

# God Needs No Passport

Trying to define the new boundaries of belonging.

Peggy Levitt

**THE SUBURB OF EXPENSIVE HOMES** with neatly trimmed lawns and SUVs seems like any other well-to-do American community, but the mailboxes reveal a twist: almost all are labeled "Patel" or "Bhaghat." Over the last 20 years, these Indian immigrants have moved from the villages and small towns of central Gujarat State on the west coast of India, initially to rental apartment complexes in northeastern Massachusetts, and then to their own homes in subdivisions outside Boston. Watching these suburban dwellers work, attend school, and build religious congregations here, casual observers might conclude that yet another wave of immigrants has succeeded at the American dream. A closer look, however, reveals they are achieving Gujarati dreams as well. They send money back to India to open businesses and improve family farms. They support the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian American Political Forum. The temples and religious schools they build are changing the Gujarati as well as the American religious landscape. And their influence is not lost on Indian politicians, who energetically encourage their involvement in Indian political and economic life.

Dipa Patel and her husband, Pratik, exemplify two such immigrants who keep their feet in the United States and in their homelands at the same time. Nearly six years ago, Pratik left Bodeli, a town of approximately 10,000, to marry Dipa. He had a bachelor of arts degree in computer science from an Indian university, and he and his cousin were partners in a computer school franchise. When he first moved to America, Pratik found a job on the assembly line of a large telecommunications firm. Rewarded for his hard work, he moved back to the engineering track and has ascended the corporate ladder steadily ever since. The company, which packed over 8,000 cars into its parking lot each morning in its heyday, now employs less than a thousand workers, but Pratik is still among them.

Nothing has deterred Pratik and Dipa from their pursuit of the American dream. As soon as he completed the mandatory five-year residency requirement, Pratik filed for citizenship. He and Dipa now have two young daughters who are more conversant in American children's songs and folktales than they are in Indian stories. In the evenings, Pratik takes classes toward a master's degree at a Boston University satellite campus. Dipa works as a quality assurance supervisor at a computer manufacturing company. Each month, they go to BJ's Wholesale Club to purchase pieces of American middle-class life. And last fall, they finally achieved the *pièce de résistance*—their own home in a new subdivision in southern New Hampshire.

But Pratik and Dipa steadfastly pursue Gujarati dreams as well. They are the primary source of financial support for Pratik's parents, and Pratik continues to be a partner in the computer school. He sends money back to buy new equipment when he has funds to spare. And before buying their home in America, the family's first project was to build a second story onto the house in Bodeli, including a separate bedroom suite and Western-style bathroom, which sit empty except during their visits.

One of the principal ways that Pratik and Dipa's lives transcend national borders is through religion. They belong to the International Swaminarayan Satsang Organization (ISSO), a Hindu denomination based in Ahmedabad in Gujarat State that has interconnected chapters all over the world. They spend most of their weekends at a temple in Lowell, Massachusetts (their congregation used to use an old Episcopal church, but recently moved to a converted Goodwill warehouse). On Saturday evenings, there are *sabhas*, or prayer sessions, followed by large communal vegetarian meals. Pratik and Dipa's children attend religious school classes and youth group meetings each Sunday. Most of their friends are fellow Swaminarayan members who stand in for the extended family they so sorely miss. The community is an important font of social support when a new baby is born, a family moves into a new home, or there is an illness or death. By being Swaminarayan, Pratik and Dipa make a place for themselves in the United States.

At the same time, belonging to the ISSO is very much about maintaining a home in India. Pratik constantly consults with religious leaders there, not only about temple business, but about difficult decisions he faces in his personal life. When he was deciding whether he should invest in a small grocery store, he called India. When the community was unsure about whether to participate in a city-wide relief drive for Asian tsunami victims, he called to discuss the pros and cons. The directors of the temple always consult their leaders back home about important decisions. They host a steady stream of visiting dignitaries from India and from other ISSO communities around the world. By being Swaminarayan, then, Pratik and Dipa also carve out an enduring place for themselves in their ancestral home.

Evidence of America's increasing religious diversity, brought about by Pratik, Dipa, and others like them, is at every corner. The sign at the local Protestant church now includes a line in Korean or Chinese to attract newcomers to the ethnic congregations that worship there. In between the Subway and Dunkin' Donuts at the strip mall is a new Swaminarayan meeting hall. Religious groups that were once tightly connected to one immigrant community have become "disengaged," abandoning their commitment to that particular group in favor of a more universal and inclusive approach. The Roman

Catholic Church has backed away from its national parish strategy toward multi-ethnic congregations. Pentecostals proselytize among all groups, regardless of race and ethnicity. The White House hosts Diwali and Id al-Fitr<sup>1</sup> celebrations each year, sending a clear signal to the country that the American religious rainbow has added more colors.

Commentators such as Diana Eck, Martin Marty, Robert Wuthnow, and Alan Wolfe applaud the country's increasing religious diversity, but tend to explain this pluralism as the result of forces operating inside the United States. They argue that America's sacred texts, such as the Constitution, laid the groundwork for religious diversity to flourish. In the 1960s and 1970s, the civil rights and antiwar movements transformed this "culture of pluralism" into something mainstream.

We need to broaden our lens and see religious pluralism in America as an integral piece of the larger global religious puzzle. Just as the corporate CEO would be out on the street in a heartbeat if she did not see her company as part of the global economy, so we miss the boat by continuing to insist that religion and culture are nationally bounded. Just as we recognize the U.S. economy is made up of various, worldwide production and distribution networks, so we must see the local mosque or Pentecostal church as part of multilayered webs of connection where religious "goods" are produced and exchanged around the globe.

Undeniably, many religious institutions were founded on universal claims and, in many cases, have always been global. In this era of the nation-state, however, religion's universality and globalism are often seen as taking a back seat to national legal and political regimes. But religion, like capitalism, is no longer embedded in a particular territory or legal regime; nor is it as encumbered by external political, cultural, or moral principles. Cultural referents, once bounded by ethnicity, language, and nation-state borders, are being disconnected or lifted out of national territories, rendering discussions of national religious practice off the mark.

A growing body of work has begun to use a broader optic and provides important insights about the role of religion in today's global world and how it differs from prior incarnations. Theorists such as Peter Beyer and Roland Robertson emphasize the need to use the global system as the primary unit of analysis to understand contemporary social life. As Christopher Queen points out in a 2002 article, Buddhism, like Judaism and Christianity, has been an "international" religion from early on, but its local variations remained largely isolated from one another.<sup>2</sup> Manuel Vásquez calls this the "thin" globalization of world empires, in which interdependence was horizontal and constant, and any cultural or religious syncretism was limited to cosmopolitan urban centers and port towns.<sup>3</sup>

What are the cultural and religious consequences of "thick" contemporary globalization, with its increasing velocity? First, many religions have become *multi-centered*, which differs from their *multi-sitedness* of the past.<sup>4</sup> Buddhist ideas and practices, for example, now move with unprecedented speed to non-Asian countries, but it's not simply a move from the religion's center to periphery—it's about the emergence of multiple new centers, with regionalized Buddhist interpretations and practices. Because the centers are constantly in communication with each other, East and West, the "old country" and the new, infuse and transform one another.

Second, if globalization is the ever-changing state of "mutability," as Beyer describes it, and we no longer have the security of an ascribed or fixed sense of self, this leads to several problems which religion may be able to solve. Roland Robertson and JoAnn Chirico define two of these problems as the "legitimacy of the world order of societies (nations)" and "the meaning of what mankind 'really is.'" Peter Beyer reminds us that in this state of mutability, it is not only the speed with which rapid changes occur that can be problematic, but who ends up holding the power. He proposes two responses that religious groups offer in the wake of globalization. The first is "conservative," and fundamentalist in nature. In this case, religion is a vehicle for asserting particularistic identities that are threatened by changing global conditions. The second, or "liberal," response, is for religions to reorient toward the global whole and take up the values of the emerging culture. Beyer emphasizes that these are "pure types" and points out the many hybrid forms that fall between these two extremes.

In his 1994 book *Public Religions in the Modern World*, José Casanova suggests that the changes that occur in religion happen because the secular (political) realm has infiltrated the two arenas religion once fulfilled—a monopoly on salvation and the function of "community cult," or the solidarity offered by collective representation of an imagined community. Accordingly, we need to view religion as a cultural system, one that in a globalized world has been disembedded. This represents both a threat and an opportunity. On the one hand, the "old" world civilizations and religions can free themselves from the territoriality of the nation-state, resuming their transnational dimensions and regaining a leading role on global stage. On the other hand, they may be plagued by dissolution of the intrinsic link between sacred time and sacred space, or the bonds of shared histories, peoples, and territories that have always defined civilizations and religion.

Although helpful, these largely theoretical accounts tell us little about how religion is actually lived. Much of this work overlooks the people actually doing the globalizing. Further, as Willfried Spohn asserts, globalization theories are macro-paradigms that are not unlike modernization paradigms in some respects. One essentializes the global system, the other the nation-state system. Both tend to "correlate the political, socioeconomic and cultural phenomena and dimensions, instead of considering the local, national and transnational macro-micro linkages, relations and interactions."<sup>5</sup> In their book *Globalizing the Sacred: Religion Across the Americas*, Manuel Vásquez and Marie Marquardt warn similarly about the danger of "glossing over the contested, uneven, and situated impact of globalization."<sup>6</sup> They prefer to talk about "anchored" or "grounded" globalization. Moreover, they use case studies, as I do, to emphasize the importance of local places and "thick" descriptions.

It is precisely this nexus between global religious norms and institutions and lived religion—the actual religious practices, discourses, and organizations that are the stuff of daily religious life—that my research and soon to be published book try to capture. By paying attention to everyday lived religious experience, it is possible to see where and how religious globalization is really happening. Such a focus is needed if we are to bring conventional wisdom about religion, migration, and the nationstate more in sync with reality. Let me suggest some new ways of thinking about categories we tend to take for granted.

# Thinking Outside the Nation-State Container

Grasping that people earn their living, participate in election campaigns, or raise children across borders can be challenging. Most people take for granted that the world has always been and always will be organized into sovereign nation-states. They are more likely to compare family life in different countries than to think of households as networks of people living in several countries who pool their income. Most governments locate the causes and solutions to their problems inside their borders rather than thinking of health or educational status as produced by people living in several places at one time.

But such a view is short on history. Capitalism, imperial and colonial regimes, antislavery and workers' rights campaigns, illegal pirating networks, and, of course, religions have always crossed borders. The modern nation-state system did not even exist until after the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. In the early 1900s, there were barely 130 sovereign states; the remaining 65 percent of the world's political entities were colonies and protectorates. Three-quarters (150) of the more than 200 countries recognized today came into existence in the last century.<sup>7</sup>

Assuming that social life automatically takes place within a national container blinds us to the way the world actually works. Assuming that political outcomes are decided nationally doesn't give enough credit to political and social movements involving activists from around the world. Taking literally the label "Made in the U.S.A." ignores the fact that some piece of that garment was probably made in Latin America or Asia. Eberhard Sandschneider, the research director at the German Council on Foreign Relations in Berlin, got it right when he told the 2005 Davos delegates, "What we are increasingly seeing is a multidimensional system in which states and state-based multilateral organizations work with businesses and civil society through a dense web of international and interdisciplinary networks."<sup>8</sup>

To pick up on these dynamics, one has to trade in a national lens for a transnational one. This is not to deny the continuing importance of nation-states, nor the fact that states continue to regulate many aspects of life. Nor is it to argue that everything is produced by factors operating outside national borders. Indeed, in many cases, they play only a small supporting role in the story. It is to say that to understand today's world, one has to ask how individuals and groups actually organize themselves, without assuming, a priori, that they fit neatly within a national box.

## Immigration Seen Through a Transnational Lens

Understanding that migration is a transnational process, and that people will simultaneously belong to this country as well as their homelands for the long haul, reveals several important things. For one, sometimes migration is as much about the people who stay behind as it is about people who move. In some cases, the ties between migrants and nonmigrants are so strong and widespread that migration also radically transforms the lives of individuals who stay home.<sup>9</sup> People don't have to move to participate across borders. People, money, and what I have called social remittances—the ideas, practices, social capital, and identities that migrants send back into their communities of origin—permeate their daily lives, changing how they act and challenging their ideas about gender, right and wrong, and what states should and should not do. The religious, social, and political groups they belong to also begin to operate across borders.

Nonmigrants hear enough stories, look at enough photographs, and watch enough videos of birthday parties and weddings filmed in the United States to begin imagining their own lives elsewhere. They covet clothes and accessories that soon become a standard part of their dress code. They want to play by the rules they imagine are at work in the United States, which they learn about each time they talk on the phone, receive email, or someone comes to visit. In such cases, migrants and nonmigrants, though separated by physical distance, still occupy the same social space. Although laws and political borders limit movement and formal citizenship, their lives are strongly connected by the myriad economic, political, and religious activities that cross borders. What happens to those in the United States cannot be separated from what happens to those who remain in the homelands, because their fates are inextricably linked. When a small group is regularly involved in their sending country, and others participate periodically, their combined efforts add up. Taken together and over time, they are a social force that can transform the economy, the values, and the everyday lives of entire regions.

One factor propelling these changes is the enormous amount of money that migrants send home. According to the World Bank, official remittance numbers (\$93 billion) in 2003 may represent only half the funds people actually send. According to Mushtaq Hussain's 2005 report "Measuring Migrant Remittances: From the Perspective of the European Commission," the global remittance market may actually be as large as \$200 to \$300 billion annually.<sup>10</sup> Countries like Albania, Croatia, El Salvador, Samoa, Yemen, and Jordan are among a growing number of countries in which remittances exceed private and official capital inflows and are the primary source of foreign currency.<sup>11</sup> These nations depend so heavily on remittances that their economies might collapse if they declined. To prevent that from happening, numerous governments now offer emigrants some form of long-distance, long-term membership. States as diverse as France, Ireland, Greece, the Dominican Republic, Brazil, Italy, Portugal, and China give emigrants and their descendants full rights when they return to their homelands, even if they are passport holders of another country. Colombia even grants political rights to emigrants who are abroad by allowing expatriates to elect representatives to the Colombian legislature.

Looking at migrants and nonmigrants transnationally also acknowledges that their lives are influenced by people and organizations in many other places and at many other levels of social experience. The relationship between Salvadoran villagers and their migrant family members in Los Angeles is not just a function of the specific ties between these two local settings. It also results from ties between the Salvadoran and U.S. governments and the Salvadoran and U.S. Catholic Churches. Similarly, understanding the religious lives of Brazilians in Massachusetts requires looking beyond the connections between specific congregations in Boston and Brazil and placing them in the context of the thick, multilayered web of denominational connections linking the two countries.

Finally, seeing migrants and nonmigrants as occupying the same social space also drives home the dramatic changes that have occurred in the meaning of immigrant incorporation. The immigrant experience is not a linear, irreversible journey from one membership to another. Rather, migrants pivot back and forth between sending, receiving, and other orientations at different stages of their lives. They supplement the income they earn in the United States with investments they still have in their homelands. They raise their children in Boston during the school year and send them back to Pakistan for the

and investments they still have in their homelands. They raise their children in Boston during the school year and send them back to Pakistan for the summer because they want them to be culturally and linguistically fluent in both places. Some are fortunate enough to be able to move up the American and homeland socioeconomic ladders at the same time. Others move up with respect to their homeland while experiencing status declines in the United States, while still others are downwardly mobile in relation to both places. And the more their lives are grounded in legal, health care, and pension systems on both sides of the border, the more likely it is that their transnational lives will endure. Newcomers will not fully assimilate or remain entirely focused on their homelands, but continue to craft some combination of the two.

## Remapping the Religious Landscape

Statistically speaking, the United States remains overwhelming Christian. According to a 2002 Pew Research Center Report, of the 82 percent who call themselves Christians, the majority (52 percent) are Protestant, followed by Catholics (24 percent). Those who claim "no religious preference" make up about 10 percent of the population.<sup>12</sup> Although the numbers of Muslims and Buddhists have doubled in the last decade, and the numbers of Hindus have tripled, non-Christians still represent a fairly small portion of America.<sup>13</sup> Jews and Muslims represent only 2 percent and 1.5 percent of the population, respectively, and "Eastern" religions, such as Buddhism or Hinduism, weigh in at less than 1 percent each, according to the World Christian Database in 2004. The most remarkable change in American religion has been the increasing number of individuals who say they have no religion, up from just over 8 percent in 1990 to anywhere between 9 and 14 percent a decade later.<sup>14</sup>

Embedded in these categories, though, is much more diversity than broad labels like "Christian" or "Catholic" reveal. New immigrants are introducing new faiths as well as "Latinoizing" and "Asianizing" well-established denominations. A survey of "new immigrants," conducted by Guillermina Jasso and based on a random sample of persons admitted as permanent residents to this country in July and August of 1996, found that Catholicism (41.9 percent), Christian-Protestant (18.6 percent), and "No Religion" (15.1 percent) were the residents' top religious preferences.<sup>15</sup> By some estimates, including by the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops' Secretariat for Hispanic Affairs, Mexican and other Latin American foreign-born individuals account for nearly 40 percent of the country's Roman Catholics.

Differences in migrants' country-of-origin mix are also changing the religious make-up of the Asian immigrant population. Between 1990 and 2001, the proportion of newly arriving Asian Christians fell from 63 to 43 percent, while those professing Asian religions increased from 15 to 28 percent.<sup>16</sup> Jasso and her colleagues also found that the proportion of foreign-born people professing faiths other than Judeo-Christianity was more than four times greater than among the native-born—nearly 17 percent versus 4 percent. Surveys conducted in 2003–04 found a continued rise in non-Christian religious preferences, although the researchers carrying out this work differed as to how much, ranging from 2004 Gallup polls which found about five percent professing "Other, non-Christian religions" to a 2004 survey by the Barna Research Group which uncovered 11 percent "aligned with a non-Christian faith," including 45 percent among Asians.

Incorporating newcomers is an age-old story for Catholics, who had plenty of practice turning Irish and Italian immigrants into American Catholics and are now using many of the same techniques to incorporate Brazilians and Vietnamese. Mainline and evangelical Protestant faiths are not as experienced at integrating newcomers, although they face great incentives to do so, given their declining native-born populations. Many of these new immigrants are the product of missionary work done in Latin America and Asia during the 1900s. The extensive missionary work that was part of American Protestantism from the start was never a strictly one-way religious export. Even while imperialist assumptions dominated, the Christianity of the missionaries was changed by those being missionized. Now, descendants of those who converted are bringing their own version of Christianity back to the United States and asking to practice their faith alongside their denominational brothers and sisters. New and old members are having to invent ways to pray, learn, and pursue social change together. Their views about how to do this are often quite different, but the compromises that are starting to be reached are a major source of religious change. David Machacek asserts, "Instead of assimilating American social practices and cultural beliefs and values, the new immigrants, often using religion as a primary resource, appear to be actively renegotiating the terms of American social and cultural life,"<sup>17</sup> thereby transforming mainline Protestant denominations in the process.

Other immigrants belong to global religious movements that unite members who happen to be living in the United States with fellow believers around the world. Again, this is not entirely new. Some Sufi orders, for example, have maintained strong ties between new places of residence and their centers since the tenth century.<sup>18</sup> Charismatic Catholics also belong to small communities of prayer and fellowship which unite them with fellow believers in other countries. The Tablighi Jama'at, one of the largest transnational Islamic movements, is now believed to be comparable in size and scope to Christian Pentecostalism. Its members participate in missions travel around the world, urging Muslims to wake up, be faithful, and return to the correct practice of their faith.

Migrant and nonmigrant followers of particular saints, deities, or religious teachers also belong to imagined global communities of connection. One of the fastest growing religious shrines in Mexico, for example, is Santa Ana de Guadalupe in Jalisco State, the birthplace of Mexico's patron saint of migrants, St. Toribio. Many believe St. Toribio guides people safely across the border to the United States. Santa Ana has been transformed from a former backwater into a major tourist destination, not by remittances but by the many faithful who visit each year and feel a sense of kinship to this saint and to each other. Vendors eagerly sell them pocket-size prayer books, which include a bon voyage message from the local bishop and a prayer for those crossing the border without documents. "I feel I am a citizen of the world," it says, "and of a church without borders."

The anthropologist John Bowen describes what he calls a transnational public space of reference and debate, which he argues has been in place since the beginning of the Islamic era. Long before it emerged in the West, this space was created, in part, by debates and exchanges between Muslim scholars and public figures in Indonesia, Pakistan, Egypt, and elsewhere. In its contemporary incarnation, scholars and professionals form networks, attend conferences, and create institutions to help convey how universally shared faith and values apply to local contexts. Bowen states, "This sense of Islam's transnational character is diffuse but powerful, and it derives its power from the ways in which rituals reproduce, and histories remind Muslims of, the shared duties and practices of Muslims across political boundaries. In its impulse to refuse particularistic loyalties to ethnic groups or to a nation-state, this consciousness first and foremost creates an imagination of an Islamic community transcending specific boundaries and borders."<sup>19</sup>

The globalization of the sacred, then, occurs on many fronts.<sup>20</sup> Changes precipitated by migration run parallel to connections arising between members of global religious communities and social movements. And these developments are taking place in a world where universal norms about human dignity, rights, and social and economic justice are increasingly salient. As global actors, religious bodies make people aware of these norms and mobilize their adherents to support them. In turn, sharing universal norms encourages the emergence of religious global identities.

It is not only the cast of religious characters that changes through migration. Ideas about what religion actually is and where to find it change as well. The separation of church and state is so firmly embedded in the American psyche that most Americans treat religion and culture as more distinct than they actually are. Many new immigrants come from places where religion and culture go hand in hand. They cannot sort out Irishness from Catholicism, Indianness from being Hindu, or what it means to be Pakistani from what it means to be a Muslim. Faith guides the way they live their everyday lives, who they associate with, and the kinds of communities they belong to, even among people who say they are not very religious. Their ideas about tolerance and diversity are shaped by having lived in states where religious life is actively regulated and where expectations about relations between "us" and "them" are quite different from those in the United States.

As a result, many immigrants bring to the table a much broader understanding of what religion is and where to find it. The sacred and the spiritual spill over into the workplace, the schoolyard, and the neighborhood. When people adorn their refrigerator doors with "saint magnets," hang cross-stitched samplers with religious teachings on their walls, light candles in honor of the *Virgen*, or decorate their rearview mirrors and dashboards with photos of their *gurus*, they imbue the quotidian with the sacred. When a Latino family celebrates its daughter's 15th birthday or a Hindu son invites his elderly father to live with him in the United States, they are performing religious as well as cultural acts. For some newcomers, American values are, in part, religious values. And these values are not just "made in the U.S.A.," but around the world.

Migrants also bring different understandings of what it means to belong to a religious community. In some cases, membership means worshiping in a particular congregation, with a clearly defined canon, leadership, and fee structure. But many people do not identify with a single congregation. They are comfortable worshiping at whatever church, temple, or mosque is close by. Their faith does not depend on participating regularly with the same group of people or, in some cases, with worshiping in a group at all.

Furthermore, religion does not stay inside the walls of official religious buildings. Private, informal religious rituals often reveal much more about the changing nature of religious life than what goes on at the church or at the temple. When a Muslim silently says her prayers while stopped at a traffic light because there is no place nearby to pray, she is transforming Islam in America. When a traveler crosses himself before the plane takes off, he is expressing his faith, whether or not he attends mass on Sunday. These changes in ritual and belief are communicated back to the home community where they also transform religious practice.

Just as the walls of religious buildings are permeable, so are the boundaries between faith traditions. Many migrants come from countries where religion has always combined elements from several faiths. Much of Latino Catholicism, for example, integrates indigenous, African, and Christian practices, implicitly giving followers permission to be many things at one time. Many of the Brazilian and Indian immigrants I have studied saw no problem with belonging to several religious communities simultaneously, because all the pieces fit under the broad umbrella of Christianity or Hinduism. For these individuals, boundary crossing, or combining elements from different faiths, is the rule, not the exception. The American context, with its wide array of religious choices, strongly encourages this kind of mixing and matching.

Similarly, religion itself does not obey political or ethnic boundaries. The Crusaders resurrected Christianity in a range of dominions, kingdoms, and principalities that had been claimed by Muslims. Incan, Mayan, and Aztec traditions were forcibly absorbed into Hispanic Catholicism. The British spread Anglicanism to the four corners of their empire. Even the birth of the modern nationstate system has not required God to use a passport. There are one billion Roman Catholics around the globe—just less than the population of China. India's 966 million population is only slightly bigger than the worldwide population of 900 million Sunni Muslims. The Catholic Church has the most sophisticated, familiar system of transnational governance, linking its members around the world through its national conferences and social movement chapters. But many denominations, such as the Baptist World Alliance and the International Swaminarayan Satsang Organization, also have administrative structures with a global reach.

These changes in religious demography are transforming the balance of power within global religious institutions. At the last 10-year meeting of the Anglican communion, third-world bishops challenged the traditional authority of English and American prelates and their positions on homosexuality, abortion, and the ordination of women. The center of political gravity in Roman Catholicism, dominated until only recently by Italian prelates, is slowly shifting as more and more cardinals from Africa, Asia, and South America are appointed to positions of power.

Finally, religion is the archetypical spatial and temporal boundary crosser. It endows followers with symbols, rituals, and narratives that allow them to imagine themselves in sacred landscapes, marked by holy sites. Some people think of these as easily coexisting with the actual physical and political geography. For others, the religious landscape takes precedence over its secular counterpart. What happens in Bombay, London, Johannesburg, Sydney, and Trinidad matters much more to some Swaminarayan members, who think of these sites as the boundaries of a sort of "Swaminarayan country." Minarets, crosses, and sanctuaries are the salient landmarks in these imaginary terrains, rather than national monuments or historical structures. Religion also transcends the boundaries of time because it allows followers to feel part of a chain of memory, connected to a past, a present, and a future.<sup>21</sup> That is why, for example, Cubans in Miami bring their newborns to be baptized at the shrine they built for their national patron saint. They are inducting their children into an imagined Cuban nation with a past in their ancestral land, a present in Miami, and a future that they hope to reclaim once again in Cuba.<sup>22</sup>

## A Blessing or a Threat?

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America is likely to remain an overwhelmingly Christian country. Those who settle definitively in the United States will probably always outnumber migrants who live transnational lives. But changes in migration and religion are on the rise and signal important changes on the way. More and more migrants will live transnational lives, and they will use religion to do so. This is a good thing for the United States, rather than something to deny or to attempt to halt.

These trends are not confined to the United States. In Europe, migrants also live lives that cross borders by belonging to religious communities. Some sending-country governments actively facilitate these linkages. The Paris Mosque, for instance, with its many member mosques, is run by the government of Algeria. The National Federation of Muslims, one of the largest Muslim organizations in France, is run by the Moroccan government. The Turkish states' directorate for religious affairs, the Turkish-Islamic Union for the Institution of Religion (DITIB) maintains foreign branches that act as the government "caretaker" of Turks abroad and supports the community's many Turkish-Islamic cultural organizations. Thus, indirectly, it controls nearly half of all Turkish mosques (about 1,100) in Europe.<sup>23</sup>

Some Americans feel that keeping one foot in the United States and one foot in the country that you come from will only lead to trouble. They believe it is impossible to pursue American and homeland dreams at the same time. Samuel Huntington's much-discussed 2004 book, *Who Are We?*, warned Americans that we are headed toward our own internal "clash of civilizations" because Mexican immigrants do not assimilate Anglo-Protestant values and because they remain behind linguistic and political walls. To survive and thrive as a nation, many believe, America needs newcomers to "become Americans," which means subscribing to a core set of values, and abandoning their ancestral homes. Especially after September 11, they argue, aren't those who are loyal to two countries suspect?

Others point out that many acts of terrorism and violence are perpetrated in the name of God.<sup>24</sup> Not just al-Qaeda but Hindu, Christian, and Jewish groups espouse versions of faith that leave little room for argument. With some exceptions, like Catholic liberation theology or Women Living Under Muslim Laws, it seems like there are few progressive, tolerant groups using religion to promote a different end. These critics find it hard to imagine a religious voice preaching inclusiveness and respect.

But such religious voices are out there, and they are the face of the future. Rather than posing a threat, transnational migrants represent an opportunity. Instead of precipitating a "clash of civilizations," they build bridges across cultures. They carry ideas, introduce skills, and redistribute wealth. Like the Pakistani mosque-goers I have been studying, they are translators—teaching people in the United States about Islam and exporting a more liberal version of what it means to be Muslim back to Pakistan. Like the Gujaratis, they are negotiators—figuring out how they can reconcile the conflicting demands of Hindu and American values by still meeting their aging parents' expectations about filial respect while taking their children to soccer practice at the same time. Like the Brazilians who realize that "your last name isn't going to get you a job in the U.S.," they are catalysts of change who demand equal treatment for all at home.

By doing so, these migrants extend the boundaries of the collective good beyond our national borders to include those in their homelands. They expand the dictionary of the values and meanings we all share. What constitutes right and wrong, tolerance, and fairness is transnationally, not nationally, determined. Fighting poverty, sickness, or pollution is not just an American project. We need to embrace this reality and use it to move forward. There is too much at stake to throw the religious baby out with the bathwater. And there are all kinds of religious voices that can be brought into the conversation. Some simply need help speaking up.

Clearly, there is cause for alarm when religious extremists want to make the world over in their own image. There is also cause for concern when secular public space, narrowed in the name of God, compromises basic rights. But the vast majority of people are not religious extremists. They live transnational lives to achieve something better for themselves and their families, not to perpetrate atrocities. In India, Pakistan, Brazil, Ireland, or the United States, most of the people I talked with were concerned about raising their children, and being able to live safely and securely in places where the schools and police departments work. Their stories could not be reduced to simple punch lines with clear heroes and villains. Their dreams are dreams we can all agree on.

Finally, true diversity requires a willingness to confront this country's Christian biases and how they limit the possibilities for difference and choice. Protestantism is what Martin Marty calls "the wallpaper in the mental furnishing department in which America lives, always in the room but barely noticed."<sup>25</sup> While American culture claims secularity and tolerance, in fact it demands religiosity, and religiosity of a certain kind. Protestant assumptions and models permeate American corporations, universities, and charitable institutions. The Bush administration's openly religious orientation is new only in degree, not in kind, an explicit, more extreme version of the marriage between religion and politics that has always been in place.

Women's rights and civil rights activists woke us up to the pervasive power of white, male privilege. A similar conversation needs to take place around Protestant privilege. This is not to deny the positive legacy of tolerance and diversity bequeathed to us by our Protestant forebearers. It is to drive home how individuals feel when they are on the wrong side of the default category. Just as women internalize a certain minority status when the operative pronoun is "he," so Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Jews feel like outsiders when Christian cultural references and practices are the automatic norm.

New immigrants and their family members around the world, regardless of their address, are all important participants in this conversation. As the religious panorama expands, our challenge is to construct a genuinely pluralistic community, based on engagement and interaction with difference, rather than its simple acknowledgment. This is a question not just for the newcomers and native-born inside our borders, but one for the people, organizations, and social movements to which they are connected across the globe.

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## Notes

1. Diwali is the Hindu New Year, often celebrated with a Festival of Lights, and the Muslim Id al-Fitr is a celebration marking the end of the fast during Ramadan.

2. Queen (2002:327).
3. Vásquez and Marquardt (2003:35–36).
4. Beyer (2001).
5. Spohn (2003: 266).
6. Vásquez and Marquardt (2003: 3).
7. In 1900, there were 43 generally recognized nation-states; by 1998, there were 193—today the number is over 200 (Martin 2003). The number doubled (90 to 180) from 1960 to the mid-1990s (Held et al 1999).
8. Quoted in a January 26, 2005 article by Katrin Bennhold, "Taking Networking to the Next Level," *International Herald Tribune*, p. 1.
9. I use the term migrant, rather than immigrant or emigrant, to capture this in-between status.
10. International Technical Meeting on Measuring Migrant Remittances, January 24–25, 2005. Available from: [www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org).
11. Claudia M. Buch and Anja Kuckulenz, "Worker Remittances and Capital Flows to Developing Countries," ZEW Discussion Paper No. 04–31 (April 2004).
12. The remaining 6 percent identified as Mormons, "Something Else" and "Don't Know or Refused to Answer," at 2 percent each.
13. Barry A. Kosmin, Egon Mayer, and Ariela Keysar, using their figures from the 1990 NSRI (National Survey of Religious Identification) and the 2001 ARIS (American Religious Identification Survey). Available from [www.gc.cuny.edu](http://www.gc.cuny.edu).
14. Kosmin et al (2001) cite that the number of adults "who do not subscribe to any religious identification" doubled from 14.3 million in 1990 to 29.4 million in 2001.
15. Jasso et al (2003: 221).
16. Kosmin et al (2001).
17. Machacek (2003).
18. See Eickelman and Piscatori (1990).
19. Bowen (2004).
20. I borrowed this term from Vásquez and Marquardt (2003).
21. Hervieu-Léger (2000).
22. Tweed (1999).
23. Marechal, 2001: 32, cited in Lawrence (2004).
24. See work on religious violence by Scott Appleby, J. Harold Ellens, Mark Juergensmeyer and Jessica Stern.
25. Quoted from an interview with Bob Abernathy, May 3, 2002, *Religion & Ethics Newsweekly*, Episode 535, produced by Thirteen/WNET New York.

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