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Book review: Mark Juergensmeyer, *Global Rebellion: Religious Challenges to the Secular State from Christian Militias to Al Qaeda*. University of California Press: Berkeley, CA, 2009; ISBN 9780520261570

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Marxist premise, which deserves more serious consideration by most of academia: ‘We need organic intellectuals capable of theorizing the changes that have taken place in the system of capitalism . . . and of providing to popular majorities . . . theoretical insights as inputs for their real-world struggles . . .’ (p. xiii). *Latin America and Global Capitalism* makes a major contribution to that effort.

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Mark Juergensmeyer, *Global Rebellion: Religious Challenges to the Secular State from Christian Militias to Al Qaeda*. University of California Press: Berkeley, CA, 2009; ISBN 9780520261570

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The basic argument in this insightful and ambitious new book is that the secular ideology underlying the Western nation-state has come under attack by a decentralized, multi-stranded ‘global

rebellion' that pits itself against its basic underlying cultural principles. This set of loosely interlinked and partially independent movements is unabashedly religious. Their main aim – across a wide variety of cultural and geographical settings – is to supplant the institution of the secular nation-state as an instrumental compact among private citizens with one in which the nation reflects moral and ethical values derived from distinct religious traditions and becomes inherently tied to religious definitions of the political community. Here a politicized orientation towards the sacred, and not appeal to abstract ideologies based on science or Western political theory, becomes the public face of the nation-state and the primary legitimizing force behind its legal and military power.

Representing a radically updated version (essentially a 'new book' [p. ix]) of the *The New Cold War* – written in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet bloc – *Global Rebellion* traces the historical emergence of the peculiar Western notion of the secular nation-state from its beginnings in England and continental Europe to its eventual exportation and apparent triumph during the post-war New World Order. A key observation is that the Western secular nation emerged from a struggle with its own brand of religious nationalism (the case of England fits best here), which made it suspicious of any attempt by religion to claim a powerful place in the public arena. As such the West's current struggle with global religious nationalism becomes essentially a recapitulation of a long-ago buried trauma through which contemporary secular ideologies that legitimize the nation-state were forged.

Juergensmeyer is clear to note that here the apparent opposition between market-based Western democracy and command and control Soviet-style socialism was more apparent than real: for both capitalism and socialism shared the same underlying premise, and emerged from essentially the same (Western, European) cultural complex (after all Marx and Smith were members of the same tradition of Western Political Economy). What appeared as a curious statement before 1989, now seems retroactively obvious as both Western democracy and what remains of Soviet socialism are confronted by an enemy that rejects them for the same set of reasons: in their own way Western democracy – by making it a 'private' issue and by instituting some sort of *de jure* separation between church and state – and socialism – by attempting to eradicate it as a defective ideological stance – cannot accommodate the religious nationalist's demand to make fundamentally sacred principles the pillars of public order and the substantive bases of legality.

Juergensmeyer mobilizes an impressive array of evidence – mostly taken from interviews with a variety of intellectual figures within the various religious nationalist movements but also from historical and archival sources – to demonstrate the recent emergence of a surprising convergence across geography and faith: most religious nationalists, whether Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Sikh, Buddhist or Hindu, have essentially the same goal and have a shared understanding of who the primary enemy is. The goal is to capture (inevitably by force) the political machinery of the state making it concordant with sacred principles. The enemy is the United States and its Western European allies as representative of secular democracy, although in practice the true enemy is any local political leadership who aligns itself with the Western secular tradition.

This blurs the (already indefensible) boundaries between 'global' and 'domestic' episodes of political violence and terrorism: in attacking and attempting to bring down 'local' governments, religious nationalists see themselves as also striking a blow against the global ideology that supports the Western faith in secular progress. This striking fact is revealed in the religious nationalists' own discourse, as they see the battle not as one between secular and religious forces, but between two 'religions', one Western, alien and 'false' and the other one culturally proximate, allied with tradition (as reconstructed and constantly retooled by religious experts) and inherently tied to a substantive definition of political community and thus 'true'.

Juergensmeyer clearly demonstrates that here what is usually taken as 'resentment' generated by colonial imposition of Western cultural models, can be given a more precise interpretation: for the religious nationalists are clear that it is not the mere fact of cultural importation that they stand against – since they make use of modern technologies when it suits their purposes – but the fact that what is being imported is what they perceive as a corrosive secular ideology; one that if it were to be adopted would spell the end of religion as they understand it (religion as the basis of public order and as definitional of who belongs within the nation) and would usher in an era of precipitous moral decline. Juergensmeyer's interview data confirms this in an effective way: metaphors based on the notions 'corrosion', 'infection' and 'Westoxification' abound in the discourse of religious nationalists and the political elites that support them.

In is in this respect that the key story in *Global Rebellion* is precisely that based not on two disembodied 'models' or 'ideologies' for legitimizing the nation-state but on two *groups* of factions competing for cultural authority and political legitimacy: on one side, we have Western-style politicians and allied secular movements and organizations (e.g. the United Nations, INGOs, etc.) who see themselves as technocrats – standing for such things as economic and scientific 'progress' – or as global political actors struggling for human rights with no clear connection to any particular faith or place (essentially a global continuation of the Western secular project). Against them stand the anti-modernist religious nationalists who position themselves as representatives of equally transcendental, sacred principles in which the notion of progress is redefined in two ways. First, it is extended to include a concern with the locus of sacredness and cultural authority. Second, it is specified to the extent of becoming charged with non-negotiable stipulations as to what constitutes a morally defensible way of life and what constitutes those modes of organizing society which are to be rejected as immoral (this goes against the secular penchant to separate legality from 'private' morality).

A key analytic advantage of the framework laid out in the book is the rejection of traditional terms such as 'fundamentalists' as imprecise and as productive of more confusion than enlightenment. Instead, Juergensmeyer opts for the notion of *anti-modernism* to refer to the converging set of ideological principles that has come to dominate various religious-nationalist movements. For the anti-modernist, it is the cultural justification of the nation-state that is rejected (and with it, all of the Western-style cultural movements that are based on it such as feminism, multiculturalism and those advocating for the rights of sexual minorities and the notion of universal human rights). While the anti-modernist does take a basic religious text as the point of departure (which is consistent with the notion of fundamentalism) the key point is that the organizational apparatus of the Western nation-state is not rejected. Instead, a synthesis emerges in which the bureaucratic, rational-legal, politico-military structure of the modern nation-state becomes imbued with an essentially otherworldly, religious definition of both political authority and the political community that is seen as legitimately subsumed under that authority.

Religious identification thus comes to surpass historical claims to territory as the primary basis for defining the political community; this is at the same time as territories become particularized and imbued with sacredness. In this way, the territorial calculus of anti-modernist politico-military organizations comes to be driven by considerations that transcend those of a purely secular government (e.g. considerations geopolitical vulnerability). Juergensmeyer shows that this simultaneous decoupling and partial re-coupling of territory, community and nationhood produces predictable contradictions. These include multiple claims to the same territory by members of different ethno-religious communities – the prototypical case being the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – but also the emergence of tension between the non-territorial definition of community in most world religions – 'imagined communities' in Benedict Anderson's sense – and the essential locality and territoriality of the nation-state. Here claims to territory come to be blended with apocalyptic visions of the

meaning that the occupancy of certain sites have for the course of world history, marking these battles with a pathos that is certainly lacking in most traditional contests for geopolitical supremacy among secular state actors.

The empirical backbone of *Global Rebellion* consists of a series of four case studies – organized by geographical region – covering the emerging (and in some cases either declining, blooming or maturing) politico-military movements based on anti-modernist religious nationalism. The book begins, predictably, on the Middle East and ends closer to home (Europe and the United States). The range of the analysis is impressive as is the wealth of evidence that is brought to bear on each case. As would be the case with an analysis of this scope and ambition, Juergensmeyer sacrifices detail in the interest of providing a big-picture characterization and in highlighting discursive and tactical commonalities across the cases. This entails understating the specificities and idiosyncrasies of each case (although to Juergensmeyer's credit these are duly noted). I believe that both novices and specialists will learn a lot from Juergensmeyer's timely analysis (I sure did); this statement applies with even more force for those movements (such as religious nationalist struggles in West and Central Asia) that usually do not make it to the headlines. The book also provides a large appendix of references on each of the regions and movements that it covers that will also be of interest to researchers in area and religious studies.

I found the analytical framework to be one of the most impressive contributions in this book. The ideal-type definitions of anti-modernism and religious nationalism allows us to see commonalities across a wide variety of cases; the basic proposition that religious nationalists have identified secular Western democracy as a common enemy is convincing and is powerful aid for theory. As with any conceptual framework of this scope however, there are a few limitations. Some of them are minor (such as Juergensmeyer's inexplicable endorsement of Pape's rational action theory of religious terrorism, when most of Juergensmeyer's data demonstrate without a doubt the power of religion as itself a powerful motivating force); others are more consequential.

First, the focus on 'ideology' can sometimes be excessive. While it is true that the various participants in the religious 'global rebellion' against the West that Juergensmeyer identifies do seem to share broad orientations toward political action, it is also the case that they share similar organizational structures and that they are interlinked through communication networks that will produce similarity in positioning beyond those accounted by the power of ideology. A more nuanced analytical focus on organizational forms and dynamics would do a lot to strengthen Juergensmeyer's case.

Second, the notion of a 'second Cold War' does not strike me as a useful analytical lens; in a certain respect this conceptual remnant from Juergensmeyer's initial treatment stands in tension with the more recent analytical reconstruction of the conflict as one pitting secular against religious nationalists. The notion of a new Cold War produces an ersatz homogenization of what remains a heterogeneous, decentralized and partially autonomous set of rebellions against local 'avatars' (or representatives) of the West. In fact that the conflict can be characterized as such is belied by Juergensmeyer's effective critique of the Bush administration's notion that they were engaging in 'war' against a single pre-defined 'enemy'. In addition, the idea of 'a new Cold War' is powerless to conceptualize the conflict between secular and religious nationalists within the same nation (as the notion of a nation in a 'Cold War' with itself does not make much sense).

The notion of a 'Cold War' produces an imagery of two powerful ideologies locked in combat for global legitimacy. This over-inflates the power and influence of religious nationalism (which, while growing and undoubtedly important, remains modest as shown in Juergensmeyer's own analysis in the last chapter of the book) and over-dramatizes the weakness of the secular nation-state (whose death at the hands of globalization has been greatly exaggerated). It is important to

note that this remains an example of *asymmetric* conflict, and that the resource advantages of Western states over their ethno-religious competitors cannot be under-estimated.

But the Cold War was not just a battle of ideologies, but one between two organizationally coherent geopolitical actors endowed with unitary status and (regional) legitimacy. In Juergensmeyer's case neither the 'West' nor the decentralized 'global rebels' qualifies as such. However, the need to personify the conflict as involving such unitary actors is evident in Juergensmeyer's own data, and explains why it is that the United States (as representative of the most forceful and successful version of Western democracy and capitalism) and Radical Islam (as representative of the most successful version of radical anti-modernism) are usually recruited for the part. This suggests that the characterization of the conflict as a 'Cold War' may be more interesting as itself a piece of contested ideology than as a useful social-scientific construct.