few possible explanations that can be derived from the history of Tanzania. First is the idea that identity will be solidified along the lines where obvious inequalities exist. In the case of Tanzania, this line rested between the substantially sized Muslims and Christians and not between the small, widely dispersed ethnic groups. A second theory is that religion and ethnic identities are inherently different in nature. According to this theory, Nyerere was successful in ridding the state of ethnic influence but failed at doing the same for religious influence not because of the power and size of religious groups but instead because of the nature of religious identity in itself. While a national identity can replace and in a way become an ethnic identity, national loyalty cannot necessarily replace religious loyalty. National loyalty can coincide with religious loyalty and identity, but because Christians and Muslims naturally possess a “larger, transcendent loyalty” to their individual deities, these will always be in competition if the state is at odds with the religion (Sanneh 151). This transcendent loyalty is arguably not as large of a factor in ethnic identity and thus it is easier for national identity to supplant or subdue ethnic identities. A third and final explanation is that extensive constraint or lack of one form of identity provides room for another to become an increasingly important and potent marker of identification. In other words: relative size of the groups matter. Regardless of the precise reason for differentiation, the case of Tanzania provides substantial evidence that religious identity is not simply a subset of ethnic identity and religious relations are not necessarily synonymous with ethnic relations as much of the literature might suggest.
NOTES
1. This statement excludes the consideration of Zanzibar as the discussion of whether Zanzibar’s conflict with mainland Tanzania is ethnic or religious in nature is beyond the scope of this paper. The brief discussion of Zanzibar in this paper serves solely as an overview of the issue, but it should be noted that the mainland Tanzania-Zanzibar relationship is very complex and beyond the impacts of colonialism, state policy, and globalization discussed in this paper.

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A GENDERED NATION:
Anti-Colonial Indian Nationalism and Non-Normative Sexualities
Julie Fader

The twentieth century marks an important shift in Indian consciousness. Incipient Indian nationalism was twofold— it was both an adaptation to modern Western materialism, as well as a revivification and reconstruction of India’s ancient ideas and ideals. The somatic nature of this anti-colonial nationalist discourse resulted in new conceptualizations of the body, gender, and sexuality. As such, the postcolonial state is marked by a highly gendered and dichotomized process of innovation and restoration, a process that clearly demarcates normative spaces for both men and women. Emerging out of anti-colonial sentiment, this form of nationalism had a particular agenda that systematically excluded certain members of society, among which are devadāsīs, hījras, and Śākta-Tantra practitioners. These three case studies are widely conceptualized as the antithesis of the new nationalist ideal, and though they were never part of mainstream Hinduism’s normative framework, the nationalist agenda further marginalized these groups by presenting them as far too divergent from the revitalized nation-state’s new image. The following work will explore what this new nationalist agenda consisted of, namely the emergence of masculine Hinduism, the adoption of often conflictual roles for women, the rise of the Hindutva movement, along with how these nationalisms corresponded to a number of Brahminical idealized forms of behaviour. Finally, the peripheralization of figures such as devadāsīs, hījras, and Śākta-Tantra practitioners will be shown to be emblematic of the exclusivist nature of the postcolonial nation-state.

BRITISH GENDER CONSTRUCTIONS IN COLONIAL INDIA

Incipient Indian nationalism was distinctly anti-colonial in nature, and was largely a response to the attacks made on ‘Hindu’ civilization by colonial administrators and missionaries. By positing themselves as physically and morally superior to Indian men, British administrators were seen as directly attacking Indian masculinity (Banerjee 22). Ranging from the missionary to the soldier, participants of the British colonizing project were thought to encompass various constructs of manliness, all of which “embodied traits of hegemonic masculinity, strength, self-reliance, independence, and confidence as India was controlled, categorized, and conquered” (Banerjee 22). It has been argued that the formulation of this marked divide between the so-called manly ruler and the effeminate subject was a strategy to destabilize
the deeply entrenched Indian patriarchy in order to create a more subordinate nation which was easier to control and reconstruct along British terms. However, this process had the opposite effect and resulted in a reification of indigenous patriarchy. Since Indian men felt the need to reassert their masculinity, physicality and sexuality were brought to the forefront of this emergent nationalism, creating dichotomized roles for both men and women. Such British constructions of masculinity stemmed from local discourses on physicality and ideas of manliness. The notions of Christian manliness that emerged in the mid-nineteenth century leant themselves to the development of this conceptualization, employing attributes such as “self-control, discipline, confidence, martial prowess, military heroism, and rationality— expressed in the typology of hegemonic masculinity” (Banerjee 23). These ideas were projected in the colonizer’s imagination onto the Indian man, who was allegedly lacking these essential traits and thus appeared inherently physically and mentally weak. This effeminacy was amply proven and exemplified in the eyes of the British because of India’s conquered status. It was in this context that reconstructions of the Indian male started emerging, resulting in indigenous conceptualizations of manliness that stood in stark contrast to existing British understandings.

Attacks on Indian male identity and conversations regarding women and sexuality were occurring simultaneously. In the nineteenth century, women and issues related to sexuality were being discussed largely in a symptomatic sense, as signs of India’s social and moral lack (Soneji, Unfinished Gestures 19). The trope of the Indian woman as victim was ubiquitous in colonial India, and women were the object of both the fascination and sympathy of the British male gaze. With the emergence of anti-colonial nationalism, the Indian female figure came to occupy her own distinct position within the movement, a position that was both complicated and conflictual.

**THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN THE NATIONALIST AGENDA**

If men were to occupy the outer spaces in society, women were to occupy its inner spheres. This meant that women were responsible for the maintenance of the domestic realm and the upkeep of the traditional and spiritual domains of Indian society. In this nationalist context, “the idea that women even more than men were the guardians of tradition, particularly against a foreign enemy, was used to reinforce the most regressive aspects of tradition” (Katrak 398, italics in the original). The domestic paradigm was considered intrinsic to women’s identity and the basis for the imagining of the nation itself (Derné 244). Women were considered to be the bridge between the home and the nation, and the proper maintenance of the microcosm, the home, was analogous to the proper maintenance of the macrocosm, Indian society as a whole.

As the leading figure of the Indian nationalist movement, Gandhi had considerable influence on the construction of the position women were to
occupy in the new nation-state. However, the Gandhian notion of Indian womanhood was rather conflictual in nature, since Gandhi never challenged the patriarchal family structure within which Indian women were embedded and wherein they were confined to a subordinate position. In fact, Gandhi encouraged the control and regulation of female sexuality (Katrak 396), which was the primary rhetoric through which women were oppressed. He did, however, allow for a certain amount of political mobilization on the part of women. Women could step out of the domestic realm in service of the nation, but once this service was complete, they were to return to their duties within the home (Kishwar 1699). In this sense, “although Gandhi’s movement did give women a chance to participate in the public sphere and to build solidarity, they did not organize to transform and challenge the root of their oppressions within traditional family structures” (Katrak 400).

In certain cases, the nationalist movement reinvigorated ancient idealized forms of behaviour for women, ideas which stood in stark contrast to the process of modernization Indian men were undergoing. This included the resurgence of notions of female sexuality expounded upon in Sanskrit texts such as the Manusmṛti, wherein the language of guarding or protecting women’s sexuality is ubiquitous (Doniger 19). After having described the inherently promiscuous nature of women, the text explains that “their very own nature is like this, as it was born at the creation by the Lord of Creatures, a man should make the utmost effort to guard them” (Manu 16). Thus, a woman’s place was within the confines of the home, where her sexuality could be controlled and regulated by the men in her family.

At the same time as Gandhian nationalism was in full swing, a right wing Hindu nationalist movement emerged that had a radically different perception of what the postcolonial state should consist of. The movement was crystallized with the creation of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which sought to bring back the principles and values of ‘Hinduness,’ thus coining the term Hindutva. Their focus was largely on physicality, militancy, asceticism, and sectarian membership. These components shaped the RSS’ ideal vision of independent India as a Hindu nation, in direct opposition to the secular democratic state Gandhi promoted (Basu 70). The RSS propelled a distinct representation of the ideal Hindu male, one who is “virile, physically strong, fearless, a celibate, and most of all, an ardent Hindu nationalist” (Bacchetta 148). However, the organization rarely mentioned women in their vision of the new Hindu nation, and when they did, it was in terms of the ideal mother who “should teach her sons Hindu culture, bring out their virile qualities, [and] spur them on to battle with the nation’s enemies” (Bacchetta 149). This lack of information regarding women resulted in the creation of a parallel organization, the Rashtra Sevika Samiti (hereafter the Samiti), an all-women’s organization founded by Lakshmi Bai Kelkar. The Samiti accepted most of the RSS’ fundamental principles, while creating
more space for women within the Hindu nationalist movement, primarily as protectors of Hinduism through its transmission (Basu 74). Women occupied a similarly conflictual role as in Gandhian nationalism, for they were viewed as the potential mothers of martyrs and ‘sons of the nation,’ but were also perceived as members of a growing militia of militant householders (Bacchetta 153). Essentially, women were encouraged to be politically active without forgetting that their primary role was that of a mother.

As previously discussed, the body and notions of masculinity have played a central role in these nationalist movements for Indian men. However, Steve Derné’s fieldwork in Banaras in 1987 and Dehra Dun’s in 1991 have unveiled another phenomenon. As Derné observes, “rather than focusing on invigorating their sense of themselves as men and as Hindus through self-control and body-building, they focused instead on enforcing the practices of Hinduism among their wives and daughters” (Derné 237). In an attempt to assert their own masculinity in the new modern nation-state, the men of India felt that it was the women’s duty to maintain traditional Hindu values, and thus assume subservient roles within the home. Nationalists were focused on the maintenance of these principles in Indian women, “even as Indian men who participated in the modern economy and modern politics embraced new dress and food habits and modified religious observances” (Derné 244).

Having intimately linked the proper maintenance of the home with the nationalist movement, the honour of the nation became largely dependent on what Peter van der Veer suggests is the “modesty and submissiveness of the female body” (qtd. in Derné 245). As such, nationalist movements tended to be progressive for men but regressive for women.

As mentioned earlier, these particular aspects of Indian nationalism can be traced back to Brahminic and Sanskritic notions of proper gender roles. These ancient ideals asserted that for women, the optimal occupation was that of the sumanīgalī, the auspicious, fertile, heterosexual wife. This is a title which “depends not on a woman’s own being as female, but on woman in relation to others, particularly husbands and children” (Reynolds 38). Indian nationalism only reinforced the importance of woman as sumanīgalī, since she now acted as the anchor that prevented her husband and children from losing touch with their Indian-ness. As the men of the family entered the modern world, the obedient wife was to remain in a static space and ensure that her family did not forget their past. The emphasis placed on female modesty and chastity in nationalist and postcolonial discourses is linked to the idea of the pativrta, a term extensively used in Dharmasastriic contexts and even more frequently mentioned in ancient Epic literature (Khanna, “Paradigms of Female Sexuality” 221). This term signifies sexual fidelity or chastity, an ideal women were expected to strive toward. The pativrta is often contrasted with her ‘other,’ namely the prostitute or courtesan, creating a problematic image of women that appears consistently in Brahminic texts
(Khanna, “Paradigms of Female Sexuality” 222). The prostitute or courtesan, it should be noted, is understood as any woman engaging in sexual activity outside of the conjugal context. Conforming to Gandhian notions of womanhood, this left women with two acceptable paths: either to get married or to abstain from sexual activity completely (Katrank 399).

**DEVADĀŚĪS**

A modern term coined by British administrators, the word devadāśī is in itself problematic and came to represent a wide range of distinct communities with diverse practices and histories. Here, the focus will be on the devadāśi-courtensans from the Tamilnadu and Telugu speaking regions of South India, who largely emerged as eroticized courtly dancers in the imperial city of Tanjavur in the Nāyaka period. Although devadāśīs mostly performed their dance in a private or courtly context, their performances in temples were largely exaggerated, providing them with the common misnomer ‘temple dancer.’ Devadāśīs reflected a deviant lifestyle for women, for they “enjoyed an unabridged right to hold and inherit property and therefore retained control of their wealth” (Tharu and Lalita 117). Since they possessed a certain amount of intellectual and economic freedom at a time when most women did not, they were perceived as somewhat socially ambiguous figures.

Women from the devadāśi communities underwent a ceremony known as poṭṭukkaṭṭutal, the tying of the poṭṭu emblem. Poṭṭukkaṭṭutal has been commonly misconstrued, as a literal marriage to the deity, especially by colonial administrators and Christian missionaries. However, as Davesh Soneji suggests, “instead of thinking about poṭṭukkaṭṭutal as a ceremony that carries the lofty religious resonances of ‘theogamy,’ it is more fruitful to think of the ritual as a way of marking a woman’s inscription into an alternative non-conjugal lifestyle” (Soneji, Unfinished Gestures 40). Devadāśīs were a part of institutionalized, systemic concubinage. They often had lifelong relationships with elite men, many of whom were married (Bor 15).

To the British gaze, devadāśīs were the quintessential example of heathenism within Hinduism and were thus imagined as the locus of immorality. As their performances became increasingly exoticized and sexualized in the colonial view, the idea of the ‘dancing girl’ came to represent a much larger concept, namely, the hideous idolatry which Hinduism was thought to uphold (Soneji, Unfinished Gestures 75) Due to an increased concern regarding venereal disease among British soldiers in India, colonialism ushered in a new surveillance of the body, and women in particular were the targets of such supervision. It is in this context that concerns around devadāśīs gained prominence. Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi, the first female medical student at Madras University as well as the first Indian female legislator before independence, was the major figure in the commencement of legal interventions in devadāśīs practice. She strongly felt that the ritual of poṭṭukkaṭṭutal was dan
gerous to women and needed to be criminalized. This movement to abolish this ceremony enjoyed the widespread support of nationalist reformers, and was crystallized in the “The Madras Devadasis (Prevention of Dedication) Act” which was passed in 1947 (Soneji, Bharatanatyam: A Reader xxi).

The disenfranchisement of devadāsīs occurred within the framework of emergent Indian nationalism and widespread Gandhian notions of womanhood. In order to participate in the nation and the public sphere, women had to prove or establish their sexual purity according to the standards of Gandhian morality. In this context, “through the interaction between colonialism and nationalism, the matrilineal, non-monogamous devadāsī figure became reconceived as a commercialized sex worker, a figure to be expunged from the imagined (and idealized) family of nationhood” (Whitehead 155). This highly gendered nationalism defined the role of women as maintainers of true Indian identity, as well as upholders of Indian spirituality by preserving, reviving, or reforming certain cultural practices, including dance. Thus, the disenfranchisement of devadāsīs and dance reform were happening simultaneously. A thinly cloaked appropriation of the devadāsīs dance, known as Bharatanāyam, emerged in the 20th century and came to be known as India’s classical and traditional dance (Gaston 277). The dance was taken out of its supposed inappropriate context in order to fit into the construction of India’s respectable past. It was consequently appropriated by the emerging Indian middle-class. Devadāsīs were disembodied from their art form and were expected to seamlessly integrate themselves into the new nation-state, as domesticated ex-devadāsīs, ideally through marriage. However, the stigma attached to their past made them undesirable as potential wives to most men. Their now extremely low social standing made this integration impossible, thus marginalizing them completely in postcolonial India.

ŚĀKTA-TANTRA PRACTITIONERS

Tantra is an interdisciplinary spiritual practice that manifests itself in diverse forms. All of these modes recognize the fundamental connection between the microcosm, the body, and the macrocosm, Ultimate Reality. Śākta-Tantra is the most prevalent form of tantric religion in India, and is centered on understanding Ultimate Reality as Devī or Śākti, the goddess (Khanna, “The Goddess-Women Equation” 110). This particular tradition has been a source of empowerment for some women, especially since it regards “all women, irrespective of their caste, creed, age, status, or personal accomplishment” as the incarnation of the goddess Śākti (Khanna, “The Goddess-Women Equation” 114). Contrary to Brahminic traditions, which emphasize the need to guard female sexuality, Śākta-Tantra provides a space for a woman’s body and senses to be celebrated (Khanna, “The Goddess-Women Equation” 117). However, it is problematic to think of this tradition as a form of radical counter-culture, for although it contains many markedly subversive elements, several patriarchal and misogynistic aspects remain.
Despite the potential for female guruship, for example, women are often considered mere tools for male spiritual advancement in Śākta-Tantra (Alexandre 46). It is thus difficult to interpret the tradition as ubiquitously and comprehensively empowering for women.

There are two types of tantric ritual practice, the most common of which is Samayācāra, or “regular praxis” (Brooks 417, note 17). These are clean-cut rituals oriented around orthodox Brahminical practices wherein normative elements replace potentially subversive ones by providing for them an allegorical interpretation. The second form of ritual practice is called Kaulācāra, or “praxis of the kula (family)” (Brooks 417, note 17). This practice is only available to upper-level initiates, and is by no means practiced by the entire community of tantric practitioners. This ritual practice often involves the use of transgressive substances or activities from a Brahminical standpoint, such as fish, meat, wine, parched grain, and sexual activity (Khanna, “The Goddess-Women Equation” 119). Kaulācāra is an important source for most misconceptions surrounding tantric practice. Commonly misunderstood and misrepresented, Śākta-Tantra is often viewed as a debased religion or as some form of black magic. This is largely due to the esoteric and obscure nature of tantric religions, causing them to be sexualized, ‘othered,’ and sometimes viewed as degenerate forms of religious thought and practice (Urban 271). Today, the sexual aspect of tantric religions is largely exaggerated, and this widespread misrepresentation is the chief contributing factor to the popularity of this spiritual discipline amongst lay people in India as well as abroad. During the British colonial rule, however, these traditions were viewed as antithetical to Western morality and Christian conceptions of religion (Urban 270). For the colonial administration, Śākta-Tantra practitioners, like the devadāsī communities, were perceived as embodying the hedonistic, immoral nature of Hinduism. Emerging Indian nationalists also greatly criticized tantric practitioners, based on their own misinterpretations of their practice, which only served to further marginalize members of these groups.

Hījraś

The study of hijraś is a complex endeavour, since viewing the hijra community as a single, pan-Indian, homogenous category does not take into consideration the distinct regional communities and histories that exist. Most hijraś are born as men and willingly undergo a castration ceremony that initiates them into the community (Nanda 382). A large part of hijra identity is the self-perception that they are “incomplete men in that they do not have the desires for women that other men do” (Nanda 380). As Serena Nanda explains, hijraś “attribute this lack of desire to a defective male sexual organ” (Nanda 380). Despite identifying as neither male nor female, hijraś usually present themselves in a feminine manner and prefer to be referred to using feminine pronouns. Hijraś have never occupied a stable position in society due to their non-normative sexual, societal, and religious practices. However,
the highly gendered nationalist agenda increased their already precarious position in society. The twofold nature of Indian nationalism and the vision of the postcolonial state left no room for ambiguous figures such as hijras. Members of the hijra community neither fit the model for the ideal Indian man, who is both modern and masculine, nor the ideal Indian woman, who maintains Hinduism’s normative traditions and religious practices. Identifying as neither male nor female, a hijra cannot be considered an ideal citizen of postcolonial India, particularly for adherents of the Hindutva movement, for whom the dichotomized roles for men and women are particularly strict.

Nevertheless, hijras had the potential to be incorporated into the new nation-state by emphasizing their association with the respected sannyasi, or ascetic practitioner (Reddy 94). They are traditionally envisioned as celibate individuals, which is how their association with ascetic communities can most easily be constructed. However, this idealized perception of the hijra as an abstinent figure clashes greatly with contemporary realities. Hijras were often invited to participate in “occasions when reproduction is manifest - at the birth of a child - or imminent - at marriages” (Nanda 386), and were thought to have the power to bless or curse on such occasions. Traditional occupations for hijras, namely their ritual roles are in far less demand, presumably due to the effects of modernization and Western rationality in the postcolonial state. Aware of the need to adapt to the contemporary situation, hijras have done so “through the exploitation of some new economic opportunities, such as establishing territories of shops from whose proprietors they ask for alms, and the expansion of some historical occupations, such as prostitution” (Nanda 415). There is an important stigma that surrounds the figure of the hijra, and regular employers rarely choose to hire them, prompting some hijras to claim that it is in fact society that turns them into prostitutes (Bombay Eunuch). There existed such few job opportunities for hijras that many of them were forced to engage in prostitution, further bolstering society’s negative perception of the community. This left little room for members of the hijra community to actively participate in the emerging perception of Indian nationhood.

**Conclusion**

The anti-colonial nationalist project in India had a particular agenda, part of which sought to create a new conceptualization of Indian nationhood. British conceptions of masculinity played a significant role in the perception of the body and the reformulation of distinct gender roles. Women’s sexuality and bodies were increasingly scrutinized and came to represent the morality of the nation as a whole. Whereas men were to delve into the world of modernity and materiality, women were to remain in the domestic sphere, where they could adhere to traditional socio-religious practices. This vision of the postcolonial Indian nation-state hinged on the strict distribution of specific roles to both men and women. In this context, deviations from clas-
sical Hinduism’s normative framework were strongly condemned by nationalists, resulting in the further marginalization of groups such as devadāsīs, hijras and Śākta-Tantra practitioners. These cases are emblematic of India’s gendered nationalist agenda, which constructed idealized images of an in surrounds the figure of the hijra, and regular employers rarely choose to hire them, prompting some hijras to claim that it is in fact society that turns them into prostitutes (Bombay Eunuch). There existed such few job opportunities for hijras that many of them were forced to engage in prostitution, further bolstering society’s negative perception of the community. This left little room for members of the hijra community to actively participate in the emerging perception of Indian nationhood.

Works Cited


The Doctrine of the Imāmate and Historical Controversies of the Early Ismāʿīlīs
Faraz Alidina

The Ismāʿīlīs are a branch of Shiʿa Muslims who today, comprise a minority of this minority. Throughout history, the Ismāʿīlī community has been faced with hostility from non-Muslims as well as both Shiʿa and Sunnī Muslims. While the violence of war and persecution fluctuates from one epoch to the next, one of the most enduring forms of oppressions has been the gradual accumulation of scholarship about the Ismāʿīlīs equating their origin with heresy. This scholarship culminated in the writings of nineteenth and twentieth century western Orientalist scholars, but its genesis lies in the embellishments of tenth and eleventh century heresiographers. Only in the past half-century has the process of shedding away the obfuscating veils of hyperbole and fiction from early Ismāʿīlī history begun.

This essay seeks to understand the nature of the Ismāʿīlī movement’s origins by first contextualizing it within the early Shiʿa debate on the nature of legitimate authority, which gave rise to the Sunnī-Shiʿa split and the gradual process of refining their doctrine of the Imāmate. Then, through an evaluation of the veracity of some of the claims made about the early Ismāʿīlīs, this essay reveals a history that markedly contrasts with the sensationalist, ostensibly objective renderings of Orientalists and heresiographers. The Ismāʿīlī schism was a result of contending interpretations of legitimate claims to succession based on the pre-established doctrine of nass, rather than a zeal for the doctrinal radicalism of the Khaṭṭābiyya; and secondly, upon scrutiny, the attempts at delegitimizing the Ismāʿīlī Fāṭimid Caliphate, founded in the tenth century, by identifying its founder’s progenitor as ‘Abd Allāh b. Maymūn al-Qaddāḥ, a libertine atheist, is revealed to be nothing more than a piece of fiction. This essay thus aims not only to present a different historical picture, but also to dispense with the fiction and exaggeration of past writings on the Ismāʿīlīs.

Legitimate Authority and the Early History of Shiʿism

The Prophet Muḥammad, Islam’s final Prophet of God, succeeded in reorienting the polytheistic Arabian society to the teachings of Islam’s absolute monotheism and, in doing so, laid the political and social foundations for the expansion of the religion beyond the Arabian Peninsula. Authority was concentrated in the person of the Prophet to such an extent that upon his death in 632 C.E., a vacuum of political power as well as religious guidance emerged within the community. Abū Bakr, the Prophet’s uncle, sought to reassure the ummah (community of Muslim believers) that Islam remains,
even during the absence of a Prophet: “O you people, let those who worshipped Muḥammad know that Muḥammad is now dead! As for those who worshipped God, let them know that God is alive and does not die” (Ramadan xiv). Nevertheless, with creeping doubt palpable, the need to quickly settle the question of succession was self-evident to the Companions and Helpers of the Prophet. They hastily elected Abū Bakr as Caliph, the political ruler of the ummah. Conspicuously absent from these discussions was the Prophet’s cousin and son-in-law, ‘Alī, whom many considered to be the Prophet’s chosen successor, citing numerous ‘ahādīth (accounts) to that effect (Momen 14-17). The term Shi‘ī itself is derived from Shi‘a ‘Alī, meaning “partisans of ‘Alī”. ‘Alī remained politically quietist, refusing requests to raise a rebellion and was eventually made the fourth Caliph, but only to be assassinated after ruling for six years. In 661 C.E., Mu‘awiya then took control of the Caliphate, established the Umayyad dynasty and henceforth, the Shi‘ī faced enmity from the Caliphal authorities, ranging from cautious suspicion to outright persecution.

The Shi‘ā claim that ‘Alī ought to be the successor to the Prophet is not an isolated matter of whether or not he was designated. Since the Qur‘ān and Shari‘a (sacred law) both emanated from sources beyond the comprehension of humanity and their capacity of reason, for the Shi‘a, this meant that ijma‘ (consensus of the community) could not be the basis of legitimate authority. Only the Aḥl al-Bayt (people of the house of the Prophet) had the necessary impeccability and ‘Alī, as the most prominent member of the Prophet’s family, was believed to have inherited the special knowledge which qualified him as the only authority in religious and spiritual matters. This knowledge was transferred hereditarily within the Aḥl al-Bayt, which was later defined as the progeny of ‘Alī and Fāṭima (Daftary 57). In contrast, the Sunnī ruler is usually understood as a temporal one of political affairs and administration. The Shi‘a came to have an Imām (leader), whereas the Sunnī had a Khalīfā (successor). Thus, debates on the subject of legitimate authority have been a principal determinant of fragmentation within the ummah since the death of the Prophet. Such doctrines on authority are refined over time, often in response to current exigencies. The death of the Prophet Muḥammad began to raise questions over who has legitimate claim to authority as well the scope of that authority. The following section describes how the principle of nasṣ was later introduced to answer the question of how authority is transferred, which then set up the basis for the Ismā‘īlī schism.

Jā‘far al-Ṣādiq’s Contribution to the Doctrine of the Imāmate

The Shi‘a doctrine of the Imāmate was gradually developed, in part as a response to the circumstances of the time. The early Shi‘a were comprised of the Zaydi and Imāmī; the latter, out of whom the Ismā‘īlīs would emerge, would eventually only allow the principle of nasṣ (designation) in determining succession. The ‘Abbāsid revolution of 750 C.E. had disillusioned
many of its original Shi'a supporters when they realized that the 'Abbāsid Caliph Abul al-'Abbās al-Saffāh (r. 750-4 C.E.) was a descendant of neither 'Alī nor the Prophet, but merely a collateral relative of the Prophet (Sharon 77). However, the failure of the 'Alid Revolts led by Muḥammad “the pure Soul” and his brother Ibrāhīm (great-grandsons of al-Ḥasan, the son of 'Alī) in 762-3 C.E. effectively marked the end of active Imāmī Shi'a political opposition (Berkey 108). The sixth Imām, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 765 C.E.) came to emphasize that the authority of the naṣṣ remained located within the individual Imām, regardless of whether or not he claimed the political seat of the caliphate. Imāmate by naṣṣ bestowed a divine prerogative of religious and political rule over the ummah which could only be transferred by the Imām, before his death, to his successor, a member of the Aḥl al-Bayt, through an explicit designation (Daftary 81). Predicated on the Imāms being the possessors of 'īсma (infallibility), the designation of a new Imām by the existing one is not an arbitrary choice, but God’s choice as well (Walker 240). The naṣṣ also had the unintended potentiality of “creat[ing] in effect a sect, with the purity and zeal of a sect” (Hodgson 13). Any ambiguity in the naṣṣ would demarcate sects based on their competing interpretations of who had the legitimate designation, increasing group consciousness and cohesion. Such was the case, as is to be seen, with the rivalries between the sons of al-Ṣādiq.

This doctrine of the Imāmate held by the Imāmī Shi'a contrasted with the Zaydis who maintained that an Imām must assert his claim publicly, sword in hand if necessary, if he wished to be recognized (Daftary 73). Al-Ṣādiq re-emphasized the practice of taqiyya (precautionary dissimulation), originally introduced by al-Bāqir, the previous Imām (Lalani 13). Taqiyya called for the concealment of one’s faith or identity to protect oneself from persecution. The practical implication of naṣṣ and taqiyya was to depoliticize the Imāmate because it was no longer necessary for an Imām to rebel openly. While the Imām is theoretically entitled to temporal leadership, his mandate did not depend on forming any actual rule. This pragmatism also provided a basis for the communal continuity of Imāmī Shi'ism, as it “attached [Shi'ism] to a continuing line of Imāms regardless of the fate of particular political movements” (Daftary 82-83).

Despite al-Ṣādiq’s pragmatic quietism, the position of the Imām remained absolute and supreme for the Shi'a: the world could not exist for a moment without an Imām, the Imām was the hujja (proof) of God on earth and his recognition was the foremost duty of every believer (Daftary 83). The supreme position of the Imām was further consolidated by al-Ṣādiq’s emphasis on ta'wīl (allegorical interpretation of scripture). The Shi'a adopted the belief that there was a zabīrī (exoteric) and a bāṭīnī (esoteric) meaning to the Qur’ān and that the Imām had the exclusive spiritual function of interpreting the inner meaning of the Islamic message. It is in this distinction between the exoteric and esoteric dimensions of religious scripture that the essence of the
Imām’s role lies (Jafri 291-93). In part, this idea was adopted as a means of reconciling some of the newly-translated philosophical works from Greece and Persia which were challenging some of the Islamic principles of the Qur’ān. The method used by the Shi‘a was similar to how the rationalist Mu‘tazilīs tried to reconcile this foreign thought through *tafīr* (commentaries on the Qur’ān). The Imām’s interpretation however “was not an ordinary commentary of the Qur’ān but a definite philosophical teaching” (Hamdani 3). Solely the Imām’s opinion is authoritative and he alone decides how best to lead the *ummah* toward *ṣirāt al-mustaqīm* (the straight path) and to *ḥāqa’iq* (truths) (Hamdani 2-4; Daftary 82-84). Al-Ṣādiq’s synthesis of this special function of spiritual interpretation (*ta’wil*) and the *nass* principle resulted in a doctrine of the Imāmate which heavily emphasized *‘ilm* (special knowledge). This divinely-inspired, esoteric knowledge exists within the Imām of the time and its presence can be validated only by appealing to the existence of the *nass* through which the current Imām came to acquire this sapiential knowledge.

**Succession by *Nass* and the *Ismā‘īlī* Schism**

The concept of *nass* is integral not only to the understanding of early Imām Shi‘a doctrinal thought, but also to understand one of the major schisms within Shi‘ism. Before his death in 765 C.E., al-Ṣādiq explicitly designated his son, Ismā‘īl, as his successor (Daftary 88; Walker 240; Momen 55). This point forms the basis of the Ismā‘īlī claim and although later Twelver writers would deny this, the authenticity of Ismā‘īl’s designation is of little scholarly doubt. Moreover, historians affirm that Ismā‘īl died before al-Ṣādiq (Walker 240; Hodgson 13). The premature death of Ismā‘īl (before becoming Imām, despite having the designation) put the succession to al-Ṣādiq in serious doubt and consequently, the Imāmī Shi‘a movement fragmented. A majority of al-Ṣādiq’s partisans accepted his death and turned to his eldest surviving son ‘Abd Allāh al-Aftāḥ as their new Imām, citing a *ḥadīth* from al-Ṣādiq which said that the Imāmate must be transmitted through the eldest son of the Imām. This *ḥadīth* is not a formal or explicit designation of ‘Abd Allāh akin to Ismā‘īl’s original designation. Nevertheless, ‘Abd Allāh died seventy days after his father and most of his supporters then pledged their allegiance to his brother, Mūsā al-Kāẓim, who is thus the seventh Imām for the Twelver Shi‘a (Daftary 89). Although later Twelver Shi‘a do have *ahadīth* that report a second *nass* by al-Ṣādiq to al-Kāẓim, the fact remains that at the time of al-Ṣādiq’s funeral, none of the three brothers could definitively prove they were designated, thus resulting in the need to resort to *ahadīth* which established only indirect claims to the Imāmate (Walker 241).

A minority, however, maintained that because al-Ṣādiq, as Imām, was infallible, his original choice of Ismā‘īl as Imām could not be subject to any debate *ex post facto*. They also rejected the claims of al-Kāẓim and other brothers on the basis that the Imāmate could not be transferred from brother
to brother after the case of Imāms al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn. This minority comprised of the pure Ismāʿīliyya and the Mubārakīyya. The pure Ismāʿīliyya maintained that al-Ṣādiq had falsely announced Ismāʿīl’s death in order to protect him from ‘Abbāsid persecution and held that Ismāʿīl would return as the messianic Mahdī (Daftary 91). Heresiographers labelled the second group Mubārakīyya, named after al-Mubārak, a disciple of Ismāʿīl (Daftary 90). The Mubārakīyya, from which the Fāṭimid Ismāʿīlis would emerge, affirmed Ismāʿīl’s death and the infallibility of al-Ṣādiq’s choice meant that the succession of Imāmate necessarily moved to Ismāʿīl’s eldest son, Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl, who had gone into hiding (Walker 241). The schism depicted within its historical context of debates on legitimate authority and ambiguity over nass thus presents the Ismāʿīli emergence as a genuine attempt to apply pre-established doctrine in a circumstance hitherto unencountered. This historical perspective, as we shall see in the next section, differs radically from the renderings of heresiographers and Orientalists, who portray the Ismāʿīlis as ghuluww (doctrinal extremists) and heterodox in origin.

The Polemics of Heresiographers and Orientalists

Most pre-modern scholarship on the early Ismāʿīlis relied mainly on the vast array of heresiographical writings to form the basis of their work. Orientalism, however, added to this scholarship on the Near East the perniciousness of ostensible objectivity and objectification. Orientalism, as famously exposed by Edward Said, “purports to be liberal objective scholarship but is in reality very close to being propaganda against [its] subject material” (Said 316). The use of the subjective, religiously- and politically-motivated polemics against the early Ismāʿīlis, written by heresiographers, was represented to Western audiences in French and English as an objective academic enquiry. This purported objectivity derived from the claim that ‘the Orient’ was being studied using such scientific methodologies as philology and typology. However, this often entailed the objectification of the cultures under investigation. The Ismāʿīlis were studied as a passive object and denied any real agency. The fact that there was little original literature available written by the early Ismāʿīlis made this denial of agency all the more easy. The pretence of objectivity, objectification, as well as the forces of time and the accumulation of an extensive literature all uniformly representing the early Ismāʿīlis, as will be discussed below, as the product of a Khaṭṭābiyya radical heterodoxy and an ibn al-Qaddāḥ’s conspiracy gave this scholarship all the trappings of truth. It is only recently, with the waves of decolonization as well as the coming of a new generation of scholars, many of whom are affiliated with the Institute for Ismāʿīli Studies, founded in London in 1977, that there has been a critical evaluation of the extant literature on the Ismāʿīlis. Accordingly, the remainder of this paper seeks to critically evaluate Orientalist claims concerning the impact of Khaṭṭāb and ibn al-Qaddāḥ on Ismāʿīlism.
THE EXAGGERATED INFLUENCE OF THE KHAṬṬĀBIYYA

The Khaṭṭābiyya were the followers of Abu’l Khaṭṭāb, a zealous da’i (summoner or missionary) of Imāms al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq. Khaṭṭāb elevated al-Ṣādiq to the level of Prophethood, preached the divinity of the Imāms and even claimed that he knew ism Allāh al-Aʿẓam (The Greatest Name of God) (Daftary 86). Al-Ṣādiq later disavowed Khaṭṭāb as a heretic for these extremist beliefs and although Khaṭṭāb remained loyal to al-Ṣādiq, he was crucified by the ‘Abbāsids in 756 C.E. after attempting a rebellion in Kufa. Although Al-Ṣādiq’s son, Ismā’il, did not participate in the Kufa uprising, he was responsive to some of the activist views and objectives of the Khaṭṭābiyya. Bernard Lewis sees the fundamental implication of this relationship between Ismā’il and Khaṭṭāb being the deposition of Ismā’il by his father. The Khaṭṭābiyya are attributed, by Lewis, with collaborating with Ismā’il in elaborating a system of doctrine during the life of al-Ṣādiq that would then serve as the basis of the Ismā’īlī religion (Lewis 42), placing Ismā’il “among the rebels against Ja’far [al-Ṣādiq]’s authority” (Lewis 37). Citing various statements, including one where it is reported that al-Ṣādiq called Ismā’il “a devil who has assumed his form” (Lewis 39), Lewis attests that there was a close association between the heterodox, revolutionary Khaṭṭābiyya and Ismā’il (and his followers), and that because of this association Ismā’il was deposed (Lewis 40). In contrast, Daftary cites this relationship as causing al-Ṣādiq to disavow only Khaṭṭāb (Daftary 85), clearly the more radical of the two. Moreover, this ḥadīth cited by Lewis and attributed to al-Ṣādiq was collected and recorded by Imāmī Shi’a heresiographers, whose potential ulterior motives impinge on any claims to objectivity, particularly when it comes to such forceful condemnations of Ismā’il.

Upon the death of Abu’l Khaṭṭāb, the Khaṭṭābiyya splintered into several groups. This fragmentation and the possible resulting permeation of their thought into the early Ismā’īlī groups of the pure Ismā’īliyya and the Mubārakiyya is a contentious subject. Bernard Lewis begins his process of delegitimizing the Ismā’īlīs by positing that the pure Ismā’īliyya sect was “identical” with the Khaṭṭābiyya (Lewis 33). Claiming a relation of equivalence during a historical period from which there are few original Ismā’īlī sources is a conjectural inference, but it nonetheless serves as a starting point for Lewis. He then links the Khaṭṭābiyya to the Mubārakiyya, by ascribing the da’i, Mubārak, with the role of organizing the sects around Ismā’il’s legacy and absorbing the greater part of the Khaṭṭābiyya (i.e. the pure Ismā’īliyya) in order to create the united Ismā’īlī da’wa (mission) (Lewis 41). In toto, Lewis represents the Ismā’īlī movement as a premeditated, revolutionary conspiracy to undermine Shi’a orthodoxy. The schism is depicted as a doctrinal one: the result of the deposition of Ismā’il by al-Ṣādiq and the close association between Ismā’il (and his followers) and the disciples of the wildly speculative
These interconnections between the Ismā‘īlīs and the Khaṭṭābiyya are exaggerated, particularly in the doctrinal domain. Ismā‘īlīs of the Fāṭimid times condemned Abu‘l Khaṭṭāb and his teachings as heretical (Daftary 93), although Lewis is skeptical and rejects the source authors as “apologists [who] were interested in denying all connection with such disreputable persons as Abu‘l Khaṭṭāb” (Lewis 35). Despite these condemnations of Abu‘l Khaṭṭāb, scholars do not deny that the early Ismā‘īlīs did adopt certain ideas and terminologies that were attributed to Khaṭṭāb such as his emphasis on the method of ta‘wīl (Daftary 86). However, the Mubārakiyya did not entertain Khaṭṭāb’s heterodox beliefs; they simply upheld the Imāmate of Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl (Daftary 2007, 93).

Ivanow distinguishes between practical theology, concerning worship and religious law, and the theoretical theology of eschatology and esoteric doctrine. At this early stage, there is little to no difference in the practical theology of the Shi‘ī splinter groups. On the other hand, the theoretical aspects of the Khaṭṭābiyya doctrine “consisted of wild mystical speculations” (Ivanow Alleged 139) rather than any coherent philosophy and, as he forcefully attests, “there are not the slightest grounds for believing that it [Ismā‘īlism] began with any new doctrine or theory” (Ivanow Studies 3). While it can be granted that certain ancillary doctrines may overlap, upon analysing the development of Ismā‘īlī thought through the Fāṭimid times, it can be seen that it has nothing in common with Khaṭṭābiyya thought in terms of evolution or original (i.e. first) principles (Ivanow Alleged 138-41). In summary, the Ismā‘īlī schism represents a split whose impetus was the untimely death of Ismā‘īl and competing interpretations on how to apply the pre-established principle of naṣṣ. Emphases on heterodoxy and radical doctrines are simply misplaced.

The Myth of Ibn al-Qaddāh

With the recognition of al-Kāẓim by a majority of al-Ṣādiq’s partisans, Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl, the eldest son of Ismā‘īl and the Imām of the Mubārakiyya Ismā‘īlīs, went into hiding, henceforth acquiring the epithet al-Maktūm (The Hidden One) (Daftary 95). He travelled to Syria, Persia, Khurasan and even India in order to direct the da‘wā of propagating the Ismā‘īlī faith, avoid arrest from the ‘Abbāsid Caliphs, and escape persecution from other Shi‘a groups (Hamdani 6). His emigration marks the beginning of the dawr al-satr (period of concealment) (Daftary 95-96). Upon the death of Imām Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl, the Mubārakiyya split into two groups: one group, comprising the bulk of the Mubārakiyya and which later came to be known as Qarmaṭīs, refused to accept his death and instead awaited his return as their Messiah; and a second group continued to trace the future generations of Imām Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl and would eventually end the dawr al-satr with the establishment of the Fāṭimid Caliphate by Imām al-Mahdī in
Hitherto, this essay has provided an exposition of the Orientalist scholarship on the Ismāʿīlīs and its exaggerated renderings of all the Ismāʿīlī groups as propagators of new, unorthodox ideas. The most baseless of the myths, however, is ascribed solely to the second group of the Mubārakīyya, who would eventually become the Fāṭimid Ismāʿīlīs: that of ʿAbd Allāh b. Maymūn al-Qaddāḥ as the genealogical ancestor of the Fāṭimid Caliphate. It is worth noting that tracing genealogies during the dawr al-satr is a probative task as the Imāms’ identities were shrouded in secrecy and, at times, they assumed different names or had their dāʾīs take their name, all for the sake of ʿtaqiyya (al-Hamdani 15). It is because of the combination of a lack of accurate history and the intense production of heresiographical material aimed at the Fāṭimid Ismāʿīlīs that one of the most scurrilous anti-Ismāʿīlī polemicists, ibn Rizām, was able to find fertile soil for his account that ibn al-Qaddāḥ was the progenitor of the Fāṭimid Imāms. Prominent nineteenth and twentieth century Orientalists then also adopted this narrative (de Sacy 72; de Goeje 49). Ibn al-Qaddāḥ was a freed Persian slave who pretended to preach on behalf of Imām Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl but whose religious belief actually consisted of seven stages that culminated in libertinism and atheism (Daftary 102-107). By labelling ibn al-Qaddāḥ as the progenitor of the Fāṭimid Caliphate ibn Rizām sought to delegitimize the Ismāʿīlīs and their Imams’ claims of being descendants of the Ahl al-Bayt, which is a necessary requirement for any leader of the Shiʿa. There are a number of theories which have aimed at explaining the precise process through which ibn al-Qaddāḥ managed to divert the Ismāʿīlī Imām’s lineage into his offspring. One such argument is that Ibn al-Qaddāḥ became the son and heir of Imām Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl through the doctrine of spiritual adoption, “according to which the pupil, not the physical son, is the true heir” (Lewis 21). A ḥadīth is cited where the Prophet Muḥammad said to Salman al-Farsi, a companion of his and one of the first Iranian converts: “thou art one of us, a member of our family.” It is from this ḥadīth that the Orientalist Massinon bases his theory that this expression is in fact a ritual formula for spiritual adoption (Massinon 16-19). Disputing that this expression had such a force, Ivanow concluded that it was in fact a “mere customary, hackneyed expression which various highly placed ‘Alids would use to pay a compliment to their subordinates […] chiefly of Persian origin” (Ivanow Alleged 165). Not only are there no reliable accounts of Imām Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl ever uttering these words to ibn al-Qaddāḥ, there is no evidence that this doctrine of spiritual adoption was widely accepted or even existent among the early Ismāʿīlīs. Beyond the skepticism over ibn al-Qaddāḥ’s actual connection with Imām Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl, a number of anachronisms have also been noted. Al-Nawbakhtī (d. 912 C.E.) Ismāʿīlism arose from a successional schism over contending interpretations on the pre-established but not yet exhaustively articulated principle of ʿnass.
There is scant evidence to believe that it began with any new doctrine or theory. Nevertheless, the objective guise of Orientalist scholarship has had the effect of prolonging the misrepresentation of the Ismāʿīlīs in Western academia.

Indeed, even the notion of Ismāʿīlism as being “founded” is a contentious one. This focus on doctrinal and biological founders is motivated by the assumption that Ismāʿīlism, being heretical in essence and origin, must have been based on some pre-existing anti-Islamic doctrine and that its su-cand al-Qummī (d. 914 C.E.), two Twelvers who authored numerous texts on the Shīʿa sub-sects, for all their heresiographical writings, do not mention ibn al-Qaddāḥ in connection with the Ismāʿīlīs, nor is he mentioned in the anti-Fāṭimid Baghdad manifesto of 1011 C.E (Daftary 103). This manifesto the ostensible organizer of the Ismāʿīlīs in the ninth century, several decades after his death (Ivanow Alleged 164). Ivanow refers to this myth of ibn al-Qaddah as an “epic of impiety, […] a tissue of lies and baseless statements, the mere product of imagination” (Ivanow Alleged 174), which was “probably invented by ibn Rizām himself” (Daftary 103). There is thus little value in the study of ibn al-Qaddāḥ, as it adds nothing to the understanding on the origins of the early Ismāʿīlīs. Instead, what is notable about this myth is its endurance in being accepted as fact for almost a millennium. The early Ismāʿīlī writers of the Fāṭimid period found no necessity in defending the genealogical veracity of their Caliph-Imāms because it was only with the Abbāsid tenth century manifesto that doubt was sewn in the minds of the Muslims. Baghdad, the Abbāsid capital, was quickly losing its prestige as the seat of culture and science to the Fāṭimid capital city of Cairo and thus the Abbāsid Caliph al-Qāhir delegitimized the Ismāʿīlīs in an attempt to restore the stature of his fragmenting Caliphate (al-Hamdani 6). It is therefore clear that while heresiographical material can be valuable in discerning dominant perceptions at the time of writing, they are far from objective accounts of history.

**Conclusion: Ismāʿīlism Has No Founder**

The claims of heresiographers, which were later reproduced by Orientalists, are that Ismāʿīlism was founded as a heretical doctrine and that it has been a drastic departure from orthodoxy since its inception. On the contrary, cess in establishing the Fāṭimid Caliphate, which achieved such stature as to rival the Abbāsids, can only be explained through appeals to conspiracy.

Ismāʿīlism has no founder, be it Khaṭṭāb, ibn al-Qaddāḥ, Ismāʿīl or Mubārak. Even though the sect was named after Ismāʿīl, this is merely because it is with him that the Ismāʿīlī line of the Imāms begins after parting from the other Imāmī Shīʿa branches. To speak of founders implies that Ismāʿīlism began with some novel innovation, which is a misrepresentation of history. Rather, it was their differences over the application of al-Sadiq’s principle of *nāsīf* that tint the early Ismāʿīlīs as distinct from the other Imāmī
Shi’a. A preoccupation with founders attaches connotations of artificiality and contrivance to the Ismā’īlī movement rather than reflecting what the Ismā’īlīs, indeed all religious movements, were striving for: elucidation of eternal and divine truths. The Ismā’īlīs’ true allegiance is to the Imām of the time as the only legitimate ruler, the true spiritual guide, the proof of God. It is thus the doctrine of the Imāmate and specifically Ismā’īlī nuances that best represent the essence of this movement. The impetus to the emergence of these nuances lay not in the innovations or speculations of any particular historical figure, but rather emerged as a product of the universal process of striving for Truth.

WORKS CITED


COMMUNITY, CREED AND COMMEMORATION:
Saint Patrick’s Day and Irish Catholics in 19th century Montréal

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This paper explores the function of the annual Saint Patrick’s Day Parade in constructing Canadian Irish-Catholic identity in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Montréal. A festival with ecumenical origins in Ireland, Canadian observances of St. Patrick’s Day early in the century comprised Irish participants of both Protestant and Catholic backgrounds, who would eat and drink together each 17th of March, the feast day of the patron saint of Ireland. In the 1840s, however, the massive influx of (mostly) Catholic refugees to Montréal during Ireland’s Great Famine reshaped the existing Irish community. This led to the consolidation of separate Catholic and Protestant religious communities, and the subsequent claiming of Saint Patrick’s Day by the former.

The success of the parade – its popularity among the nineteenth-century Irish Catholic community, as well as its endurance – speaks to the commitment to community solidarity of its organizers and participants. However, the parade was also characterized by compromise and contradiction: while it was an act of public commemoration intended to foster a sense of unity among Irish Catholics city-wide, the observance achieved that goal, in many cases, by alienating members of the broader Irish community (Protestants) and of the broader Catholic community (French Canadians) in Montréal. Due to this, the parade can serve as a point of reference for the study of immigrant nationalism in early Canada, as the politics surrounding it highlighted the difficult question faced by those newly settled in a new nation: how could one remain loyal to the homeland while pursuing better opportunities elsewhere?

From the mid-nineteenth to early-twentieth century, the parade served the Irish Catholic community as a dynamic and accommodating tool for asserting their rightful presence in Montréal. The differing uses of the parade throughout this period illustrate the changing relationship between religious affiliation and national identity: in the mid-nineteenth century, the parade functioned to delineate community membership; later in the century, it showcased, so to speak, their worthiness as citizens and attempted to dispel local
mistrust of Irish Catholics; and, in the twentieth century, aided the community's transition from 'Irish-Catholic' to 'Irish-Canadian,' as most members at this point were Canadian-born, and local society increasingly secular.

The Saint Patrick's Society and Ethno-Religious Privatism

By the time first-wave Irish immigrants arrived in Montréal in the 1820s, less than a century had passed since the conquest of New France, and segregation along ethno-linguistic and religious lines was already endogenous to life in the city. This unique socio-cultural climate would work to Irish-Catholic advantage in terms of achieving a compromise: retaining their Irishness while becoming Canadian (Barlow 2). In this context, the community was able to engage quasi-systematically in acts of self-segregation – first from Irish Protestants, and later from French Catholics, largely under the direction of the Saint Patrick's Society. The relative cultural autonomy achieved through these acts is what gave the annual parade meaning for participants, allowing it to contribute to their sense of belonging in Montréal.

While often conflated as the story of the Irish in nineteenth-century North America, the respective Irish experiences in Canada and the United States were mutually distinct, which informs the parade's success. The United States were founded by Protestants and, with the legacy of the American Revolutionary War, encompassed a militancy in their society that was detected and adopted by Irish Catholic immigrants. This led to the 'ghettoization' of the Irish in cities like New York and Boston, while Canada – which had Catholic founders and no revolutionary history – was more conducive to the growth of a distinct Irish-immigrant culture (Currie ii). Early in the century, more Irish Catholics went to the United States than to Canada, attracted by its recent success in achieving independence from Britain. Prior to the Great Famine, British North America saw mostly Protestant immigration and in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars, the Orange Lodge became far more influential than the Fenian brotherhood (Currie ii). Because the port of Montréal was an important destination for steamers crossing the Atlantic and because the Catholic community was already established, Irish-Catholic presence became more pronounced there than in other parts of early nineteenth century Canada (McMahon 48). Still, Irish Catholics remained an un-threatening minority who were generally able to coexist peacefully with their Irish-Protestant neighbours.

These patterns of immigration explain why Irish Catholics and Protestants in Montréal were far less segregated before the Famine than after. Donald Akenson refers to early nineteenth-century Canada as a “clean laboratory” for testing the supposedly entrenched cultural differences between Irish Catholics and Protestants (42). Due to nativism being weak (in comparison to the situation in the United States), and to the absence of the oppressive penal codes governing inter-group relations in Ireland, the Irish community in Montréal was able to function outside of sectarian boundaries. Further-
more, before the Famine, the very poor did not possess the means to leave Ireland while the very rich had no need, resulting in the emergence of an ‘emigrating class’ that was mostly comprised of middle-class Irish Catholics and Protestants (Akenson 43). The consolidation of a middle-class, non-sectarian Irish community in 1820s Montréal is what allowed for the founding of an Irish national society, the Saint Patrick’s Society, in 1834.

The Saint Patrick’s Society of Montréal was first a national, charitable organization, comprised of both Catholics and Protestants and concerned with the welfare of the local Irish community at large (Collard 7). In the 1830s, Patrician festivities were observed communally by Saint Patrick’s and its ‘sister societies,’ Saint George’s [English] Society and Saint Andrew’s [Scottish] Society. Marches were more military than religious in nature, and the sumptuous feast that followed was considered the main event (Cronin and Adair 21). By 1856, however, in the wake of the famine exodus, the Protestant members had become an ineffectual minority, and so left Saint Patrick’s to form the Irish Protestant Benevolent Society (Collard 14). It was in the 1850s that the military, Protestant overtones of the festivities were eradicated and the parade was henceforth to be considered a religious procession instead (Collard 35). This change came about under the direction of Father Patrick Dowd, superior of Saint Patrick’s Cathedral as of 1848, when he was dispatched from Ireland to attend to the trauma of “Black ’47,” the year famine migration was at its height (Hustak 39).

The active segregation of the community reflects awareness on the part of Society members of the importance of protecting Irish-Catholic identity from subsumption – not only into the Irish Protestant community, but the French-Catholic clerical hierarchy as well. Saint Patrick’s Cathedral had been built by the Sulpicians in 1847 to meet the devotional needs of the growing Irish Catholic population and had since remained at the centre of the community; by the 1860s, its parish spanned 55 square miles, and records of births, deaths and marriages were all kept in a central registry (Hustak 50). In 1866, Montréal’s Bishop Bourget decided this system was inefficient and announced a plan to disperse Saint Patrick’s Anglophone congregation among six French-speaking churches, according to their respective residential locations. Furious over the perceived attempt at erasure of the Irish-Catholic presence, Dowd enlisted politician Thomas D’Arcy McGee to help fight to keep churches linguistically segregated. Eventually, a compromise of sorts was reached; in 1872, the Vatican ruled in favor of dismemberment, but it was ensured that there would be an English-language church in every sub-parish (Hustak 58). In a study of the geo-politics of Catholic Parishes in nineteenth-century Montréal, Rosalyn Trigger posits that the erection of these smaller Irish parishes placed greater emphasis on the creation of parish societies dedicated to locally relevant concerns, strengthening parish affiliations among the laity (Trigger, Role of the Parish i). According to Trigger,
participation in the annual Saint Patrick’s parade inscribed these affiliations in space, intertwining the ideological concerns of the Irish Catholic people with the urban geographic reality.

PUBLIC MEMORY AND PLACE-BASED RESISTANCE

As such, in the second half of the century, the purpose of the parade was twofold: to foster and maintain solidarity within the Irish Catholic community, and to demonstrate their worth to the rest of the city. While parade participation allowed for the effective ‘laying of claim’ to Irish neighbourhoods, clerical direction of festivities publicly combated negative stereotypes in two ways: first, by emphasizing temperance, and second, by making explicit the community’s loyalty to Montréal. All of this is most definitively illustrated through an analysis of the events of Saint Patrick’s Day, 1866, which were overshadowed by tensions within the community, as well as by rumours around the Fenian invasion.

The year 1866 coincided with growing animosity not only between Irish Catholics and Protestants, but within the Irish-Catholic community as well. That year, Bishop Bourget wrote a pastoral letter reminding the Irish of the charity they had been offered by French Catholics in 1847; while the letter was intended to assuage hysteria over parish dismemberment, many reacted with outrage over what they saw as the devaluation of Famine memory (McMahon 49). In response to the outcry, Dowd and McGee, representatives of Saint Patrick’s congregation, made their own position clear: that ‘dwelling’ on the Famine experience would only hinder their cause (McMahon 50). At the time, they were preoccupied with the parish dismemberment, although the more general process of integration into the city was also a serious concern. Meanwhile, inter-generational hostility emerged in the community, as those who had arrived in the 1820s wanted to be associated neither with the diseased and destitute who disembarked in 1847, nor with the Irish working-class of Griffintown, where crime and alcoholism had become significant issues (Barlow 59).

Despite the presence of this internal tension, however, the most troubling source of discord among Montréal’s Irish Catholic community – and especially the Saint Patrick’s Society – was the presence of Fenians within their ranks. The previous year, authorities in Montréal learned of American Fenians threatening a raid at the Upper-Canadian border, believing the annexation of Canada to the United States would encourage revolutionaries in the homeland, prove Irish military competence, and draw British troops away from Ireland (Wilson 18). According to McGee, militant Irish nationalism in the United States was due to the Irish Catholic community being “camped but not settled” there, but nonetheless, many Irish Canadians were hostile to what they took as a suggestion to make a clean break with their past (Currie 75). This led to increased tension between clerical and lay-organizations: the latter were carefully monitored by the former, while lay-groups
with suspicious political sympathies were shut down (Trigger, “Politics on Parade” 186). Notably, Montréal’s Ancient Order of the Hibernians covertly supported the Fenian brotherhood, and by 1865 there were an estimated 300-400 Fenians in Montreal, making inroads to the St. Patrick’s Society and increasingly gathering support (Currie 187).

March 17, 1866, therefore, was significant in that the parade’s organizers eagerly took the opportunity to dispel mistrust of Irish Catholics. Following the dismemberment of the parish, the parade route typically went from Place D’Armes to Saint Patrick’s Cathedral, traversing the various new parishes so as to symbolically unite them (Trigger, “Politics on Parade” 184). Wearing green, sporting Celtic crosses and carrying banners, thousands of people from the clergy and laity joined the procession while others lined the streets, later to attend a mass and hear speeches; under Father Dowd, the focus had been shifted away from feasting, and, in accordance with a trend sweeping the Commonwealth, temperance organizations paraded to counteract the popular association of the festival – and the Irish – with drunken revelry (Cronin and Adair 49). In 1866, however, the procession continued after the mass, finally arriving at Victoria Square, where Thomas D’Arcy McGee gave a speech to explain the route’s significance, saying, “[…] you are now here to receive from the Mayor of the city the gratifying knowledge that Montréal looks upon you, not as step-children or as foreigners, but as children of her own household” (Trigger, “Politics on Parade” 184). After all, while many in attendance supported Home Rule for Ireland and had no great love for imperialism, McGee’s speech pointed out that “the Irish [had] no grievance” in Canada; rather, they had prospered in many cases, had been aided by the French Church in times of crisis, and had the same rights as descendants of the earliest settlers (Currie 74). This event served as an example of how the celebration of a particular national heritage did not preclude loyalty to Canada. Furthermore, the fact that the parade took place only once a year created an infrequent set of circumstances wherein Irish Catholics could express national sentiments without attracting suspicion.

**THE GLOBAL DIMENSION AND DIASPORIC NATIONALISM**

By the early twentieth century, relations between the Saint Patrick’s Society and the Irish Protestant Benevolent Society were friendlier than before. With memories of the Famine slowly fading away and the Fenian ‘threat’ dissipated, Montréal’s Irish community saw something of a return to valuing ‘Irishness’ over sectarian disputes. At the 1867 Irish Protestant Benevolent Society concert, guest speaker McGee presciently remarked that “for us, the Irish in Canada, there is at least one public duty clear beyond doubt, namely to show […] that we should dwell together in peace” (Collard 124). By 1942, writes historian Colin McMahon, a collaborative Catholic-Protestant ceremony held at the Irish Commemorative Stone monument was “illustrative of the extent to which perceptions of Irish ethnic identity in Montréal had
changed […] the historical contributions of Irish ethnic identity in Montréal had become part of an Anglo-Canadian national meta-narrative” (55).

This new outlook on Irish nationalism was considerably influenced by the increasing secularization of Canadian society in the twentieth century, but the fact that the contemporary Montréal Irish community was quite removed from the immigration experience necessitated the construction of an Irish-Canadian identity based less on politics (religious or otherwise) than on self-consciously ‘Irish’ cultural practices. Gradually, the annual Saint Patrick’s Day parade shed its Catholic connotation and became a celebration of Irishness, rooted in the urban cultural reality of Montréal, while simultaneously acknowledging the diasporic, international Irish community to which Montréal’s Irish Catholics belonged.

This trajectory illustrates how religion in twentieth-century Canada was beginning to dissociate itself from national identity. Irish Catholics did not necessarily cease to identify themselves as such, but the degree to which Catholicism permeated every facet of their lives was decreasing with the gradual separation of church and state. At this time, practices like the parade – historically, an implement of religious politics – were being re-imagined as tools for the celebration of Irish history and the acknowledgement of Canada’s place in a post-diasporic global network of Irish identity.

**CONCLUSION**

Over time, the annual Saint Patrick’s Day parade became a different entity as it was adapted and appropriated by successive generations of Irish Montrealers. While monuments and plaques possess an air of permanence and finality that points to the cultural elite, parades are participatory and democratic and can change from year to year in order to meet the needs of the group in question (Gordon 145). In early nineteenth-century Montréal, the Irish Catholics needed to carve out a space for themselves in the existing urban milieu, enlisting the parish system and religious affiliation to demarcate their territory. Towards the turn of the century, the community felt the pressure to defend that space, and by the twentieth century, it needed to feel a part of a global ‘imagined community’ in order to find their present values and cultural practices rooted in a real historical past.

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Reading Mahāmudrā in Non-Tantric Texts

Ben Patrick Stidworthy

Kagyū1 scholars began to use various non-Tantric works as textual sources for mahāmudrā2 beginning with Gampopa (1079–1153) in the twelfth century CE. When the social and political climate of Tibet with respect to the competitive factions of Tibetan Buddhism is considered, the appeal to legitimate textual sources seems reasonable. However, this is only one possible way to explain sūtra-based mahāmudrā. Because the term mahāmudrā never actually appears in any Buddhist sūtra (R. Jackson, “The Indian Mahāmudrā” 171), significant questions regarding the appeal to canonical authority for legitimacy and textual interpretation arise.

The study of sūtra-based mahāmudrā is helpful for understanding the philosophical and doctrinal evolution of Kagyü mahāmudrā; the questions of motive and manifestation behind such a phenomenon are therefore of primary concern. Ultimately, it is clear that the efforts of Kagyü scholars offer valuable insight into the complex relationship between canonical authority and the shifting boundaries of legitimate interpretation in medieval Tibet. Using the Ratnagotravibhāga as a case study and making reference to other significant non-Tantric materials used in sūtra-based mahāmudrā, this paper will argue that the political motivations of sūtra-based mahāmudrā were secondary to the didactic motivations of Kagyü teachers. As will be demonstrated, close analyses of the efforts both of Gampopa and of those influenced by him show that the appeal to non-Tantric sources was not merely an attempt to buttress the positions of a particular school, but was also an effort to show that mahāmudrā could be accessible to more than just the most advanced practitioners of Vajrayāna Buddhism. This is especially clear in Gampopa’s work, and despite the more overtly politicized work of Rangjung Dorjé (1284–1339) and Gö Lotsawa Zhönu Pal (1392–1481), they each continued to follow in the tradition of widening the boundaries of mahāmudrā practice.

This paper will introduce the history of the Ratnagotravibhāga in India and address its reception and interpretation in Tibet. From there, the three above-mentioned figures in the Kagyü lineages who use the Ratnagotravibhāga as a source of sūtra-based mahāmudrā will be examined. In chronological order, the first figure is Gampopa, who uses the Ratnagotravibhāga amongst other texts to establish the tradition of sūtra-based mahāmudrā and delineate paths for practitioners of varying capacities. The second figure is the Third Karmapa,3 Rangjung Dorjé, who connects mahāmudrā with the concept of Buddha-nature4 that is found in the Ratnagotravibhāga. In addition, Rangjung Dorjé attempts to incorporate a Madhyamika5 philosophical
position into the Ratnagotravibhāga that resembles the zhentong6 position. Lastly, to be addressed is Gō Lotsawa, whose efforts to attribute the concept of unfabricated natural mind and the four yogas7 to the Ratnagotravibhāga are noteworthy.

I. THE HISTORY OF THE RATNAGOTRAVIBHĀGA AND ITS RECEPTION IN TIBET

Understanding the transmission of non-Tantric texts into Tibet is essential in order to grasp the significance of their usage for claims to legitimacy by Kaygū scholars. The Ratnagotravibhāga and its commentary, the Vvākhyā, were probably composed in India by the fifth century CE (Williams 103). Broadly speaking, the text is most famous for expounding Buddha-nature thought and for its similarities with the doctrinal positions of Yogācāra texts. Divided into seven sections called “Vajra Points,” this relatively long śāstra8 consists of over 400 verses originally composed in Sanskrit, along with the prose commentary. Although by the beginning of the sixth century CE the text was well known by Indian and Chinese scholars, many Indian Buddhist philosophers remained silent on the text in their writings.

In traditional Tibetan accounts, the text is regarded as a treatise written by Maitreya9 while the commentary is attributed to Asaṅga.10 Furthermore, it is believed that, in the eleventh century, Maitrīpa11 rediscovered the text in an old stupa.12 From this point on, the text gained prominence in Buddhist discourse. This was especially the case in Kaśmir, where it was taught by Sajjana, the only known Indian commentator of the Ratnagotravibhāga beyond the author of the Vvākhyā. His disciples are credited with its introduction to Tibet (Ruegg 349). The association of the text with the Indian Buddhist mahāsiddha13 Maitrīpa, known both for his prominent usage of the text and his mahāmudrā transmissions, gives it a clear association with mahāmudrā itself (R. Jackson, “The Indian Mahāmudrā” 175). This unverifiable connection to Maitrīpa is one of the legitimizing factors in the linking of the Ratnagotravibhāga with mahāmudrā by Tibetan Buddhist scholars.

According to Gō Lotsawa in the Blue Annals, the Maitrīpa connection extends even further back in time, to mahāsiddhas such as Saraha (Mathes, A Direct Path 35). While it is clear enough that such an assertion would support the claim to legitimacy, it nonetheless seems to be a strange move on the part of Gō Lotsawa. Due to the esoteric nature of Saraha’s teachings, one could argue that it would be unlikely to find him in agreement with the sūtra-based mahāmudrā position presented by Gampopa. However, Maitrīpa is believed to have written a commentary on Saraha’s Dohās, which indicates the contrary position. Whether or not Saraha’s teachings are compatible with those of Gampopa, his connection with Maitrīpa serves to strengthen the association with non-Tantric texts.

Based on the fact that the text is concerned with concepts integral to
mahāmudrā, such as dharmadhātu and tathāgatagarbha, it seems logical that the text is seen as a “typologically proto-Vajrayānist work” (Ruegg 349). The question implied by this assertion, the answer to which is outside of the scope of this paper, is whether or not these concepts were integral to mahāmudrā from the start, or subsequently became so once mahāmudrā was linked to Mahāyāna philosophy late in the Indian period. It is also important to point out that the Ratnagotrabhāga and Maitrīpa’s mahāmudrā, while held to be in concert with Vajrayāna, were not classified in the Tibetan canon with the Tantric texts by several authorities but instead were equated with the earlier prajñāpāramitā literature (Reugg 349).

II. Gampopa

Beyond his being the most famous disciple of Milarepa as well as the founder of the institutionalized Kagyü lineage, Gampopa is regarded as the first to establish the sūtra-based mahāmudrā tradition in Tibet. In the Blue Annals, the most famous indigenous Tibetan historical record, GōLotsawa quotes Gampopa as saying: “The basic text of this mahāmudrā of ours is the Mahāyānotaratantraśāstra (Ratnagotrabhāga) by Venerable Maitreyā” (Mathes, A Direct Path 34) and this decision set the precedent for future Kagyü scholars.

Gampopa’s view of mahāmudrā doctrine begins with his understanding of the nature of the mind as innate, and by extension synonymous with the dharmakāya. This is similar to a position later held by Rangjung Dorjé, who equates the dharmakāya with Buddha nature. In addition, Gampopa is the first individual to use the term “ordinary mind” and to equate this ordinary mind with the dharmakāya. The concept of ordinary mind is an essential aspect of the pointing-out instructions of mahāmudrā, which indicates the authority with which Gampopa can speak in relation to mahāmudrā. Because of the steps Gampopa took in the development of mahāmudrā doctrines, his position with regard to sūtra-based mahāmudrā was seminal in its evolution.

In terms of his didactic method, he places his emphasis heavily on the role of the guru’s blessings rather than Tantric initiation. It is because of this emphasis that “Mahāmudrā […] changed from being the climax of Tantric practice to be a much more subitist-oriented practice through its employment of instant enlightenment” (Kragh 42). In other words, Gampopa’s interpretation of mahāmudrā is seen as a shortcut to the results of the highest Tantric practices, which were accessible only to the most adept practitioners. As for those without the necessary qualities for such practices, the sūtra-based mahāmudrā became a suitable substitute. Therefore, Gampopa viewed sūtra-based mahāmudrā as the more accessible form of mahāmudrā, and evidently felt the desire to expound it. Roger R. Jackson mentions that despite this delineation, “for many bKa’brgyud pas there is no essential difference between the results of Sūtra- and Tantra-Mahāmudrā; it is only the methods
that differ” (R. Jackson, “The dGe ldan-bKa’brgyud” 171).

This lack of prioritization of method highlights the emphasis on increasing accessibility for practitioners regardless of their means, which is indicative of Gampopa’s teaching methods. Unlike conventional mahāmudrā practice, the sūtra-based mahāmudrā practice did not demand initiation but instead required the pointing-out instruction (ngo sprod) of the guru, which offered a glimpse into the nature of one’s own mind. (R. Jackson, “The dGe ldan-bKa’brgyud” 291). For example, in Gampopa’s series of lectures entitled A String of Pearls, every section begins with the preface: “This Dharma teaching can be given to anyone” (Roberts 31). Although the text is not Tantric in content, it does provide a good illustration of Gampopa’s emphasis on the needs-based paradigm of the Dharma. This special importance given to practitioner accessibility is also the case in Gampopa’s Jewel Ornament of Liberation. In particular, the opening chapter on the topic of Buddha-nature emphasizes the different means of attaining liberation. Indeed, Mathes notes that Gampopa “is said to have produced a realization of mahāmudrā even in those beginners who had not obtained Tantric empowerment” (“Blending the Sūtras” 202).

While Gampopa’s emphasis on accessibility is noteworthy, it is not a complete deviation from the established norms of the time. Other authors, such as Gampopa’s nephew Sherab Changchub (1130-1173) argue that: “In general, all beings in samsāra have always appeared as buddhas within, but as long as this has not been pointed out by the nectar of the teacher’s instruction, it is impossible to realize this and liberation cannot be gained,” demonstrating a growing trend in placing greater emphasis on guru practice (Krgh 36). It is plain to see that while Gampopa does not emphasize the importance of Tantric empowerments, he still believes the guru to be central to mahāmudrā practice. In Gampopa’s didactic method, he sets himself up as that very guru, intent on demonstrating that beings of all abilities can participate in mahāmudrā realization.

For Gampopa, where the path of sūtra-based mahāmudrā and the general Mahāyāna path differ is on the means by which practitioners advance on the path. Gampopa distinguishes a path of direct perception from both a general Mahāyāna path of inferences and a Vajrayāna path of blessing (Mathes, “Blending the Sūtras” 202). In other words, Gampopa argues that the mahāmudrā path is distinct from merely receiving teachings and initiation and that there is something far more intimate and direct in mahāmudrā practice. The distinction between the sūtra-based mahāmudrā and the tantra-based mahāmudrā also relates to the means of the practitioners themselves. As Mathes explains: “Mantra mahāmudrā is transmitted through the Vajrayāna path of method, which involves Tantric empowerment. Essence mahāmudrā leads to the sudden or instantaneous realization of one’s ordinary mind (tha mal gyi shes pa)” (“Blending the Sūtras” 201). On the other
hand, sūtra-based mahāmudrā, which is connected to the pāramitā-based pith instructions, involves both settling in the nature of the mind and the affirming negation of meditation on emptiness (Thuken 141). In essence, Gampopa believes that sūtra-based mahāmudrā is hidden in texts such as the Ratnagotravibhāga and his establishment of this path sets the stage for further developments within the Kagyü schools. What must be noted is the fact that Gampopa is not attempting to prove that his is the superior path, but instead pointing out that if mahāmudrā can be found in the sūtras, then it must be available for practitioners of all capacities.

III. RANGJUNG DORJÉ

The Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorjé (1284-1339), was a significant contributor to the early Karma Kagyü tradition and was a central transmitter of sūtra-based mahāmudrā. Known as one of the first Tibetan scholars to provide a systematic treatment of Buddha-nature that stems from within a Tantric, and specifically mahāmudrā-based, context, his interpretations of Buddha-nature and its relation to mahāmudrā offer valuable insight into the sūtra-based mahāmudrā of the Kagyü school. The character of Buddha-nature discourse is a positive affirmation of the innate Buddhahood in all sentient beings; Rangjung Dorjé’s linking of Buddha-nature to mahāmudrā therefore demonstrates a more open and accessible interpretation of mahāmudrā and a continuation of Gampopa’s project.

Evidence points to the likelihood that Rangjung Dorjé composed a summary of the Ratnagotravibhāga; such a document would contain the clearest demonstration of his mahāmudrā reading of the śāstra. However, no such text survives nor do the commentaries composed by his disciples Karma Könzhön and Karma Trinlepa (Mathes, A Direct Path 51). Instead, much of our knowledge regarding his sūtra-based mahāmudrā comes from his commentary on the Dharmadhātustotra, the Profound Inner Meaning (zab mo nang don), and from the Treatise on Buddha Nature (de gshegs snying bstan). In relation to mahāmudrā, Buddha-nature is a very significant topic. Because these texts are primarily concerned with Buddha-nature and would have been greatly influenced by his reading of the Ratnagotravibhāga, an analysis of his perspectives on the subject gives a good indication of his interpretation of a sūtra-based mahāmudrā.

In the Profound Inner Meaning, Rangjung Dorjé uses various illustrations to equate the dharmakāya with dharmadhātu. In his view, the four kāyas are merely aspects of the dharmadhātu, which is synonymous with Buddha-nature because it is endowed with the qualities of the Buddha. By extension, mahāmudrā is a defining characteristic of the dharmadhātu and, thereby, of Buddha-nature (Mathes, A Direct Path 34). Due to the fact that so many seemingly divergent doctrines are considered synonymous, Rangjung Dorjé’s attempt to systematize philosophical terms can be both confusing and problematic. However, when Buddha-nature is explained from within the context
of a zhentong position, his philosophical outlook appears more concrete. As will be discussed in more detail below, Buddha-nature in Rangjung Dorjé’s view is not empty in the Madhyamaka sense that it is itself an illusion empty of intrinsic existence, but is instead empty of qualities other than its inherent (i.e. Buddha) nature. This assertion affirms the innate nature of mind that is mahāmudrā; therefore, the discourse becomes increasingly inclusive, since Buddha-nature doctrine attempted to open practice by demonstrating that all sentient beings possessed the ability to become Buddhas.

On the most fundamental level, Rangjung Dorjé’s views on Buddha-nature can be found in his Treatise on Buddha Nature, where he states that: “Sentient beings are simply Buddhas. / Save for being obscured by adventitious impurity. / If just this [impurity] is removed, there is Buddhahood” (Schaeffer 94). This passage holds the key to the central argument found in Buddha-nature discourse, embedded in the term tathāgathagarbha itself, implying all beings contain a Tathāgata, or Buddha. Although Rangjung Dorjé certainly holds this view, how it manifests in his philosophical discourse is not so simple. This is because the assertion, which Rangjung Dorjé takes as literal, is not in line with the notion of emptiness found in the traditional understanding of the Madhyamaka school. Therefore, Rangjung Dorjé found it necessary to formulate a position for Buddha-nature within Tibetan Buddhist discourse on a sound textual basis that he would label the Great Madhyamaka.

Rangjung Dorjé, like other commentators, sees Buddha-nature as the mahāmudrā term “natural mind” or “ordinary mind” (tha mał gyi shes pa), which is found in the context of the mahāmudrā pointing-out instructions. Because the Profound Inner Meaning is based in the pāramitā-centered mahāmudrā tradition, Rangjung Dorjé views this natural mind as “neither improved by the noble ones nor demolished by sentient beings” (Mathes, A Direct Path 373). In other words, Buddha-nature is an unchangeable aspect of all sentient beings that is not possessed but is instead realized. Rangjung Dorjé takes natural mind as consisting of moments. Therefore, the mental defilements, such as anger and desire, which result in rebirth in saṃsāra, must be removed in order to reveal the momentary natural mind, which is mahāmudrā. By positioning mahāmudrā into Buddha-nature discourse, Rangjung Dorjé contributes to Gampopa’s project of opening mahāmudrā to a wider audience. While the position was politically convenient, this notion is secondary to the efforts of Rangjung Dorjé to demonstrate that if all sentient beings possess the innate qualities of the Buddha, then they have the ability to grasp mahāmudrā.

IV. Gö Lotsawa

A student of the Fifth Karmapa Deshin Shekpa, the historian and scholar Gö Lotsawa (1392-1481) is most famous for the Blue Annals. In addition to this influential work, he wrote a mahāmudrā interpretation of
the Ratnagotravibhāga, found in his commentary on the work itself. At the beginning of his commentary, Gō Lotsawa definitively states his allegiance to the mahāmudrā tradition of Maitrīpa, Dampa Sangyé, and Gampopa. Mathes notes that the “commentary’s main purpose is to teach and justify a [...] sūtra- or pāramitā-based mahāmudrā” (A Direct Path 367). Because his commentary on the Ratnagotravibhāga is still accessible (unlike that of Rangjung Dorjé), and based on the fact that he roots himself firmly in the sūtra-based tradition of Kagyü scholars prior, Gō Lotsawa is the best figure to which to appeal in order to understand the mahāmudrā interpretation of the Ratnagotravibhāga. While he covers many topics in the commentary, some of which have been addressed above, this section will look at two outstanding examples of his mahāmudrā interpretation of the text.

The first notable aspect of Gō Lotsawa’s interpretation is the fact that he reads the four mahāmudrā yogas into the Ratnagotravibhāga. These four distinct phases of mahāmudrā are: one-pointedness, freedom from mental fabrications, one taste, and finally, non-meditation. Gō Lotsawa does not look directly at the Ratnagotravibhāga but instead at the dharmatā23 portion of the Dharmadharmatāvibhāga, which is regarded as a commentary on the second chapter of the Ratnagotravibhāga and which, according to Tibetan tradition, was rediscovered by Maitrīpa along with the Ratnagotravibhāga (Mathes, A Direct Path 368). This text is also regarded as one of the Five Dharmas of Maitreya, and Gō Lotsawa appeals to it in order to buttress his position on not only the four mahāmudrā yogas, but also explanations of practice and elaboration on the three dharmacakras.24 Gō Lotsawa explains that the first two padas25 of the Ratnagotravibhāga I.13 teach the one-pointedness yoga and the yoga of freedom from mental fabrications. In his commentary on the corresponding passage in the Ratnagotravibhāgavyākhyā, in the following lines of stanza 13, he writes: “I bow before those who see that – in view of the natural luminosity of their mind – defilements lack an own-being [I.13a] / And, as a consequence of that, have completely realized the extreme limit of selflessness of all sentient beings and the world as quiescent [I.13b]” (Mathes, A Direct Path 176). Describing the third vajra point, the Jewel of the Saṅgha,26 Gō Lotsawa asserts that these two lines describe the first two of the four mahāmudrā yogas, although they are never explicitly mentioned in either the Ratnagotravibhāga or the Ratnagotravibhāgavyākhyā. Whether or not this is a legitimate interpretive move on Gō Lotsawa’s part is clearly not a question that can be answered. However, it is obvious that the lines can be read from a mahāmudrā perspective without much stretch of the imagination. What is important here is that the reading of the gradual path of the four mahāmudrā yogas into the passages of the Ratnagotravibhāga or the Ratnagotravibhāgavyākhyā is the essence of his sūtra-based mahāmudrā.

Despite the fact that the text is one of the “Five Dharmas of Maitreya”
found in the Cittamātra27 section of the Tengyur,28 it has had numerous Tibetan commentaries written from the perspective of both the dominant views of the Mahāyāna philosophical traditions (Kongtrül 15). Thus, it is considered one of the primary sources linking the Madhyamaka tradition with Vajrayāna Buddhism and, by extension, mahāmudrā. As explained above, in his Dharmadhūtastotra commentary, Rangjung Dorjé equates prajñāpāramitā with mahāmudrā, both of which he sees as being synonymous with the dharmaḥaṭu (Mathes, A Direct Path 34). Gō Lotsawa follows in the same tradition of equating prajñāpāramitā with mahāmudrā in the Blue Annals and this second significant interpretive move that will now be addressed.

The association with prajñāpāramitā is interesting because the latter is considered an essential part of the second turning of the Dharma wheel, i.e. Madhyamaka philosophy, while the Ratnagotravibhāga is associated with the third turning. Some commentators believed Madhyamaka to be the ultimate philosophical school and that the third turning was an exercise in skillful means, whereby doctrines such as Buddha-nature and schools such as Yogācāra were merely provisional teachings for those unable to achieve a realization of emptiness. This is not the case for the scholars in question here, who take Buddha-nature very seriously in relation to mahāmudrā discourse, to the point where they exalt the third turning over the second. By acknowledging the superiority of the third turning, Gō Lotsawa, like Rangjung Dorjé, emphasizes the importance of de-esoterisizing mahāmudrā discourse and views the third dharma wheel as superior for a number of reasons.

In Gō Lotsawa’s view, that it is easier to generate compassion based in the knowledge that all beings possess Buddha qualities. In addition, he believes that the second and third dharma wheels are the same in terms of ontology (Mathes, A Direct Path 369). Despite the fact that they all contain the seeds of definitive meaning, where the second and third differ, and where the third is superior, is in its more nuanced and effective teachings. The supremacy of the third is the essential point to keep in mind when reflecting on the motivations behind reading mahāmudrā into the Ratnagotravibhāga and related texts.

V. QUESTIONS SURROUNDING SŪTRA-BASED MAHĀMUḌRĀ

As mentioned at the outset, the term mahāmudrā never appears in any Buddhist sūtra. If this is indeed the case, it is important to problematize sūtra-based mahāmudrā and explore the possible motivations of various Kagyü scholars who attempted to forge links between the sūtras and mahāmudrā as the latter developed. While it is clear that Kagyü scholars were responding to an emerging scholastic and monastic tradition in Tibet, this point cannot be the sole reason for articulating a sūtra-based mahāmudrā.

In the case of Gampopa, the evidence clearly suggests that his motivations for the creation of a sūtra-mahāmudrā were based on a desire to
bring mahāmudrā to less endowed practitioners, as shown by the fact that his writings focused less on essence-based mahāmudrā and empowerments, and more on the actual teaching of sūtra-based mahāmudrā and meditation. Indeed, a central aspect of Gampopa’s understanding of the method of mahāmudrā is the reliance on the teacher’s blessing to give rise to the first glimpse of enlightenment, as has been argued above (Kragh 37). The second dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet saw a massive upsurge in the popularity of practice. Therefore, Gampopa’s efforts can be seen as an effort to subvert empowerment-based Tantric practice and disseminate esoteric teachings to a wider audience. From his perspective, if mahāmudrā were such an important method for realization, why would it not be found in other Buddhist texts? Clearly Gampopa’s interpretation of mahāmudrā could be considered liberal, and it is thus important to address the fact that the dynamisms of medieval Tibetan Buddhism that may have made a sūtra-based mahāmudrā necessary.

The competition of various lineages and schools throughout Tibet, based on political and doctrinal developments, made it necessary for scholars to appeal to textual authority in order to legitimate their claims. Being able to trace the lineage of teachings back to India was essential for both internal and external validation; a preferred method for many scholars was appealing to scriptures on whose origins there was consensus. For example, the Blue Annals goes to great lengths to defend Gampopa’s sūtra-based mahāmudrā teachings from any accusation of Sino-Tibetan influence, most notably at the hands of Sakya Paṇḍita29 (Mathes, A Direct Path 35). Due to the fact that accusations of Chinese influence were to be avoided as much as possible in post-Samye debate30 Tibet, it is reasonable that scholars such as Rangjung Dorjé and Gō Lotsawa would also appeal to the sūtras in order to establish the doctrinal legitimacy of the Kagyü lineage.

That being said, the first discernible articulation of sūtra-based mahāmudrā comes from Gampopa’s interpretation. If the claim that his motivation was based in the compassionate wish to open the mahāmudrā path to more practitioners of varying means is accepted, then the more overtly politicized efforts of Rangjung Dorjé and Gō Lotsawa can be seen as rooted in the same didactic motivations. Although it can be argued that the reading of mahāmudrā into the sūtras was solely an attempt to gain support for the Kagyü lineage, this interpretation fails to acknowledge what these authors were actually representing in their works. In all the examples provided, Gampopa, Rangjung Dorjé and Gō Lotsawa are opening mahāmudrā discourse to a wider audience and demonstrate the accessibility of mahāmudrā to practitioners of all means.

**Conclusion**

A study of the mahāmudrā interpretation of the Ratnagotravibhāga and other non-Tantric texts offers valuable insight into the philosophical and doctrinal perspectives of influential Kagyü scholars such as Gampopa,
Rangjung Dorjé, and Gō Lotsawa. In addition, the question of why a sūtra-based mahāmudrā was necessary brings up interesting questions regarding the history of the development of the Kagyü schools and their relationship with other schools in medieval Tibet. More broadly, such a phenomenon is indicative of the means by which religious groups worldwide attempt to enforce and legitimize their claims by appealing to an already established scriptural authority.

Beginning with Gampopa, a sūtra-based mahāmudrā intent on emphasizing the role of the guru and downplaying the importance of empowerment starts to develop. Indeed, Gampopa wishes to portray sūtra-based mahāmudrā as a path for practitioners of lesser means. Rangjung Dorjé continues the work of Gampopa by looking to Buddha-nature discourse that inherently emphasizes the innate ability of all beings to participate in mahāmudrā and, in turn, reach Buddhahood. In many ways, Gō Lotsawa fills in the gaps left by Rangjung Dorjé by arguing that much of mahāmudrā doctrine can be found in the Ratnagotravibhāga, which must indicate that the practices associated with mahāmudrā cannot be confined to an elite group of practitioners. By extension, his emphasis on the third turning of the wheel of Dharma mirrors the assertions of Gampopa and Rangjung Dorjé.

The mahāmudrā interpretation of the Ratnagotravibhāga and other non-Tantric texts at the hands of Gampopa, Rangjung Dorjé, and Gō Lotsawa brings up a question of hermeneutics, in that the Ratnagotravibhāga and other non-Tantric texts are confined to the language of the conventional, as opposed to the ultimate, realm of existence. It is of course impossible to say whether or not these texts actually contain mahāmudrā teachings or even themes. However, as Paul Ricoeur once noted: “If it is true that there is always more than one way of construing a text, it is not true that all interpretations are equal” (Ricoeur 160). Indeed, the mahāmudrā interpretation of the Ratnagotravibhāga and other non-Tantric texts did not arise in a vacuum and was subject to the scrutiny of a variety of communities. For this reason, while skeptical perspectives on sūtra-based mahāmudrā are constructive, suspicious perspectives are problematic because they do not allow for the tradition to speak for itself.
NOTES
1. The Kagyü school is one of the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism.
2. This multivalent Sanskrit term, usually translated as “great seal”, is primarily known as a series of meditations on the nature of mind that are central to the Kagyü school. For further information, see Jackson, R., 2013.
3. The Karmapa is the leader of the largest sub-sect of the Kagyü school, the Karma Kagyü.
4. The innate basis for enlightenment found in all sentient beings.
5. One of the two dominant philosophical positions in Mahāyāna Buddhism, the other being Yogācāra.
6. The zhentong (other-empty) philosophical position is concerned with the nature of the mind in relation to emptiness.
7. The four mahāmudrā yogas are four phases of mahāmudrā practice.
8. Śastras are commentaries on sutras.
9. Maitreya is regarded as the future Buddha to come. In the Tibetan tradition, he is believed to have delivered five texts to the Indian scholar-monk Asaṅga.
10. Asaṅga was a fourth century CE Indian scholar-monk famous for expounding the Yogācāra school.
11. Maitrīpa was an eleventh century CE Indian mahāsiddha and teacher of Marpa, one of the founders of the Kagyü school in Tibet.
12. A stupa is structure containing Buddhist relics and texts.
13. The mahāsiddhas are a certain type of yogin/yogini in Tantric Buddhism. Traditionally they are listed as 84 in number.
14. Multivalent term meaning “sphere of dharma” in Sanskrit, this term connotes the realm of truth in Buddhist cosmology.
15. Tathāgatagarbha is the Sanskrit term sometimes translated as Buddha nature or essence.
16. Mahāyāna, or “great vehicle” is a term used to describe the forms of Buddhism popular in Tibet, China, Korea, Japan, and parts of Vietnam.
17. The Dharmakāya is one of the three bodies of the Buddha, usually described as the body of reality itself.
18. Subitist practice, as opposed to gradualist, represents the theory that enlightenment can be attained in a single, instantaneous moment.
20. The Karma Kagyü is a sub-sect of the Kagyü school.
21. Kāya is the Sanskrit term for “body” in the sense of many qualities.
united into one. See Dharmakāya.

22. Dharmatā is a Sanskrit term that means suchness or the true nature of reality.

23. Dharmachakra is the Sanskrit term for “wheel of dharma”.

24. Sanskrit for “chapters”

25. The Saṅgha is the community of Buddhists.

26. Cittamātra is the Sanskrit term “mind-only”, which is the label for the Yogācāra section of the Tengyur.

27. The Tengyur is the collection of commentaries on Buddhist teachings that makes up one half of the Tibetan canon.

28. Sakya Paṇḍita was the thirteenth century CE leader of the Sakya school of Tibetan Buddhism.

29. The Samye debate was a two-year debate (c. 792–794 CE) held between Chinese and Indian Buddhist scholars to determine which philosophical school would hold primacy in Tibet.

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SQUEAKY WHEELS:  
The Role of Online Content in the Perceptions of Religious Extremism  
A.S. Lewyckyj

In the information age, popular conceptions of the world’s religions have become muddled rather than clarified. Exacerbating this problem, media representations of religious traditions are full of misconceptions and misunderstandings. Given the ever-growing importance of online media, it is critical that the ways in which religions are represented and misrepresented on blogs, social media, and other Internet forums be understood. This paper explores how the Internet contributes to misunderstandings of religion, specifically the role of content creation online in driving sensationalism and misconceptions between religions, creating the illusion that religious extremism is more frequent and influential than it is in reality. It will be demonstrated how the democratization of information in globalized media, especially Internet content, has created and continues to create definitions and perceptions of religious traditions that do not consistently reflect the lived realities of practitioners. These warped definitions can be attributed to biases in the coverage of religious traditions, the accessibility of information via the internet, and the deconstruction of authority online.

I. SENSATIONALISM AND THE FAIRNESS BIAS

Popular discussions on religion have long run the risk of sensationalism—Victorian England, for example, was fascinated by tales of thugges and their secretive and violent devotions to a ‘cult of Kali’ (Wagner 353-376). This tendency towards the dramatic has only grown with the advent of the Internet, where eyes on a page translate into advertising revenues: the more pages of a website a guest views, and the more guests a website has, the more money stands to be made through online advertising (Evans 44). Additionally, there are those, such as many major newspapers, who charge viewers for access to their website. They must convince an audience used to accessing Internet media for free that this particular content is worth paying for. In both cases, eye-catching headlines and shocking stories drive viewership, while thoughtful and nuanced explanations do not provide the same excitement as extreme cases. In the same way that criticism has been levied at news journalism for only reporting on negative stories, it can be said that Internet coverage of religions focuses on outliers despite the fact that they are rarely representative of a religious tradition as a whole.

There is another, less cynical, explanation for the overrepresentation of
extremists in religious coverage. Both online and offline, the way an issue is presented and discussed shapes the way the audience understands it. Andrew Cline identifies a series of ‘structural biases’ in journalism, which include temporal bias (the desire in news media to follow stories which are ‘new and fresh’), glory bias (the insertion of journalists into stories they cover), and visual bias (preference for visual depictions of news), among others. Most saliently for this argument are what Cline calls ‘fairness bias’ and ‘expediency bias.’

Cline describes the fairness bias as a result of an ethical journalistic practice, which “demands that reporters and editors be fair. […] Whenever one faction or politician does something or says something newsworthy, the press is compelled by this bias to get a reaction from an opposing camp.” Though Cline is referring to political divisions when he writes about the fairness bias, it can also be applied to coverage of religions. The pressure to appear fair and unbiased, especially when dealing with the many possible interpretations of a religion, often leads journalists to pursue alternative opinions, or ‘the other side of the story,’ even when the dissenting view or interpretation is held by a comparatively small group of practitioners. Fringe groups thus gain an opportunity to draw attention to themselves and have their ideologies legitimized through mainstream news coverage, while news consumers are misled into believing these views are more prominent or influential than they actually are.

Cline’s expediency bias also provides a useful framework for understanding flaws in religious coverage. He notes that in order to remain competitive, journalists and news outlets must produce material faster than ever before, creating a bias toward information that can be obtained quickly, easily, and inexpensively. […] Much of deadline decision making comes down to gathering information that is readily available from sources that are well known (Cline).

Accuracy in news coverage is not as important as the speed with which information can be delivered, and the first opinions present are those reported. If a fringe group exploits this bias by being first to comment on a news-worthy event, they are more likely to be featured in media coverage, regardless of their status within their larger communities. The expediency bias is deepened by the nature of content online. From the 140-character limit on Twitter posts, to the social app “Vine” which limits videos to six seconds, to popular microblogging sites such as Tumblr, the Internet favours short-form content that can be easily scanned, reposted, and shared. For many, the currency of the Internet is thought of as the number of people who view a post. Complex issues cannot be conveniently compressed into soundbites or three-sentence summaries; therefore, they are dramatically simplified to the
point of inaccuracy, or simply ignored.

The Westboro Baptist Church is a prime example of the ways in which the above biases favour coverage of extremists. Its forty-person congregation represents only 0.0002% of over twenty million Baptists in the United States, but receives disproportionately large amount of news coverage (“Statistics”). The church has become infamous for its inflammatory statements and public appearances, such as picketing the funerals of US soldiers with slogans including “God Hates F*gs” (homophobic slur censored), “Thank God For 9/11,” and “God Hates The Marine Corps.” Its website, www.godhatesf*gs.com, is among the web’s most criticized, featuring sermons, videos, pop-song parodies, and Biblical quotes about current events. Members of the Phelps family at the heart of the congregation have been interviewed on major news networks such as CNN and BBC, and have been prominently featured in several documentary films, including 2007’s “The Most Hated Family in America.” The church is best known in the United States, especially for the 2011 Supreme Court decision “Snyder v. Phelps,” which established that their protests were protected by the First Amendment. According to Pew Research, in the week of the Supreme Court ruling, the Westboro Baptist Church was the subject of 78% of reporting on religion, and was the fourth-biggest storyline in religion coverage that year (“Religion in the News”). The WBC is just one of the fringe groups that cast enormous shadows in the public mind. They have become experts at using the biases of the media for self-promotion by responding quickly to news events, accusing the media of being biased against them should their opinions go unheard, and creating sensationalist “bite-size” messages such as “God Hates F*gs” or the Dove Outreach Center’s “International Burn a Koran [sic] Day.” Despite their very limited memberships, these religious groups have been over-represented in media coverage, which enables them to have a large hand in defining, in popular culture, the overarching traditions to which they belong.

II. THE ACCESSIBILITY OF INFORMATION AND THE CRISIS OF AUTHENTICITY

The nature of information-sharing in the age of the Internet has contributed to flaws in coverage of religious issues. Information online is often more difficult to identify as reliable than offline sources of information. The world of mass information promised by the Internet requires considerable critical and analytical thought, which is not always deployed, to identify authentic and accurate content online. Given the unprecedented opportunities for online self-publication and the lack of ‘vetting’ it requires, it can be challenging to authenticate information provided through internet media. Dawson and Cowan identify these difficulties in authenticating online information as a “crisis of authenticity” (2).

There are other ways in which the crisis of authenticity manifests. The accessibility of seemingly complete information about complex traditions can result in the overestimation of one’s knowledge, and leads to a perception of
expertise after a relatively limited investment of time and effort. Berger and Ezzy specifically identify the prevalence of teenagers in online Pagan covens as part of this phenomenon. Chatroom practitioners are able to become ‘instant experts’ and quickly transition from students to teachers, without significant oversight of their individual practice (Berger and Ezzy 176). For those researching Pagan traditions, or other religions online, becoming sufficiently educated and proficient in a topic may seem deceptively simple. In turn, confidence in one’s knowledge comes easily, though not always deservedly. While it is sometimes tiresome to decipher what is true and what is untrue as a consumer of Internet media, it can be more difficult to identify the incompleteness of one’s own knowledge.

There is a third level to the crisis of authenticity online. In his essay “On Bullsh*t,” Harry G. Frankfurt identifies that “[a] lack of connection to a concern with truth—[an] indifference to how things really are—[is what] I regard as the essence of bullsh*t” (34). What Frankfurt calls bullsh*t is more dangerous than lying, because to lie is to deliberately misrepresent a truth of which one is aware: bullsh*t is to speak, disseminate information, or create media with little or no attention paid to the truth or reality (Frankfurt 34). In terms of perceptions of religions online, not all content creators have sufficient knowledge of the topics about which they are writing to identify the information they spread as true or false. Stories and urban legends rife with misconceptions are produced and spread, while the aforementioned biases in coverage mean that myths of extremism become the most viral. For example, in June of 2012, the popular news, entertainment, and social networking site Reddit had its front page filled by users posting anti-Muslim photos, captions, and cartoons (Chen). These ‘memes’ did not come with citations, were published anonymously, and made it to the website’s front page by being voted up and shared by users. Few, if any, among the content creators or re-posters cared enough about the accuracy of the posts’ claims to allow viewers to check their assertions.

III. THE CRISIS OF AUTHORITY

Dawson and Cowan note that accompanying the crisis of authenticity is a crisis of authority (9). Online, religious authority is decoupled and separated from information: readers may find it difficult to identify whether a content creator is an authority on a subject, and whether a content creator is speaking as an individual or as a representative of a larger group. As described above, it is difficult to authenticate authorities online, both in terms of sources (which websites contain accurate and dependable information, for example) and in terms of authoritative bodies. Information obtained online can be posted without any oversight from authoritative sources such as churches or international organizations. Moreover, it is often difficult to ascertain whether the information provider is even a practitioner or affiliated with the religion they are attempting to present. Many facts and figures cited online
Ironically, however, the divorce of authority from information online means that the ability of religious practitioners to correct misconceptions is limited. As part of the process of authenticating information found online, anecdotal or personal narratives are rarely considered reliable. The democratization of information on the internet means that individuals are able to produce and exchange content and information in a relatively unmediated way, without the corrective intercession of authorities on the subject; in other words, there is no vetting process. That being said, it is often more difficult for an individual to be heard when contesting misinformation online than for a recognizable figure of authority to do the same thing. The result is a Catch-22: those with a deeper understanding of a religious tradition can be shut out of discussions because ignorant individuals have engendered skepticism and a deep mistrust of online content, while the sheer number of online forums means that the uninformed can still post freely elsewhere.

Another aspect of the crisis of authority is related to the crisis of authenticity: it is the crisis of authentic authority. Just as it can be difficult to validate information obtained online, it can be difficult to verify self-identified authorities. Dawson and Cowan identify the dualistic dynamic of “online religion” and “religion online,” whereby the online and offline worlds engage in a complex interplay of authority. “Religion online describes the provision of information about and/or services related to various religious groups and traditions” (Dawson and Cowan 7) that have a presence offline. For example, the Montreal Hindu-Mandir temple has a site at www.hindumandir.com, which contains information about the temple, the community it serves, and about the basic layout of the temple. Although it also provides detailed and up-to-date information about the temple’s event calendar, and the suggested donations for each religious service, a visitor cannot make these donations online. The only contact information available consists of phone numbers—there are no e-mail addresses listed on the website at all. The website’s primary purpose is to provide information about a physical location and real-world community.

In contrast to religion online, online religion uses the Internet as an interactive tool, “invit[ing] Internet visitors to participate in religious practices” (Dawson and Cowan 7). Hinduism again provides us with a fruitful example in ePrathana, which allows visitors purchase puja for real-life temples and offers virtual pujas. ePrathana’s interactive online videos for nearly a dozen deities include the basic elements of a real-life puja—the visitor can ring a bell, wave an arati lamp, or offer a basket of flowers to the deity. This is the embodiment of online religion: the entire religious experience takes place online, without significant reference or dependence on a real-world institution or specific community.

There is considerable debate over the comparable validity of religion
online as opposed to online religion, especially over the authenticity of religious authorities. In “religion online,” it can be easier to recognize authority as valid because of the way in which offline communities, traditions, and social structures are seen as more real. Having an offline guarantor of a religious tradition or community authenticates it, since it is not “just something on the Internet.” Though legitimacy and authority can be more difficult to identify in online religions, participants in these traditions often better at using the Internet. Whereas “religion online” uses the Internet unidirectionally, as a way of distributing information, online religion uses the Internet as a dynamic platform for exchange, collaboration, and creation. Simply put, religion online is a non-experiential placeholder for religion offline, while online religion is, in itself, a religious experience. Given that participants in online religion make greater use of the Internet, they are closer to the lightning-fast process of web development and innovation.

Ironically, the religious authorities who are most qualified to correct misconceptions about their religious traditions and have those corrections heard and respected are often ill-equipped to maneuver the online world where these misconceptions flourish. Older and more staid institutions, such as the Roman Catholic Church, are often seen as bearing more authority: the importance of tradition in creating authenticity cannot be underestimated. This same conservatism, however, means that these institutions are slower to adopt and adapt to new technologies and forms of media, sometimes finding themselves struggling to catch up and remain relevant. This tendency is changing, however, to which the existence of the Holy See’s @pontifex Twitter account can attest.

**CONCLUSION**

Despite the concerns this paper raises about the creation of misconceptions, especially about religious extremism online, nearly all of the above categories of risk are equally capable of being mobilized for good. While sensationalism can lead the media to focus on dramatic outliers, it also highlights especially heinous international events and, through its drama, can call the viewer to action. Though the fairness bias may create space for extreme opinions in the minority to insert themselves into a discussion, it is a testament to a fundamentally good instinct in journalists to present balanced arguments. The expediency bias may preclude significant analysis in breaking news, but it also takes advantage of one of the Internet’s most powerful features: the instantaneous nature of information transfer. Short-form media such as Twitter may not allow for exploration of a topic, but they have proven to be powerful tools for connecting individuals internationally. This effect has been especially evident during moments of rapid change, instability, or uncertainty, such as the Egyptian Revolution, the Syrian civil war, or the current protests in Ukraine. The accessibility of information online may have created a crisis of authenticity, but it has created opportunities for individu-
als who may be unable to access traditional forms of education. Although there may be a crisis of authority in online religions/religions online, the dismantling of traditional authoritative structures allows for an outpouring of creativity, a diversity of divergent interpretation, and the empowerment of individuals to renegotiate their relationships with their religions.

**NOTES**

1. It should be noted that although this section deals almost exclusively with trends in news media coverage, they are similarly applicable to other forms of content creation online. The trends are, however, more identifiable and ultimately more harmful in commercial news media, which presents itself as objective and professional.

2. Notably, the BWA has disavowed the Westboro Baptist Church, and while the WBC has rejected affiliation with the BWA, it continues to identify itself as Baptist. The WBC’s 40 members are not included in membership statistics published by the BWA.

**WORKS CITED**


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