



SWEDISH
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REGULAR SESSION INFORMATION

Session: Religion and Politics in a Comparative Perspective

Session Convener(s): Batia Siebzehner, Beit Berl College and Truman Institute, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Chair: Batia Siebzehner, Beit Berl College and Truman Institute, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Comments: -

I) *Christianity after Socialism*

Danzan Narantuya, National University of Mongolia

II) *Religion and Policy in a National Rebuilding Society: the Jewish Case*

Yosef Gorny, Tel Aviv University

III) *Political Islam and Religious Violence in Indonesia*

Abdil Mughis Mudhoffir, Universitas Negeri Jakarta

IV) *Religion as a Strategy of Political Participation: The Emergence of a New Orthodoxy in Israel*

Batia Siebzehner, Beit Berl College and Truman Institute, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

ABSTRACTS

Session description

Religious movements in many contemporary societies are a force that, invoking conflict and injustice, have a strong influence in the transformation of the political realm. Hence, the supernatural dimension become a central component of new social projects. Furthermore, radical religious movements attempt to define new "rules of the game", trying to impose changes in the mechanisms of mobilization and participation. By adopting different strategies grounded in strict observance, religious movements gain political power and control, deviating government resources and goals to their own purposes. They also establish new modalities for defining the boundaries between the religious and the secular and the concomitant symbolic position of religion itself in society. This process, which mobilizes new agents into the political arena, puts a challenge to the institutional architecture of state religion relations.

The purpose of this panel will be to examine, from a comparative perspective, the strategies of different religious movements that, by claiming the importance of religion in the advancement of social wellbeing and the maintenance of the social order, became central actors in the political game. I purpose to focus also on the strategies of religious agents that facilitate the incorporation of marginalized groups into the process of decision making as well as on the impact of incorporation in policy changes.

Papers

I) *Christianity after Socialism*

Danzan Narantuya, National University of Mongolia

In the 1990s democratic changes took place in Mongolia and the citizens have been granted the right both to worship and not to worship. With the democratic changes of the country Buddhism as the traditional religion revived but also many Mongols became converts to Christianity. Under socialism there was no Christian church in the country and Christianity had the negative image among the populace. However, Christian churches and organisations, whose number was over eighty in 2010, attracted many modern Mongols. This paper investigates why such pivotal changes have taken place within such a relatively short period. It also suggests reasons why some Mongols become Christians through analysis of published sources and the oral histories of Christian Mongols. The answers are complex but four possible reasons, including adaptability of teachings, value changes and nostalgia for 'collectives' or a togetherness are suggested here.

II) *Religion and Policy in a National Rebuilding Society: the Jewish Case*

Yosef Gorny, Tel Aviv University

The involvement of religion in national politics is a well-known phenomenon which has been widely researched as a historical, political, and sociological case regarding countries in Eastern and Western Europe (for instance: Ireland), and in the Middle and the Far East – especially regarding Moslem societies.

In this paper I intend to discuss the special function of religion in the effort of the part of the Jewish people who made political efforts to renew its national state in their historical homeland.

The paper discusses four periods in the history of religious political involvement in this effort. The first period: the struggle between the Orthodox, Reform, and Conservative religious denominations against any national idea. The second: the founding of Zionist religious organizations (like: the Mizrahi political party), and its national ideology.

The third: the political standpoint of the religious parties in the Zionist movement and the Jewish society in Palestine in the pre-state period and in the State of Israel in the years 1948-1973.

In the fourth period (since 1973) – the religious policy became more and more active in the political struggle to define the borders of Israel and the national-religious character of the Israeli society. At this stage the religious Zionist parties together with anti-Zionist orthodox denominations are trying more and more to develop a political strategy which intends to shape the nature of the State of Israel and its Jewish society as a synthesis of religion and nationalism.

III) *Political Islam and Religious Violence in Indonesia*

Abdil Mughis Mudhoffir, Universitas Negeri Jakarta

This paper tries to understand why religious violence increasingly occurs in the democratic period in Indonesia. There are two dominant views in understanding this. First, the security approach that perceives the violence as a result of the emergent of “radical” agent of political Islam in the more open political space. In this regard, the state is considered weak because the iron hand as used by the authoritarian regime in the past New Order has disappeared. Thus, the solution is the strong security instruments are needed, like the law on anti-terrorism and the police force of anti-terrorism (*Densus 88*). Second, the cultural approach views violence as caused by the inability of society to build the religious tolerance. Society is considered weak. Religious expression in the political arena is believed as the source of the emergent of intolerant acts. To conquer this, intensive inter-religious dialogues are required. The author argues that those two approaches are not adequate. The historical fact shows that the emergence of political Islam today is the result of the volatile relationship between Islam and the authoritarian state during the New Order period. In addition, the historical Indonesian experience also clearly illustrates that the presence of political Islam is nothing but a form of response to the critical social-political-economic situation. Political Islam does not appear in a vacuum. It emerges from the crisis. Unfortunately, both approaches would attempt to take off the political aspect of Islam and argue that it is simply placed merely as ethical and cultural norms. Looking negatively at the political Islam certainly will not help to understand the problems. It is noteworthy that the presence of political Islam precisely indicates a defect of political democracy.

IV) *Religion as a Strategy of Political Participation: The Emergence of a New Orthodoxy in Israel*

Batia Siebzehner, Beit Berl College and Truman Institute, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Among the many paradoxes of Israeli politics, there are the strategies of political inclusion used by organizations and parties representing groups which reject the universalism which Israeli democracy is heir to. This paper develops a model of 'political inclusion Israeli-style' illustrated by one party, Shas, which since 1984 proclaims itself the voice of the socially and culturally excluded Sephardi population of North African and Middle Eastern Jews, who represent over 40% of the Jewish population. Shas is also a movement of religious and ethnic revival which, by adopting a social strategy of self-exclusion grounded in strict religious observance, and of independence vis-à-vis established Ashkenazi ultra-Orthodox politics, has gained 11 out of 120 Knesset seats, inclusion in government, and control over a share of government educational and welfare expenditure. The paper raises the issue whether such less-than-perfectly- universalistic practices are not a variety of corporatism and possibly, for the parties concerned, a more effective strategy of incorporation than the classic social democratic path.