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*Secularism and the State in Pakistan**

Introduction

HUMEIRA IQTIDAR

Centre of South Asian Studies and King's College, University of Cambridge, Laundress Lane, Cambridge CB2 1SD, UK
Email: hi217@cam.ac.uk

AND

DAVID GILMARTIN

Department of History, North Carolina State University, 350 Withers Hall, Raleigh, North Carolina 27695-8108, USA
Email: david_gilmartin@ncsu.edu

Pakistan occupies an uncertain and paradoxical space in debates about secularism. On the one hand, the academic consensus (if there is any), traces a problematic history of secularism in Pakistan to its founding Muslim nationalist ideology, which purportedly predisposed the country towards the contemporary dominance of religion in social and political discourse. For some, the reconciliation of secularism with religious nationalism has been a doomed project; a country founded on religious nationalism could, in this view, offer no future other than its present of Talibans, Drone attacks and Islamist threats. But on the other hand, Pakistan has also been repeatedly held out as a critical site for the redemptive power of secularism in the Muslim world.

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The idea that religious nationalism and secularism could combine to provide a path for the creation of a specifically Muslim state on the Indian subcontinent is often traced to the rhetoric of Pakistan's founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah. But debate among Muslim League leaders specifically on the relationship of religious nationalism with secularism—and indeed on the nature of the Pakistani state itself—was limited in the years before partition in 1947. Nevertheless, using aspects of Jinnah's rhetoric and holding out the promise of secularism's redemptive power, a military dictator, Pervez Musharraf, was able to secure international legitimacy and support for almost a decade.

Perhaps because of the lack of pre-independence debate within the Muslim League, since 1947, the relationship between secularism and religious nationalism has, in fact, been widely debated in Pakistan.[1] However, in recent years such discussions have taken on new meanings. The current backdrop for debates on secularism in both academic circles and in popular political discourse is provided by the anxiety generated by the role of Islam in world politics in the post-Cold War era. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the 'war on terror', and the fear of religion—particularly Islam—as a potentially irrepressible source of violence and disorder in a capitalist world, has sparked new interest in secularism as an ideology of stability. Debates about the rise of political religion have arisen in various parts of the world, and these have generated new discussions on the relationship of secularism to political order. These debates have taken on their most visceral form in predominantly Muslim countries and with respect to Muslim minorities elsewhere. Notions of Islam's inability to secularize and its apparently unmatched ability to retain a hold over the 'Muslim mind' saturate international debates about secularism. Pakistan's local problems in this context have, thus, more recently taken on a global significance.

The term 'secularism' is, of course, one that carries multiple meanings and implications.[2] In practical terms the range of institutional arrangements subsumed under the rubric of secularism contain the spectrum of state-supported churches and temples to a

[1] For some discussion of this, see Leonard Binder (1963), *Religion and Politics in Pakistan*, University of California Press, Berkeley.

[2] When Agamben noted that '[t]here is a moment in the life of concepts when they lose their immediate intelligibility and can then . . . be overburdened with contradictory meanings' he could very easily have been talking about secularism. Agamben, Giorgio (1998). *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, p. 80.

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free market of religious enterprise.[3] The most commonly held view of secularism—both in popular debates and in academic writing—has been of a strict delineation of the private and the public sphere and the relegation of religion to the private: the proverbial clear separation between the church and the state. However, such a view has been challenged not just by the empirical reality of religion's refusal to be banished from the public domain, but also by a range of studies exploring both the historical processes in specific detail as well as the contemporary situation with an eye towards interrogating the categories of analysis. In this context, a key challenge has been raised by the anthropologist Talal Asad's reformulation of secularism. Asad argues that contrary to the commonly held view of a clear separation of domains the pattern that emerges is of increasing entanglement, albeit one where the state manages religious practice and increasingly religious thought as well. More interestingly, Asad points out that this management of religion by the state in fact produces new forms of religion.[4] One can, of course, write of secularism in ways that carry attention away from the state and to the place of religion (or lack of a role for religion) in everyday life. Some would analyse the historical processes by which religion has in some contexts assumed a qualitatively different role in social life as part of a process of secularization that could remain orthogonal to, or at least not directly dependant upon, state projects.[5] Nevertheless, Asad's intervention has been a productive one and the papers included in this forum engage with it implicitly and explicitly.

Fundamental to the papers in this forum is the assumption that underlying all discussions of secularism must be an analysis of

[3] Some recent useful additions, particularly focused on the South Asian, particular Indian context, to the vast and growing body of literature on secularism include: Jacobsohn, Gary (2003). *Wheels of Law: Indian Secularism in Constitutional Comparative Context*, Princeton University Press, Princeton; Kumar, Sunil (2001). *Communalism and Secularism in Indian Politics: A Study of BJP*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur; Dingwaney Needham and Sunder Rajan (eds) (2007). *The Crisis of Secularism in India*, Duke University Press, Durham; T. N. Srinivasan (ed.) (2007). *The Future of Secularism*, Oxford University Press, Delhi. For a recent critical look at legal structures and management of religion in Pakistan see Ahmed, Asad (2010). 'The Paradoxes of Ahmadiyya Identity: Legal Appropriation of Muslim-ness and the Construction of Ahmadiyya Difference', in Naveeda Khan (ed.) *Beyond Crisis: Re-evaluating Pakistan*, Routledge, Delhi.

[4] Asad, Talal (2003). *Formations of the Secular: Islam, Christianity, Modernity*, Stanford University Press, Stanford.

[5] For instance, Iqtidar, H.(forthcoming 2011). *Secularising Islamists? Jamaat-e-Islami and Jamaat-ud-Dawa in Pakistan*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

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the state and its relationship with society. The impulse within the papers collected here is to ground discussions of secularism within the larger paradoxes of the modern state—paradoxes relating to the state's efforts to conceptually separate itself from society (and thus define a place for itself as the external, 'secular' regulator of society) even as it increasingly penetrates society and defines its authority through its ever-increasing entanglement in daily life. In adopting this focus, the papers link the discussion of secularism to academic debates about the nature of the state. These debates have crystallized competing visions of the state as, on the one hand, a congeries of fluid institutional structures, interpenetrated by society, and, on the other hand, as an imagined unitary entity, juxtaposed against society. The papers suggest that no discussion of secularism can effectively navigate secularism's paradoxes without confronting the state's conflicting meanings. If secularism defines some form of institutional or conceptual separation of religion from the state, then, such a separation can only be understood within the larger framework of the state's conceptual, if paradoxical, separation from society, both in imagination and in institutional form.

The case of Pakistan is an excellent one for approaching secularism in this way, for it provides a clear perspective on how the analysis of secularism cannot be limited by any simple formula for the separation of religion from the state. Pakistan's history allows us to see more clearly than in most other histories that the notion of a secular state that can claim to stand above (and therefore 'manage' religion), does not necessarily mean a state divorced from religion. As Talal Asad's arguments suggest, the question of the state's management of religion opens critical windows on how the state navigates its claims to power as an imagined locus of power existing outside society, even as it exercises power through interventions in society. And yet such perspectives also suggest how society's own structurings both constrain and enable state-society interactions, producing new subjectivities and norms tied to religious practice in the process.

The papers in the forum thus complicate our understanding of the state and of its abilities to manage and model religious thought and practice by focusing on the role of imagination. As Humeira Iqtidar notes in her paper, the very distinction between 'state' and 'society' needs to be understood as an institution of the imagination. Such a framing is important in Pakistan. The Pakistan state's historical place in popular imagination as a unitary entity, embodying the community, is instrumental to its claims to manage religion, and at this level,

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the conceptual distinction between state and society remains critical for thinking about secularism in Pakistan. Yet, all the papers show that the role of the state has also been constantly re-imagined and continuously re-negotiated in Pakistan, in interaction with changing social forces. If the state's claims to unitary authority are integral to its assertion of a legitimate interest in acting upon religion, rather than being controlled by it, the state's porousness as an actual institution makes it susceptible to being manipulated by religious forces, or in the name of religion. This inevitably impinges not only on its institutional functioning, but also on its moral claims to legitimacy.[6] The role of religion in society's 'management' of the state is thus the flip-side of the question that Asad raises and one that all the contributors to this forum engage with in different ways.

All four papers thus challenge the notion of the state as a completed project that is often assumed by analysts of secularism. The distinction drawn most commonly in debates about the state relates primarily to notions of strength and weakness or between theocracy and secularism. However, such a focus hides the fact that most states operate in the vast middle range covered by such binary oppositions. More critically, we do not have the vocabulary to talk about states as simultaneously imagined unitary entities, and as fragmented, fluid, always-incomplete projects.[7] Kamran Asdar Ali shows how, immediately after Partition, the state in Pakistan seemed unformed enough for intellectuals of varying persuasions and political allegiances to debate how to shape it and what its role should be in the new country. Asdar Ali highlights the sense of contingency and the range of options being explored among the urban intelligentsia. His paper thus undercuts any teleological narrative of Pakistan's history as simply the inevitable unfolding of a logic of Muslim nationalism. Sadaf Aziz's paper complements this analysis by showing how, in the current political context too, the state remains an ongoing project, its validity, viability and sovereignty constantly under imaginative reconstruction,

[6] For a look at the sources of legitimacy for a separate state of Pakistan see Gilmartin, David (1988). *Islam and Empire: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan*, I. B. Tauris, London.

[7] The dominance that the idea of the state exercises in defining the terms of political debates and discussions goes hand in hand with a certain amount of inflexibility of vocabulary. Hedley Bull remarked that 'one reason for the vitality of the state systems is the tyranny of the concepts and the normative principles associated with it' (Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, London: Macmillan, 1977: 275).

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yet also constantly challenged and under threat. Iqtidar's and Nelson's papers highlight the ways that shifts in the roles of the state have critically shaped both the Jamaat-e-Islami and student organization. As Iqtidar shows, the Jamaat-e-Islami initially invested deeply in the years before and soon after partition in the idea of a state whose powers, if directed by a committed elite, could morally transform society. But in the face of changing domestic political imperatives and international shifts in the state's post-Cold War role, changes in the idea of the state have transformed the purpose and method of the Jamaat-e-Islami organization as well. Nelson's paper brings out the ways that shifting ideas about the state shaped new visions of student organization and action in the decades since the 1950s and 1960s. He documents the decline in the dominance of the idea of a territorial state and its replacement, at least in part, by the notion of a transnational *ummah* (community or nation) among university students. Yet, his work also suggests the continuity of the unitary vision of moral community that had at one time been associated with the state, but that has increasingly been displaced onto an image of a mobilized *ummah*.

Critical to extending our understanding of the variations in secularism, then, is not a generic metric of strength or weakness of the state but is the precise contours of its ability to manage religious thought and practice. As noted by Aziz, state ventures relating to secularism are not always implemented and executed exactly as planned. Her analysis of the role of Ghamidi as a public intellectual whose career has been built 'precipitously close to the official elaboration of the Enlightened Moderation agenda' under Musharraf, allows us to see the ways in which even arguments in support of state agendas can take on autonomous meanings within the framework of open public debate, and are not easily controlled or managed. Iqtidar highlights the limits to governmentality, the state's ability to manage the 'conduct of conduct', by focusing on the competition mounted against the idea of the state by the equally fuzzy and problematic idea of the market. Though the market has been deeply imbricated in practice with state authority in Pakistan, it has remained for most of Pakistan's history in the background as an inspiration for political projects. However, it has gained increasing salience in recent decades in the realm of political imagination. Even as the market in Pakistan remains intertwined with institutions of state regulation, bureaucratic intervention, and army manipulation, it has increasingly become a frame also for imagining autonomous

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constructions of religious community, independent of direct state control. The primacy of the market has thus carried with it new ideas about the legitimate relationship of state and society, and with these ideas, new visions of the appropriateness of the state as an autonomous ('secular') regulator of religion.

The papers also make clear that it is not only society that impinges on the state's imagined position as an embodiment of the community, it is also the state's position as a sovereign entity within international systems of power. One key issue that all the papers engage with is the degree to which the state's position has been critically defined not just by internal forces but by shifts in international regimes of power. As these have carried implications for shifting understandings of relations between state and society, they have also impinged deeply on meanings of secularism. The classical Weberian state that Matthew Nelson discusses has been historically perceived as responding primarily to internal dynamics and local pressures. But as Nelson shows, local visions of the Weberian state in Pakistani politics have been repeatedly shaped by Pakistan's place within a broader system of states. Nelson highlights the importance to student groups of a newly empowered vision of the Muslim *ummah* as an alternative to the territorial state. Yet he shows how this has come to be locked into the same zero-sum politics that had characterized earlier state visions. Through a focus on the international communist movement, Kamran Asdar Ali highlights the circulation of ideas beyond as well as within the Pakistani state, as intellectuals in the years after Pakistan's creation sought to define the legitimate boundaries of Pakistan's sovereignty within the contexts of both Islamic history and an emerging Cold War order. Sadaf Aziz takes up the more recent Muslim World Outreach project as a concrete manifestation of a contemporary imperial project to remake the Pakistani state's relationship to religion within the vision of a reconfigured Muslim world, encapsulated within a larger neoliberal world order. Finally, Iqtidar brings to the fore the ways in which the place of the state in the global political imagination has influenced the meanings and methods of political mobilization for the members of the Jamaat-e-Islami. International flows of ideas and practices are, thus, for all these authors a critical dynamic element in the analysis of state in contemporary Pakistan—both in terms of concrete manifestations of state power and in terms of the way the state is popularly imagined.

Discussions of secularism must, of course, engage ultimately not only with complexities in the meaning of the state, but also in the

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meanings of religion. How religion is defined and engaged with in these debates on secularism remains a contentious issue. A significant body of literature on secularism in predominantly Muslim societies places much emphasis on the dynamics of religious thought attributing to it its own autonomous logic.[8] In contrast, all four papers in this forum take for granted the diversity of thought within religious tradition. Indeed, tensions in the meaning of the state, as both an imagined entity and as a complex and porous structure of engagement with society, are mirrored in definitions of 'religion' as both a source of imagined unity and of division. The focus of these papers is less on the diverse religious forms always haunting the imagined monolith called 'religion' (which have been increasingly dealt with elsewhere in scholarship on Islam[9]), and more on the ways that this tension too has been 'managed' (and, indeed, sometimes embodied) by the state. The Muslim World Outreach programme that Aziz highlights assumes a malleability in religious thought and practice, which Javed Ahmed Ghamidi's public interventions illustrate, even as Ghamidi himself casts his arguments as a method of limiting this malleability. Ghamidi's own religious training and move from Jamaat-i-Islami to his current position give further insights into the variety of ways in which religion is approached, even by the 'religious', as malleable and an ongoing field of interpretation. Similarly, the papers by Nelson and Iqtidar suggest ongoing debate and discussion about what it means to be Muslim in contemporary Pakistan**,** but within shifting political and economic frameworks. Finally, Asdar Ali pays much more explicit attention to the debates among intellectuals in the immediately-post-partition Pakistan about religion itself as a category, particularly in relation to the conjuring of a Muslim 'nation'. Whilst some writers, such as Sajjad Zaheer, assumed religion to be dependent upon

[8] See for instance, Boroujerdi, Mehrzad (1994). 'Can Islam be secularised?' in M. R. Ghanoonparvar and F. Farrokh (eds). *In Transition: Essays on Culture and Identity in the Middle East*, Texas A&M University Press, Austin; Filali Ansari (1996). 'Islam and Liberal Democracy: The Challenge of Secularization', *Journal of Democracy* 7(2): 76–80; Monshipouri, Mahmood (1998). *Islamism, Secularism and Human Rights in the Middle East,* Lyn Rienner, London.

[9] In addition to the influential Eickelman and Piscatori (1996). *Muslim Politics,* Princeton University Press, New Jersey, see also Manager, Leif (1999). *Muslim Diversity: Local Islam in Global Contexts*, Curzon Press, London. For an important critique of a previously influential approach of assuming an inherent, unitary continuity in Islamic experiences, that of Clifford Geertz and Ernest Gellner, see Asad, Talal (1996). 'The Idea of a An Anthropology of Islam', in Hall, John and Jarvie, Ian, *The Social Philosophy of Ernest Gellner*, Rodopi, Amsterdam, pp. 387–406.

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economic and political growth—or a dependent variable—others, such as Hassan Askari and Ahmed Nadeem Qasmi, allowed it much more depth and importance as a frame for defining the community.

Ultimately, all the papers highlight a certain contingency in the relationship between state and religion in Pakistan. These papers disrupt the teleological narrative of Muslim religious nationalism as a particularly pernicious challenge to secularism. Rather, identification of the state with a vision of unitary community, and its association with the projection of a Muslim nation, have empowered the assertion of the state's right to manage (and even control) the operation of religion in Pakistan. At the same time, however, the imagination of such a state has been in pervasive tension with the fragmented operation of the state and with the expectations of society. As the papers in this forum acknowledge, religious tradition continues to play a central role in providing a framework for legitimate authority (and for providing, at least in the imagination, grounds for holding the state to moral account). Tradition, not as rigid and dogmatic rules—or at least not just as that[10]—but also as a vocabulary and means for managing and legitimizing power and change, continues to frame the domain of politics. At the same time, competing ideas and power interests exert pressures that facilitate the emergence of new configurations of state, society and religion out of existing traditions. Acknowledging the contingency in the relationship between state and religion in Pakistan forces us also to acknowledge the many possibilities for structuring a response to both the 'war on terror' and Talibanization without aligning with either. A response that permits considerations other than a reified version of the 'state' and 'religion' to dominate the agenda, allows greater flexibility in engaging with the reality of the situation. Social and economic justice and democracy, not its institutions but its practice, must be important variables in assessing the success or failure of any state in its ability to manage religion.

[10] See Zaman, Mohammed Qasim (2007). *Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change*, Princeton University Press, Princeton New Jersey, for a useful look at the innovations integral to the management and rejuvenation of tradition, particularly in South Asian Islam.

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