

Neoliberal Political Economy and the Religious Revival

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In a recent talk at UC Santa Barbara, the activist-scholar Tariq Ali suggested in passing an intriguing line of causality for the elusive connection between economic practice and religiosity in the political sphere. It goes as follows: *the minimal governmentality proscribed by neoliberal ideology leads to an “empty” and hopeless political discourse, wherein radical religion can easily take hold. This, along with Cold War-era suppression, explains the process of the last several decades in which secular political activism around the world has largely been replaced by religious activism.*

The purpose of this paper is (1) to explicate and evaluate this explanation and (2) to infer from it a functional and substantive theory of politicized religion. Does a particular economics render the political sphere somehow “empty”? Can (or must) this vacuum be filled with input from other spheres, notably religion? If so, is such religion merely a replacement rhetoric for something essentially political in nature or does it sidestep politics entirely? In order to address these questions, I will draw from the evidence of current events, particularly in the volatile United States-Middle East complex, which is a hallmark on both sides of globalized economics and radical religion. Ultimately, I do find Ali’s suggestion to be a useful one.

It is a rather Weberian project, certainly more than it is Marxian: locating zones of dialectical affinity between the apparently separate social spheres of political and religious life. I mean to follow Weber in staying well shy of pure determinism. This, however, is an inversion of the *Protestant Ethic*’s method, which began with theology and arrived at its probable impact on economic practice. Instead, Ali’s suggestion begins with political economics and speaks to its impact on the behavior and beliefs of religions in the public sphere. To invert Weber in this way, I should hope, contributes to illuminating the other side of a broader dialectic.

1 Politicized Religion / Political Economy

By “politicized religion” I mean an entirely contingent concept. The assumption behind any of the politics, economics, and religion discussed here is an ideology of secularism. This, most broadly, is the transcendent medium of citizenship upon which the idea of the modern state is constructed.¹ The process of secularization, inscribed in the existence of the modern state, posits separate (“differentiated”²) public spheres through distinct secular and religious discourses. In these terms, politics and economics are secular. To whatever extent secularization can be said to have been implemented, the ideal of constitutional authority founded on some theory of social contract implies a humanistic politics apart from transcendent religious authority. In the presence of this ideal, even a theocracy exhibits a kind of secularization such that its conjoining of religion and state is non-obvious enough to deserve a name.³ It is on these grounds that we can talk about politicized religion, which might otherwise sound redundant. Now it sounds revealingly contradictory. Religion is politicized when its discourse and authority venture into the presumably secular sphere of politics, where its presence is intrinsically evocative.

Since at least the early 1980s, politicized religion has been widely recognized as an empirical fact. It dashed the mid-century predictions that throughout the secularizing world,

¹ See Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 5.

² Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, demonstrates that differentiation is the most essential characteristic of secularization, recognizing that the decline and privatization of religion, has not been as widespread as earlier theorists anticipated.

³ See the discussion of post-Islamism in Roy, *Globalized Islam*. In revolutionary Iran, he argues, the infusion of religion into the modern state has evaporated its perceived religiosity by masquerading as politics. On the other hand, non-state “neofundamentalists” perform an equally secularizing purification of religion from politics.

religion was in decline. Events like the Iranian revolution of 1979 and the rise of groups in the United States like Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority demonstrated to many that religion had far from conceded its place in political process.⁴ From the "clash of [religious] civilizations" discourse to September 11th to the rise of the Islamist electorate to the "faith-based initiatives" of the second Bush administration, explicitly religious forces appear more and more to be motivating political decision-making worldwide. Religion existed before politicized religion. People were pious. But it did not dominate secularized politics so obviously and boldly. Instead, as Ali pointed out in his talk, political discussions were instead dominated by secular political movements, particularly those posited by the Cold War situation.

The world's picture of politics in the Middle East for the last several decades has been dominated by news of violence captioned by religious coding. So much more so since 2001. All along, peaceful political parties based in religious ideology have gained ground throughout the Muslim world against the secular regimes more or less following Cold War models. Islamists have staked a distinct place in the public sphere. We now recognize immediately that the "martyred" suicide bomber and the veiled woman, like the "Jesus fish" bumper sticker, are *political* statements, alongside whatever else they might signify.

These movements take place on postcolonial geography. The contested nation states were created by European treaties and ushered through the Cold War by the competing interests of superpowers. Now, vast oil wealth has made the the region's religious battles concurrently a focal point of the global economy. Religion, at the least, offers an alternative mode of discourse to the politics of exploitation. At the same time, it always has local, self-generating meanings as

⁴ See Berger, *Desecularization of the World*, edited by the eminent theorist of decline, which traces the failure of that thesis.

well. Across the Muslim world, religion is becoming increasingly the language of a local public sphere reclaimed from global contestations.

All along, religion has become etched deeply in the discourse of the apparent exploiter as well as the exploited. Since Carter and Reagan, and much more under George W. Bush, Christianity⁵ represents the language of power in Washington and in the local politics of many states. In *American Theocracy*, political analyst Kevin Phillips powerfully demonstrates the dependence of the ruling Republican majority on a constituency that votes along the lines of religious doctrine. The last thirty years, he argues, have seen “the transformation of the GOP into the first religious party in U.S. history.”⁶ Domestically, issues like abortion, and more recently gay marriage, have become key litmus tests for voters, even despite very little legislative movement on them at the federal level. Additionally, many have argued that Christian eschatology trumps even *realpolitik* in the minds of top foreign policy decision makers (and at least 40 percent of voters⁷), particularly when the Middle East is concerned. Mainline Protestantism, which kept a safer distance from politics, has given way to a thoroughly politicized evangelicalism concerned with enshrining its doctrines through political processes.⁸ In government, and culture more broadly, the political goals of religious communities certainly hold more noticeable sway than those of any non-dominant secular alternative.

The religion we see revived today is not necessarily Marx’s “sigh of the oppressed creature.” It has occurred not only in the stagnant regions of the American south or on the

⁵ I use this term in parallel with how “Islamism” has come to be generally understood: politicized Christianity.

⁶ Phillips, *American Theocracy*, viii.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 253.

⁸ In previous work, I have argued that nondenominational Christianity in the United States uses national politics as a performative forum for internal theological debates, in lieu of a centralized ecclesial structure.

impoverished “Arab street.” There is revival in the relatively affluent United States and in the relatively vulnerable Middle East, both. Its leaders and adherents are very often members of the prosperous and educated classes. George W. Bush and Osama bin Laden are both sons of wealthy and powerful families. In these contexts, people have embraced religious politics not as an escape from the ruling ideology but in order to find and dictate meaning within it.

Phillips’s book, on either end of the discussion of religion, includes two large sections about aspects of economic policy in the United States, oil and debt respectively. While he doesn’t make much of an attempt at establishing any connection between the economics and the religion, his juxtaposition is a suggestive one. The faith the American economy has placed in fossil fuel energy and the financial services sector, at the cost of vast military expenditure and total dependence on overseas manufacturing, seems close to religious in its own right. Together with the growing influence of religion, Phillips argues, these ingredients resemble the historical conditions under which the old European empires collapsed.

These features of the American economy that he points to are far from isolated trends. Both reflect a national and global consensus on neoliberal economic and political ideology that has been in place, ever increasingly, since the Reagan-Thatcher years. To talk about “neoliberalism,” of course, does not refer to a single orthodox doctrine or movement.⁹ After the economic crises of the 1970s, governments and international organizations began to turn gradually away from the Keynesian model of welfare states to a renewed confidence in the *laissez-faire* market process. Built on the theories of economists like Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, this kind of thinking took hold by the end of the Cold War as the ideology of a new

⁹ On neoliberalism generally: Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*; Robison, *The Neo-Liberal Revolution*; Treanor, “Neoliberalism.”

world order. The forces of open competition and free trade, they argue, are more likely to bring about an equitable distribution of resources than even the most benevolently-minded central planning. Border tariffs should be removed, taxes should be lowered, and government should be drastically reduced, privatizing its social services. In actual practice, the regimes that have most touted neoliberal reforms in the developed world have had a some difficulty implementing them in their own countries. Nevertheless, they have used it widely as a policy for international development, imposing it on client states in the developing world. Through organizations like the World Bank and the IMF, neoliberal ideology has become deeply entrenched worldwide. “In a sense,” writes one political scientist, “all governments throughout the global economy are now neo-liberal governments.”¹⁰

The symptoms of the United States economy that Phillips points to both, debt and oil, reflect characteristics of neoliberal thought. A ballooning financial services sector is necessary infrastructure for the greater frequency and formalization of contract transactions as business is conducted more and more quickly and minutely through markets rather than state bureaucracies. In turn, the power of the oil business in determining American policy abroad with disastrous results reflects the neoliberal bias of market interests over state interests. Government’s responsibility, rather than to directly provide for its citizens or even its own prestige, is to protect the interests of the free market. And this is key to the neoliberal logic: the market mechanism, not the rational governance of leaders, provides for the people (or: they provide for themselves through it). The market thereby becomes an end in itself. Values, both economic and cultural, are determined through market processes, and will be better for it. In this sense, many critics have

¹⁰ Gamble, “Two Faces of Neo-liberalism,” 34.

noticed, neoliberalism is much more than an economic theory. Once in place, it becomes a totalizing system that brings more and more aspects of society under the umbrella of markets, with the markets as the only remaining ends in themselves.

There is, therefore, the coincidence of religious revival and neoliberal ideology that makes Tariq Ali's remark so suggestive. Importantly, both came onto the global scene at around the same time, beginning in the late 1970s and ultimately flourishing after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, it is not obvious that the two movements bear more than incidental relation to one another. The following explication of Ali's narrative in more detail should make the connection between them more clear.

2 “Empty” Politics

When he spoke of “empty” politics, Ali contrasted neoliberal ideology to a kind of human rights discourse that he finds it has left unattended. Market consciousness only has concern for markets, the criticism goes, and never for people. Its politics is “empty” because no hope is offered for changing the conditions that human beings live under.

Notwithstanding, neoliberalism offers its own compelling discourses of hope and human betterment. The success of the internet, for instance, offers an accessible example of how the collective mind of individuals acting out of self-interest can produce goods and knowledge for the benefit of all. Thomas Friedman, popularizer *par excellence* of neoliberalism's close cousin globalization, describes a sometimes attractive, sometimes troubling world picture.

Globalization, he writes,

is enabling corporations, countries, and individuals to reach around the world farther, faster, deeper, and cheaper than ever before, and in a way that is enabling the world to reach into corporations, countries, and individuals farther, faster, deeper, and cheaper than ever before.¹¹

This world, while fundamentally integrated and bewilderingly complex, is also empowering in way that ordinary people have never experienced before. The mind of modern markets, clearly far beyond the capacity of our own minds, offers a real (as opposed to Ali's utopianism), wealthier, and probably inevitable future for human beings. In these terms, can market politics still be considered "empty" politics?

The answer begins with the recognition that, like Marxism, neoliberalism has inscribed within itself a kind of "end" of politics. It is a comprehensive vision about the organization of political economy that can brook little opposition. To the extent that neoliberal reforms have failed in the United States and Britain, the failure can be attributed precisely to politics: the entrenchment of vested interests and visions which resist the rollback of public infrastructure and "safety nets." Parliamentary government has slowed the neoliberal advance.¹² At the same time, the international organizations and new states that have been built on neoliberal models from the ground up have created conditions within those states and in the international economy as a whole that makes the priority of markets inescapable; there, politics is forced to defer to economics.

¹¹ Friedman, *Longitudes and Attitudes*, 3.

¹² For this reason, Richard Robison's "Neo-liberalism and the Market State" in Robison, *The Neo-Liberal Revolution* argues that in some respects, the authoritarian market state is a actually preferable shell for neoliberal economies than democracy.

In any of its most commonly articulated forms, neoliberal economy depends on a strong state that is devoted to maintaining the market.¹³ It must provide basic systems of infrastructure and continually work to overcome the recurring obstacles to free economy. The discourse of the state's institutions, therefore, shifts from secular political ideology to "a techno-managerialism of economic governance," charged with the job of maintaining the market state while insulating it from challenge and critique.¹⁴ Mechanizing politics, like mechanizing industry, abstracts production away from the human scale. By arranging the order of things in this way, direct critique becomes not only inconsequential to the system but ultimately unthinkable by the people who depend on it.

This is a classic instance of the Habermasian narrative in which a "system-world" comes to colonize the "life-world." According to Habermas's *A Theory of Communicative Action*, the interaction of these two irreducible domains is the essence of human exchange.¹⁵ Only in the life-world, however, can meaningful discussion be had that lends itself to creative action and mutual understanding. Systems are operating necessities, but their encroachment onto the realms of imaginative and communicative life must be vigilantly guarded against. In *The Decline of Politics*, Peter Marden argues that neoliberal ideology has brought about just such an encroachment, particularly when measured against the expectations for the political articulated by Foucault and Arendt. He describes the neoliberal mechanisms as "antipolitics": "the shrinking of the public sphere and the closure of political participation through corporate practices of

¹³ Gamble, "Two Faces of Neo-liberalism," 22.

¹⁴ Rodan, "Neo-liberalism and Transparency," 198-199.

¹⁵ My sources for this discussion are Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, 66-67 and Marden, *The Decline of Politics*, 185. See also Hugh Baxter, "System and Life-World in Habermas's *Theory of Communicative Action*." *Theory and Society* 16 (1987): 39-86.

commodification.”¹⁶ As the basic units of life become commodified, the person’s world becomes less distinguishable from the system, and therefore less able to imagine alternatives to it. But politics, as Marden emphasizes, depends on the presence of the opposition. Totalizing neoliberalism is total encroachment because the public sphere operates wholly according to the rules of the system. New ideas, visions, and products are welcome of course, but only so far as they succeed in the market. The worlds of ordinary life are so mediated by it that they cannot begin to overturn it or even think past it.

The success of rational choice models in the sociology of religion following Stark and Bainbridge reflect the extent to which religious thought (put aside the politicized variety for the moment) in the modern United States has thoroughly adopted the market model. Light, economical, easily-adapting forms of Protestantism and metaphysical thought increasingly beat back institutionalized, mainline denominations. Olivier Roy spends much of *Globalized Islam* demonstrating the presence of a similar trend among Muslims worldwide. By his account, Muslim self-understanding has undergone “deterritorialization”; with significant minority communities spread around the world the traditional *dar al-Islam* is no longer a geographical entity.¹⁷ Like the internet, and like the markets themselves, the boundaries of the *ummah* are more dynamic and “virtual” than ever before. Meanwhile, and particularly in the diaspora, the constitution of Islamic identity is tending toward more and more individualized forms of personal spirituality that frame the individual believer as customer. These cases appear in one sense like the defeat of an old system-world by a grassroots insurgency, but in the larger context they clearly represent gains by an even more overarching market system.

¹⁶ Marden, *The Decline of Politics*, 212n2.

¹⁷ Roy, *Globalized Islam*, 234.

The politics of neoliberalism are not “empty” in the sense that they preclude any visions of a better future or even human rights, however indirectly they might come about. Markets of ideas, carried through electronic media, offer new possibilities for expression and public reflection. Nevertheless, the realm of politics proper begins to be effaced. The politics of the modern state diverts above all to the job to maintaining the market. Tariq Ali argues that this is just what has occurred in the United States; the two party system offers no genuine political choices because both parties are largely devoted above all to the needs of the market. Discussion in the political sphere that is meaningful to people as people, then, may only be possible through a medium that transcends conventional politics.

3 Religion as Substance

One characteristic that pervades politicized religion, both in the Middle East and in the United States, is an obsession with the specifically, often sexualized, human scale. Islamist groups and the Republican party mark their identities not through economic theories but through headscarves and abortion protests. Against the bewildering, interwoven complexity of the market system, these groups draw attention to what is immediately and viscerally human. They form a veiled foreground, even a public distraction, before the techno-managerialism that dominates the energy of the neoliberal state’s machinery. But the question remains whether religion, beyond discursive miming and its boisterous resurgence in recent decades, has come to inhabit the political vacuum left by the neoliberal agenda.

In both religious contexts, religious thought bears the influence of the economics around it, which should come as no surprise. But the process is not simply passive. As these communities embrace the mechanism of globalization, they also stake a claim on it, compete for mastery of it, and sanctify it. Such appears to be increasingly the case in the Islamic world, where “neofundamentalist” movements use performative marketing through the media to sidestep the authority of mainstream clerics, who in turn make futile attempts to denounce the internet “fatwas” of popular extremists with no traditional religious education. In the American context, the same evangelical communities that have built such a strong base of political power have developed a religious discourse in alignment with the neoliberal economics of their political allies. Christian business manuals and courses paint a picture of Jesus as a master entrepreneur, organizing and delegating his disciples into a competitive unit while coding investment advice into his parables. The popular novels of the *Left Behind* series, which tell the story of the apocalypse in blockbuster form, embody neoliberal theology plainly in their very marketing and presentation, which resembles Hollywood more than the Bible. In their vision of the end times, one reader has observed, “markets persist as the most efficient way of resisting totalitarian evil.”¹⁸

There is ongoing discussion about whether religion is enough a thing in itself to motivate political action. The explanation offered by some academic observers of politicized Islam has been to the effect that “the key to understanding the jihadist and his journey lies in politics, not in religion.”¹⁹ By this account, politicized religion amounts to no more than longings for political

¹⁸ Strombeck, “Invest in Jesus,” 162.

¹⁹ Gerges, *Journey of the Jihadist*, 11. See also Kepel, *The War for Muslim Minds* and Humphreys, *Between Memory and Desire*.

liberation or economic prosperity, cloaked in religious language by discourse-making figureheads. On the other hand, sometimes in the same books, the believers themselves repeatedly warn against this interpretation. Fawaz Gerges, after asserting the basic primacy of politics, writes of the opposite consensus among Islamists in the Middle East he interviewed:

Nearly all cautioned me against the Western tendency to explain the rise of Islamism in purely socioeconomic and political terms. Such explanations, they felt, distorted and trivialized what their movement was all about: a spiritual and moral quest to halt, *not* merely to moderate, the secularization of society.²⁰

More in the West may be sympathetic with this view than they realize. The question asked by so many people in the United States after September 11, “Why do they hate us?” was very often answered in terms of religion. On September 20, 2001 in a joint session of Congress, President Bush explained the terrorists’ motivation in terms of “a fringe form of Islamic extremism that has been rejected by Muslim scholars and the vast majority of Muslim clerics—a fringe movement that perverts the peaceful teachings of Islam.” On a more extreme end, Robert Spencer, author and editor of jihadwatch.org, has gotten a lot of mileage out of the argument that Islam intrinsically lends itself to the sort of violence we see so many Muslims participate in on the news.

Obviously, politicized religion would not warrant attention if it were nothing other than veiled politics. When people organize activity around religious canons, they behave differently than “pure” politics or economics could possibly suggest. Other things are at stake. A political position like banning stem cell research, for instance, is difficult to justify in terms of economics or secular ethics alone; in the present American case, it depends on a religious taxonomy of

²⁰ Gerges, *Journey of the Jihadist*, 34.

values. Even more so, religion tends to subvert the conventional political authority structure. The charismatic, authoritarian leaders who tend to set the agenda of politicized religion and determine the interpretation of the canon stand in profound contrast to the social contract model of authority offered by the modern secular state. The choice between Prime Minister Muqtada al-Sadr and the “renegade” cleric Nouri al-Maliki in Iraq is not merely between one political ideology or another but of the very meaning of politics, authority, and representation. In some circumstances and discourses, religion can offer very different motivations for action than politics. When suicide bombing can be construed as a religiously expressive and ultimately salvific act, it becomes a more available strategy than if its only meaning were that of instrumental politics. Consequently we can conclude that religion is at least enough a thing in itself to diverge meaningfully from normal politics.

Critics like Gerges claim that, as a whole, politicized religion cannot be a legitimate politics because it offers no comprehensive vision. “Their organizations,” he argues, “possess no concrete views of politics or economics nor do they offer new models of society.”²¹ In their interviews with Giovanna Borradori after the September 11th attacks, both Habermas and Derrida made such an argument; for Derrida, “such actions and such discourse *open onto no future and, in my view, have no future.*”²² After all, Osama bin Laden appears to be in no position to establish a viable Islamic state. But according to Olivier Roy, traditional states are less and less the currency of political Islam’s imagination. As events have unfolded since those world-creating attacks, constantly in implicit reference to them, it is becoming clearer and clearer that Derrida’s remark is neither here nor there: politicized religion is *making* the future.

²¹ Gerges, *Journey of the Jihadist*, 12.

²² Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, 113.

In his recent study of the Islamist movement in modern Turkey, Alev Çinar gives a vivid account of this making. As religious parties have entered political discourse since the late 1980s, they employ parallel strategies to those used by the initial secularizing reforms after World War I. By vying for the privilege of meaning-making over space, history, and the body, secularists and Islamists both contend for control over modernization. She reads the renewed practice of wearing headscarves among women as a refashioning of Atatürk's Hat Law of 1925, which required the bureaucracy to wear western-style hats instead of the traditional fez. Secularists then attempt to appropriate the headscarf as a nonreligious fashion rather than as religious expression. Islamists, in turn, insist on its religious meaning. But the difference, Çinar insists, is not between modern and anti-modern, but between "alternative modernizations." In Habermasian terms, the contested spheres of space, history, and body constitute the life-world (which Çinar re-describes as the "public gaze"), while both parties share a common ideal of a modernizing, apparently globalized system-world.

Perhaps, then, Gerges's and Derrida's critique can be answered in this way: if politicized religion has no comprehensive vision of the future, neither does politics. The growing neoliberal consensus has closed the possibility of resisting the system of mechanized markets, while at the same time leaving questions of fundamental human values completely unaddressed. It has limited politics to the system-world and then shut off discussion there. Politicized religion in this context, then, enters into a contest to inscribe its discourse and its forms of life into the life-world that economics neglects. The *system* of the future seems to be a given, while its *form of life* is still up for grabs.

José Casanova, in his landmark reevaluation of secularization theory, concludes that politics is a “historical option” for religious communities. But he leaves as an open question the problem of how or why a community might decide to enter into politics, perhaps as a choice of free agency. Following Tariq Ali’s suggestion, I find that we can identify ways in which political and economic conditions can help explain the options that religious communities choose. In both the United States and the Middle East, the discussion of political economy has reached the point of consensus (or deadlock). Neither regional economy can evade its dependence on the globalized economy. But this neoliberal system, by insisting on the priority of the market, makes no claims for the order of ordinary life. It thereby draws alternative religious voices back into certain discussions in the public sphere that under the conventional modern state would be marked as political. The option of politicization, seemingly, comes as a comprehensible entrance of religious logic into and upon the retreat of politics. It would be worth investigating further, for instance, whether the relative lack of politicization in western European Christian communities can be linked with the remaining vestiges of social democratic economies there.

4 The Nature of Politicized Religion

What I suggest here is a theory of politicized religion as it is defined above, not any answer to the elusive dream of a theory for religion in general. Religion, itself a set of specific family resemblances, can ultimately be theorized only in its specificities; here I take up only one, the particular moment when a religious way of talking and thinking comes to dominate a secularized politics.

In an appendix to *The Sacred Canopy*, Peter Berger offers in brief two approaches to the definition of religion, which I draw upon for my analysis. He takes up this discussion in order to capture the critical difference between his account of secularization and that of his colleague Thomas Luckmann. In “the most convincing and far-reaching attempt to define religion in terms of its social functionality,” Luckmann equates religion with the anthropological drive to create worldviews, “all-embracing universes of meaning.”²³ A secular worldview, therefore, is a difference of character and not of kind from a Christian one. Both serve a social function. Berger, in contrast, insists on preserving a meaningful substantive difference between the religious and secular, distinguishing religion by its reference to the sacred. Scholars since have not agreed on one or the other approach.²⁴ For present purposes, however, I find the disagreement to be a useful one within which to categorize what we have been calling politicized religion.

When Tariq Ali observed that the secular political contests of the high Cold War have been replaced in the new world order by religious ones, he implies an account of religion that is *functionally equivalent* with secular politics. Anthropologically, that is, the two do the same “work” and satisfy comparable needs. This characterization holds up in my analysis. The life-world activity of conventional politics has been emptied by neoliberal ideology. In consequence, religious discourses and authorities have been drawn into the once-secular political sphere, apparently to fill a need.

Meanwhile, these discourses and authorities are decidedly different from secular politics. Their manner of decision-making and justification might refer to transcendent authority in a way

²³ Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 176.

²⁴ The majority undoubtedly tends to Berger’s approach, understanding religion in terms of its reference to the supernatural (that rather than “sacred”). There remain major figures however, like Ninian Smart and Danièle Hervieu-Léger, who make a convincing case for a functionalist approach.

secular politics could not claim to do. We can see it in the clothes they wear and the ceremonies they perform: clerics and prophets just aren't the same as secularized politicians in business suits. Suicide bombings and a ban on stem cell research are conceivable in a secular context, but are much more plausible when couched in religious beliefs. Politics and politicized religion, therefore, maintain *substantive specificity* from one another. To answer a question raised earlier: is politicized religion any different from merely religionized politics? Functionally, probably not. Substantively, probably so.

This discussion began with the appearance of a contradiction: politicized religion, the entrance of religion into the secular category of politics. At the end, I maintain that the contradiction is real and actually performative. "Politics," as both the managerial mechanism of the modern state and the account of its social meaning, has begun to collapse, particularly in the context of neoliberal ideology. The very existence of politicized religion is a sign that politics is undergoing a stage of redefinition, or was never quite what we defined it to be in the first place. At a glance, this appears to be a further division of labor: an emerging differentiation between a single transnational global economic mechanism on one hand and a series of human-scale-meaning-making communities inhabiting it on the other.

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