

Religious Dimensions of Nationalism: Interdisciplinary Perspectives

CALL FOR PAPERS
DEADLINE 1 MAY 2020

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CENTRO STUDI
IN CIVILTÀ E SPIRITUALITÀ
CONTEMPORANEA
fondazione
GIORGIO CINI



Art: Massimo Sestini, The Defeat of the Empire, 1988
Image courtesy of Oliver and Company



In his classic study of nationalism, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (1990), British historian E.J. Hobsbawm wrote: “Religion is a paradoxical cement for proto-nationalism, and indeed for modern nationalism, which has usually (at least in its more crusading phases) treated it with considerable reserve as a force which could challenge the ‘nation’s’ monopoly claim to its members loyalty... The world religions which were invented at various times between the sixth century BC and the seventh century AD, are universal by definition, and therefore designed to fudge ethnic, linguistic, political and other differences”. These remarks point to the fascinating ambiguity of the relationship between nationalism and religion, particularly in the modern period.

A potential tension exists in the fact that universalist forms of religion tend to create and cultivate collective identities that, at least in principle, are not based on ethnical or cultural divides. On the other hand, modernist interpretations of nationalism have insisted on the close association between nationalism and secularisation. From this perspective, nationalism, as a modern phenomenon, becomes one of the leading forces towards the formation of new collective identities, while traditional forms of religion are increasingly challenged and mainstream religious institutions see their influence on society decreasing. In this sense, nationalism could develop an antagonism with religious loyalties. The paradoxical result was, frequently, a competitive imitation, with liturgical forms of nation-worship or state-worship (“secular religion”). As Jean-Jacques Rousseau had already remarked in the *Contrat Social*, “never was there a state founded but that religion served it for a basis”. Religious loyalties proved more resilient than modernizers expected, and politics across 19th-century Europe are characterized by a process of confessionalisation. Indeed, religion, far from disappearing from modern societies, has simply gone through a series of changes, such as individualisation and privatisation on the one hand, and new forms of public presence on the other.

In sum, nationalism and religion have become closely entangled in the last two centuries. Nationalism in fact, can be easily associated with “political religion”, charismatic leadership, forms of prophetism, messianism, millennialism, and more generally mysticism, esotericism and alternative spirituality. The old religious concept of a divine covenant with a “chosen people” takes new shapes in nationalist, but also imperialist and colonialist, discourses. The spread of nationalism on a global scale, and its role in the decolonisation process, is also often far from having a purely political or secular dimension, and indeed alliances with religious fundamentalism are now a prominent feature.

This entangled relationship warrants a fresh focus on the relationship between nationalism and religion, which remains relatively inconspicuous in the field of nationalist studies. This conference aims at bringing together scholars coming from different disciplines who are interested in this relationship. We would like

to have papers focusing on the modern and contemporary period from a global perspective, but we would also welcome contributions on earlier periods that would problematise modernist concepts of nationalism.

Abstracts and texts

Abstracts up to 300 words, accompanied by a CV, should be submitted in English by the 1st of May to nationalism.conference@cini.it A notification of acceptance will be forwarded by the 1st of June. A few months after the Conference, we will ask participants to send us their full paper, to be published in an edited book. We welcome submissions from doctoral students, early career researchers and established scholars.

Timetable

1. The call for papers is open – 21st of January 2020.
2. Abstracts (300-500 words maximum) and CVs to be received by 1st May 2020.
3. Notifications of acceptance will be given by 1st June 2020.
4. Conference will be held the 26th, 27th, and 28th of November 2020.
6. Final papers in English to be received by 30th January 2021.
7. Publication of the book in late 2021.

Practicalities and Funding

Fondazione Giorgio Cini, the University of Amsterdam, and the the Center for History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents will provide accommodation on San Giorgio Island, coffee breaks and lunches for all participants. Participants will arrange and pay for their own transportation, and will be requested to donate to the Cini Foundation Library *Civiltà e Spiritualità Comparate* one book related to religious studies they authored or in which they have participated. Extra funding is available to cover the

travel expenses of a limited number of scholars who cannot obtain funding from their own institutions.

If extra funding is needed, please indicate this in the email with which you submit your abstract.

For further information, please contact: nationalism.conference@cini.it

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