

Comment 1

Kazuo Ohtsuka

As a social anthropologist and an ethnographer of Arab societies, I would like to comment on two themes which the three panelists seem to share: first, relations between the modern state and religion or the religious community; and second, some of the common features of nationalism and so-called fundamentalism.

The tenet of the separation between church and state is taken for granted for most of modern states, even for many, if not all, of the Muslim-majority countries. However, the idiom of the tenet varies somewhat depending on the cultural or civilizational background of the countries. For example, in Japan, especially in the post-WWII period, there is a separation between politics and religion (政教分離), and in Egypt, one of the Muslim-majority countries, the separation is between religion and state or dynasty (*dīn wa dawlah*). From these terminological variations, we can discover that there are several forms of relations between the state and religion, or the religious community, in the contemporary world.

As Professor Nakata properly points out, the Islamic community (*ummah*) ideally transcends the frame of the modern nation-state in terms of its membership (the organizational principles of the umma are totally different from those of the nation) and its borders (Muslim networks are literally global and beyond the territory of a nation-state). In contrast to the Islamic case where we cannot find the equivalent of a well-organized church system, the institutional separation of the state from the Christian church, which has a long history in the Western countries and was established mostly by the secularist ideas derived from the Enlightenment tradition, operates mainly within a frame of the nation-state, although the Vatican and some churches and denominations work internationally. While the movements based on Islam as a religion (*dīn*) cannot be ideally confined within the borders of a modern state (*dawlah*), those of modern Christianity or the Christian churches are mostly under the control of the state.

In reality, however, some of the Islamist movements, though publicly claiming that their activities easily surpass the limits of a nation-state, appear to work with political and financial support of particular states—for example, the Saudi's support of the Muslim World League. Even in the case of the Muslim Brothers, one of the most influential Islamist organizations originally set up in Egypt in 1928, a Sudanese branch separated from the Egyptian headquarters under the leadership of Hasan al-Turabi. Though Islamists, ideologically, tend

to ignore the bounds of the modern state, the frames of the nation-state in the Islamic world, which inherited colonial territories established about one century ago, certainly have some significant effects on their ideology and movements.

In the case of the USA, as Professor Mori persuasively argues, “the God of the Holy Bible,” worshipped by both Christians and Jews in the country, seems to be a supreme symbol of the American nation composed of divergent “races” or ethnic groups, though the principle of the separation between church and state has been officially maintained. In other word, while the churches of the denominations in the U.S. as social and religious organizations have to be separated from the government, the ‘church’ of the American nation, or the civil religion, is an integral part of the state. It is an important moral base of President Bush’s foreign policy and an essential apparatus of the political and military mobilization of the American people. God in this sense is a symbol not only of national integration but also of the mission of civilizing or democratizing other countries, particularly the Muslim-majority ones. It is noteworthy that the phrase, the “mission of civilization,” reminds us of a formal pretext of the old colonialism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Today the American religious right wing or “fundamentalism” becomes one of the active elements carrying out the mission. Now we are talking of nationalism and fundamentalism, the second theme of these comment.

Professor Kohara shows us that some Japanese intellectuals have recently praised polytheism or animism and devalued monotheism—or Judaism, Christianity and Islam—by reason that the former is a more peaceful form of religion than the latter. The militancy and violence of monotheism are represented, they claim, by Islamic terrorism and the “Christian” Bush’s militant foreign policy. I believe that people who insist on this ignore, intentionally or not, that the Japanese militarism before and during WWII was ideologically based on national Shintoism, which was evidently a kind of polytheism. Therefore, it cannot be intuitively assumed that polytheistic religion is peaceful in nature.

I would like to suggest here that we can identify some common features in the social and cultural processes which form such collectivities as a nation and a fundamentalist (Islamist) group. Concepts like ‘the Orient’ in the sense of Said’s Orientalism, to which Kohara refers, and ‘civilizations’ in Huntington’s usage, also share similar characteristics. These collectivities are often imagined in essentialist terms by their members and by outside observers (researchers). The essentialist mindset believes that these collectivities have maintained unchanging, essential particularities which are prevalent within them and are commonly shared by all of their members. In term of these particularities, members can readily distinguish their own collectivity from another one, and they are apt to image the world within a strict dichotomy: we versus others. Thus the collectivity, imagined in an essentialist way by many of its members, is able to become a strong political and military body. As political actors, nationalists and fundamentalists hope to organize such collectivities in order to realize their special political goals.

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If my argument would be accepted, we should discard futile dichotomies such as Christianity versus Islam, civilization versus terrorism, and monotheism versus polytheism, which are often used politically, not analytically. Even in so-called monotheism we can find some polytheistic tendencies, like the saint veneration practices in Islam. The state Shintoism in pre-war Japan seems to be a case of polytheism interpreted monotheistically, mainly not in term of theology but of secular ideology—that is, nationalism. We should, therefore, investigate the social and cultural factors contributing to the formation of the essentialized imagination of collectivity—not only in religious but also in secular spheres—and seek ways out of the violence which, unfortunately, is pervasive around the globe today.

Comment 2

Yoshitsugu Sawai

Since Professor Ohtsuka gave his comment on the more general issues of the three papers, I would like to comment mainly in regard to their contents. After September 11, 2001, Japanese newspapers and journals have often published special articles on the relationship between religion and war or violence in the Islamic and Christian worlds. Many of these articles, however, seem to be superficial or short-sighted; this might suggest some limitations of journalism. By contrast, in this panel, Professors Mori, Nakata, and Kohara clearly proposed some perspectives that assist us in understanding the implications of the discourse on the relationship of religion to violence and war in the Islamic and Christian worlds, contextualizing it in its socio-cultural background. These three presentations, organically related, constitute valuable theoretical reflections that also recognize trends in the contemporary world. Now, I would like to give brief comments on the three presentations respectively, and also ask one question to each of you.

Comment on Professor Mori's Paper

On the basis of the present trend in American society, Professor Mori accurately analyzed the discourse of the war against terrorism. He says that “President Bush’s discourses to justify the war against ‘terrorism’ have been expressed in religious terms and conceptions”; and yet “the core element of his speech is not religion, but the ideas and ideals of the United States.” According to Professor Mori’s analysis, the religious discourse of President Bush is not based upon his own faith as the mass media has reported; rather, it is language in which the

situation of present American society is taken into consideration. This analysis is very clear and quite convincing.

As he pointed out, “the idea of freedom and democracy is the core element in the global strategy of the second Bush administration.” America’s cause for the founding of the nation is and was to “realize ‘the pursuit of life, freedom, and happiness.’” Thus, “it is the mission of the United States to fight against tyranny.” Further, “America’s cause justifying the war against terrorism” is the same as “America’s cause for the founding of the nation.” In such a context of discourse, the war in Iraq is also justified.

Moreover, the following point raised by Professor Mori is especially noteworthy. That is, “the most pressing requirement for both Islamic and Christian worlds may be theological insight into their real situations, in order to coexist with diverse others.” Similarly, “it is now time to move beyond such simple missiology in Christianity.” This point seems to be more important in the religious pluralistic situations of the modern world. In this connection, I would like to ask one question to Professor Mori. You brought up the necessity of “theological and self-critical insight.” I would guess that this ‘insight’ is based upon the aims of the Center for Interdisciplinary Study of Monotheistic Religions at Doshisha University, of which you are the head. I would be very grateful if you could explain the implications of the terms “theological and self-critical insight” a little more clearly.

Comment on Professor Nakata’s Paper

Professor Nakata’s paper has clarified how the situation of the contemporary world is observed from the perspective of the Islamic world. According to the Islamic *Weltanschauung*, the world is divided into “the house of Islam” (*dar al-Islam*) and “the house of war” (*dar al-harb*); jihad is “the means to defend and expand the house of Islam, that is, the lands under the rule of law.” Moreover, jihad is constituted by both defensive and aggressive forms.

In the modern Islamic world, however, he has pointed out that the discourse of jihad is structurally distorted because of external and internal factors. The external factor is based upon the “disease” of “the theory of word usage” in the discourse of western Christian culture, while the inward one is the suppression of speech imposed by dictators in the Islamic world. This is not only the problem of the Islamic world, as it is also the western problem of “the system of the nation-state,” which constitutes its background. For in the Islamic world, the reason for dictatorship is none other than the “system of the nation-state.” According to Professor Nakata, if this problem is not solved, the distortion of the discourse of jihad will not be diminished.

As Professor Nakata analyzed, the Islamic world and the western Christian world are mutually closely related. Thus, the problem within the Islamic world can be solved only through the solution of the problem of the western “system of the nation-state.” For example,

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Osama bin Laden's "jihad against the Jews and the Crusaders" denotes the distortion of the discourse regarding jihad, derived from the problem of the "system of the nation-state."

Now, I would like to pose one question to Professor Nakata. You dichotomized the world into the Islamic world and the western "system of the nation state," or into the "house of Islam" and the "house of war." This theoretical dichotomy is very clear at that level, but each of its terms is in fact closely connected. Thus, could we understand that the solution of this problem is not oriented in only one direction, but that it is also oriented in a mutual-direction or bilateral way?

Comment on Professor Kohara's Paper

Finally, I would like to make a comment to Professor Kohara. At first, you paid attention to the discussion of "monotheism and polytheism" in modern Japan and in the West. Especially after the beginning of the Iraq War, the importance of polytheistic thinking has been pointed out. Professor Kohara discussed the logic of President Bush as "a logic of monotheism," saying that "the pacifism that is rooted in Japanese society has a tendency to see monotheistic logic as the enemy of peace." But, as Professor Kohara discussed, what is important is not whether it is monotheistic or polytheistic. In this regard, it may be enough to mention the example of how fundamentalism in Hinduism, which is regarded as a polytheistic religion, comes to be a cause of conflict in South Asia. Professor Kohara's typological discussion of "monotheism and polytheism" is very convincing.

Moreover, in order to examine the problems of the modern world, Professor Kohara says, "we must understand 'idolatry' not only as serving visible idols but also in the broader sense of 'invisible idolatry.'" This point is very suggestive for all of us, since in the contemporary world, especially after the events of September 11, 2001, it seems to be much more necessary to regard religious nationalism as "invisible idolatry."

The images of "idols to banish" are a matter of perspective. In the modern West, "idols to banish" were "traditional values before the Enlightenment, especially those dependent on religion," while in the Islamic world, a primary 'idol' was the "wave of western modernization, which emphasizes human sovereignty." Professor Kohara accurately pointed out the reasons for conflict between the modern West and the Islamic world. So, what is important in the modern world is to "make the fault lines between monotheistic religions the front lines for new dialogue." Thus, Professor Kohara, I would like to ask you the following question: What could be the "mediating agency to build a bridge over different spheres of values"? I would be very grateful if you could answer this question.