

Sacralizing the Secular. The Ethno-fundamentalist movements

Enzo Pace¹

Abstract

Religious fundamentalist movements regard the secular state as an enemy because it claims to codify its power as if God did not exist. Those movements consider their religion the repository of absolute truth, the ultimate source legitimizing human laws. Therefore, although they are post-secular, at the same time they endeavor to transform religious principles into political agendas. Indeed, militants often act in accordance with political objectives in the attempt to assert the primacy of their own faith over that of others. They move within contemporary societies in the name of a radical political theology. The main arguments based on two case studies: Bodu Bala Sena in Sri Lanka and the movements for the *Hindutva* in India.

Keywords: Fundamentalism. Ethno-nationalism. Secular state.

Introduction

This article contains some reflections on the links between secularization, the secular state and fundamentalism. Religious fundamentalist movements, which act on behalf and in defense of an absolute transcendent truth, regard the secular state as an enemy because it claims to codify its power *etsi Deus non daretur*², that is, independently of any religious legitimation. Those movements consider their religion the repository of absolute truth, the ultimate source legitimizing human laws. Hence the paradox of their beliefs

1 Professor de Sociologia e Sociologia da Religião na Universidade de Pádua (Itália), onde dirige o departamento de sociologia (DELETE). Professor visitante na École des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (Paris) e antigo presidente da Sociedade Internacional para a Sociologia das Religiões (ISSR/SISR).

2 "As if God did not exist" was the maxim used by Hugo Grotius in his important work *De iure belli ac pacis* which was first published in 1625. It refers to the natural law that is considered valid regardless of the existence of God. The maxim has been conventionally extrapolated by Catholic Popes who have criticized secular states that do not legitimize their authority and power in connection to God or a religious principle and by philosophers and politicians who have argued since the time of the Enlightenment in favor of the *laïcité*.

and actions: although they are post-secular, at the same time they endeavor to transform religious principles into political agendas. Indeed, militants often act in accordance with political objectives in the attempt to assert the primacy of their own faith over that of others. It is in this respect that fundamentalist movements are considered post-secular (that is, they go beyond the secular state); they nevertheless also *secularize* religious ideas into political strategies. In a word, they move within contemporary societies in the name of a radical political theology. If, according to Carl Schmitt (1927, 1929), the modern political sphere can be considered a field of human action characterized by a *Freund* (friend) and *Feind* (enemy) polarity, fundamentalist movements share this radical perspective which is based on religious beliefs that already contain a germ of secularization.

Politics is the means by which the friend-foe war is played out in accordance with a literal approach to the sacred texts. It is a communicative action that portrays the dramaturgical confrontation between truth and falsehood and between good and evil in political terms. The eschatological *polemos* (war/battle) narrated in a sacred text becomes the linguistic and communicative code that expresses without any cultural mediation or moral scruples the language of faith through political doctrine. Fundamentalist movements have taken on the task of provoking a serious crisis in certain forms of secular states, first in the modern era in Europe and the United States and, later, in particular after the Second World War, in post-colonial countries. There can be no question that Gandhi and Nehru never intended to build a nation of Hindū people founded on the complex system of religious beliefs that we in the West have come to call Hinduism. The fathers of modern India were inclined towards a secular, democratic, non-denominational state³.

3 *Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956), one of the fathers of the Indian Constitution, was a politician, philosopher and anthropologist who fought against the chaturvarna (the caste-based) system. He chaired the Parliamentary commission charged with editing the Constitution in 1947 (adopted two years later). Ambedkar, who studied the origins of the shudra e dalit caste system based on Veda scriptures, embraced Buddhism and popularized the core message of Gautama Shakyamuni (Buddha). Buddhism became a liberation theology for him, a social religious manifesto for emancipating scheduled and tribes castes from the segregation to which they were condemned in the name of a religion (Hinduism). While drafting the Constitution, Ambedkar incorporated not only European models but also some organizational guidelines utilized by the Buddhist sangha (association or community), i.e. rules of conduct, practices, disciplinary regulations and duties such as following a particular order before taking a decision by vote. To learn more about the social Buddhism proposed by this prominent Indian intellectual (Ambedkar, 1987, 2011).*

They recognized that the Indian society was a multi-religious one and that a peaceful coexistence between the members of different faiths could constitute a reciprocal resource and promote the democratic spirit itself. Secular, as far as they were concerned, did not mean anti-religious; indeed, religious diversity could be the salt of democracy and nothing less than the soul of the democratic adventure (CHAKRABARTY, 2006; SEN, 2006).

This paper examines the links between secularization and fundamentalism by presenting three approaches: the first theoretical, the other two, empirical. The first part, which briefly underlines the characteristics of a type of socio-religious action conventionally called fundamentalism (PACE, 2011), is followed by the delineation of two case studies focusing on fundamentalist movements linked to Sinhalese Buddhism and to Indian Hindu activism. They are a counter-intuitive demonstration of the extent to which the fundamentalist trend has taken hold not only within monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), but also in those classified as polytheistic systems of beliefs which, in principle, do not necessarily presuppose the existence of a single God. The section referring to Buddhism leads us to re-examine the popular stereotype according to which that religion is inherently opposed to violence. We will also consider the aggressive attitudes of some groups of Buddhist monks both in Sri Lanka and Myanmar. Against the backdrop of neutral secular states basically sympathetic towards other religious faiths, radical Buddhist clerics have *secularized* principles and rituals, transforming them into political agendas seeking to gain power. The fundamentalist approach has thus become the means by which the new elite of an ethnic nationalist phenomenon communicate.

I Types of fundamentalism

Social scientists have approached fundamentalism from two diametrically opposite directions: as an expression (or the quintessence) of modernity and as a reaction to it, with an infinity of shades of meaning linked to both perspectives. According to the first approach, fundamentalism is clearly a reaction to modernity, a defensive action against the individualization of faith and of socio-religious identity (MEYER, 1989). According to the second, as delineated among others by Lawrence (1989) and Eisenstadt

(1999), fundamentalism is a modern phenomenon, a direct consequence of a modernity that rejects modernism. While exploiting the advantages of modernity (propaganda techniques, the logic of social mobilization, lobbying in the public and political arenas, etc.), fundamentalists are driven, according to Eisenstadt, by a modern Jacobin idea that utopia is the antithesis of modernity. According to Lawrence, the disjunction between modernity and modernism has enabled fundamentalism to become a transnational movement that claims to provide a new, absolute foundation for social action and human knowledge with regard to social order and political power. A third variation stresses the relationship between fundamentalism and secularization (KEPEL, 1991), the former bearing witness to a tendency countering the gradual eclipse of the sacred predicted by numerous scholars two decades ago.

Although fundamentalism and terrorism are in principle incompatible, the latter at times develops into a sort of senile form of the former. The violent radicalization of some fundamentalist groups quite often occurs when a fundamentalist plan made to gain political power or to impose cultural hegemony over the rest of society fails. The holistic worldview very often degenerates into proposals to cleanse and eliminate religious minorities or ethnic groups. Religious violence intensifies when those in power suppress fundamentalist groups by violent means, prompting activists to go underground, to take up arms, and to fight the political establishment by means of terrorist attacks. This strategy is partly due to the asymmetry in the military forces that are deployed. As fundamental terrorists often find themselves fighting against technologically sophisticated armies, they tend to choose terrorist methods, striking civilian targets to create panic and social insecurity. Manipulating the interpretation of sacred texts and religious jurisprudence, fundamentalist terrorists justify suicide bombers, kidnapping or killing unarmed civilians as actions carried out in God's name. As Juergensmeyer (2003) emphasized, claiming to interpret God's will, they consider themselves true believers and defenders of the faith. Referring to suicide bombers and the violent radicalization of contemporary groups and movements in the Muslim world, the Franco-Iranian scholar Farhad Khosrokhavar (2002) coined the term "*martyropathy*."

Generally speaking then, fundamentalism is a label applied to many social groups or processes proclaiming the unerring nature of a sacred text upon

which a rational strategy for instrumental social action is founded. By gaining political power and building an organic solidarity that has been threatened by relativism, secularism, and religion's weakened role in promoting social integration, fundamentalists ultimate goal is to create a utopian regime of truth (PACE, 1998; 2007). Fundamentalist tendencies have emerged in various socio-religious settings linked to: Protestantism, Catholicism, Islam, Jewish diasporic communities and Israel (after the Six Day war of 1967), contemporary Hinduism, Buddhism, and some Sikh factions. (MARTY; APPLEBY, 1991, 1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1995). Some of the features and goals fundamentalist movements share include: endeavoring to restore a mythical sacred order, direct engagement in the political arena, supporting politics of identity, in many cases evoking a purity of a people or religious groups' origins, developing intolerant attitudes to religious diversity, envisioning a virtuous religious solidarity economy.

As we have seen, fundamentalists first of all consider the sacred text as inerrant and use it to legitimize a new social order envisioning a pure, integral one mirroring divine or Dharma (universal) Law, the exclusive way to affirm and preserve a pure collective identity. The sacred language that is adopted inspires a discipline of the body and mind, fosters shared habits, and promotes the idea of organic solidarity between individuals. Rejecting the modern concept of individualism, the sense of solidarity that it inspires is supposedly conducive to a mystical brotherhood. The second characteristic element is a direct political struggle inspired by religious motives. When the Iranian revolution began in 1977–1978, for example, Islam was perceived as providing the means to promote the country's liberation from the dictatorial Pahlavi dynasty and its subsequent modernization. When *Ayatollah* Khomeini came into power, the Islamic liberation theology became a political project aiming to shape an integral Islamic state. In the process, as the centralized power of the state increased, the traditional role of the Shi'ite clerical institution began to change. Up until the revolution, although the clerics were the interpreters of the sacred text, they had made no attempt to impose a particular model on society or politics. But once they actually gained power, the *ayatollah* began to offer a sort of state hermeneutics of the sacred texts. Despite the traditional pluralism in the country with regard to the interpretation of canon law, Khomeini imposed a tight straitjacket on a society possessing a relatively diverse social differentiation.

The third feature refers to fundamentalist's intent to walk in the direction of a mythical past outlined in a sacred text, a depository containing the secret of social order and the language of social action, the *socio-logos* of the community, is conserved. The fourth element is linked to the need for an enemy. Fundamentalist groups systematically remind followers that their survival/identity/territory is threatened by a real or imaginary enemy. When Yigal Amir, a Jewish religious zealot, killed Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995, he did so because he was convinced that the peace with Arafat being negotiated by Rabin would mean losing territories that were part of the Promised Land given by God to His people. The fifth feature of fundamentalism is simply a corollary of those already outlined above. Fundamentalist terrorists are convinced that they are "guardians of the truth". They are certain that they have been commissioned directly by God to take radical, determined action against the enemy; thus their symbolic and physical violence is legitimized. The sacred violence comes as a logical consequence of the missionary calling that fundamentalists feel they have received from God or from the Transcendental Cosmic Order. Finally, a holistic worldview clearly recognizes the links between religion and politics as well as the connections to the economic sphere. A fundamentalist wants to save the world by converting people and is adamant that all aspects of everyday life and the social system need to be changed. Since the calling focuses on the idea that we must become pious, populist, and pragmatic, the redemptive action must necessarily embrace religion, politics, and economics. Taking a broad approach to the relationship between fundamentalism and economics, Iannaccone (1997) concluded that the success of fundamentalist movements is due not only to the theological vision that they present, but also to the fact that they act as providers of social services and economic benefits. In states in which governments and economies function poorly, fundamentalist movements may develop welfare organizations that may often attract greater consensus than their religious radicalism (HEILMAN; FRIEDMAN, 2010). Another important link between fundamentalism and economics can be found in the communications market as fundamentalism is ever more a *brand* that circulates freely particularly in the new media systems (cyber-religion or social media) (MARTENSSON; RINGROSE; BAILEY, 2011). Exploiting old and new medias, fundamentalism tends to discourage all forms of tolerance, or

intercultural, inter-religious dialogue and, according to many studies, to reinforce ethnocentrism and homo-negativity (hostility toward persons who are gay, lesbian, or transgender) (WRENCH et al., 2006).

2 The *dharma* war in Sri Lanka

The ultra-nationalist Sinhala Buddhist movement, the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS), was founded in 2012 in Sri Lanka by two monks three years after the end of a civil war (1983-2009)⁴ that was tearing apart the post-colonial Sinhalese State. The case is particularly interesting because of the development of fundamentalist traits within a contemporary Buddhist movement. A similar movement, led by Ashin Wirathu, a Buddhist monk, also developed in Myanmar. What these movements have in common is the projection of the systematic message that “everyone else is an enemy”. The Tamils were the main enemy in Sri Lanka, but since the Tiger Tamil Army was defeated in April 2009, the Muslims have become the new primary target.

The aims and precepts of the BBS can be summarized as follows:

a) identifying a text *par excellence* from the large corpus of the Buddhist school of Theravāda (the Elder Monks) that is to be considered the sacred text that is the source of an inerrant narrative of the history of Sinhala Buddhism, a mythopoiesis of the pure identity of a people that has become a nation;

b) identifying symbols, signs and rituals pertaining to the monastic tradition as moral resources for collective action in the political and social spheres, transforming rituals into public performances to be held also in the political arena;

4 According to UN reports, the 25 year armed conflict between the Tamil insurrectionist movement claiming independence of Northern and Eastern provinces of the island and the Sinhalese government cost an estimated 80.000-100.000 lives. Pitted against the much stronger national army, the Tamil forces – the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) organized suicide-bombing attacks, recruited at least 3.200 child soldiers (according to the Human Rights Watch [HRW] report: <<http://www.hrw.org/reports/2014/srilanka1104>>, and exiled many Muslim-populated villages. On their part, the Sri Lankan Army used a violent repression strategy that became increasingly brutal also against civilians, especially towards the end of the conflict. When the final battle for Kilinochchi (the most important Tamil town in the north) was launched on 19 February 2009, HRW reported that the Sri Lankan soldiers slaughtered civilians in indiscriminate artillery attacks. In response, on the following day, February 20, a Tamil brigade conducted a suicide mission, attacking the Army Headquarters in the Sri Lankan capital Colombo from the air. The list of cruel, violent atrocities committed by both sides is endless and shocking. For more information on the civil war, see Johnson (2005); Swamy (2002) and Pace (2003).

c) considering all other religions (Tamil, Muslim or Christian) as a potential threat, a dangerous source of contamination and corruption of the moral virtues of Buddhism, which is instead the foundation of the social bond that legitimizes political power and the basis for the nation's organic solidarity (SILVA, 1988).

All these elements converge to delineate the BBS as a fundamentalist movement: the interpretation of a sacred text exclusively by the monks legitimizes the quest for a pure Sinhala national identity and connects it to the political *polemos*. An inerrant sacred text is the primary code through which the BBS monks aimed to develop a model society and the ultimate principle legitimizing the State. The new highly educated generation of Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka developed a repertoire of symbols and signs pertaining to Sinhala Theravāda Buddhism to reaffirm the centrality of the monks' *sacred* mediation in the nation-building process. In this respect, the leaders of the fundamentalist movement have been successfully outsourcing religious rituals from the monastic communities (*sangha*) to the public squares. The communication strategy (and agency) in this case which focuses on the message that everyone else is an enemy, is based on four premises: a) choosing a non-canonical text and transforming it into sacred, supreme, absolute text; b) interpreting that text as the source and model of the organic, primordial, moral solidarity of Sinhala People; c) considering the defense of the nation's identity as a dramatic eschatological battle to save the Sinhala people from their enemies (internal and external); d) asserting the moral and political authority of the Buddhist monks as the undisputed custodians of the collective (sacred) memory and language (shaped by sacred text) and of individual and social virtues.

It is in the light of these developments that Tambiah devised his theory of the *fetishization of Buddhism* (TAMBIAH, 1976, 1992), in particular with regard to modern-day Sri Lanka. According to Tambiah and other scholars (LING, 1973; BECHERT, 1978; SMITH, 1966, 1973), the term describes the transformation of an open system of belief, or in other words the Buddha Dharma, into a closed one. From an historical standpoint, Buddhism is a plurality of belief-systems that allows for the free movement of beliefs and practices through intensely creative languages, rituals, images, signs

and symbols – or, simply put, with a prodigious production of an *excess of meanings* that are broader than the texts, symbols, and rituals encoded by the various Buddhist schools. In other words, the *fetishization* of Buddhism that has occurred in recent times can be considered similar to the *bibliification and scripturalism* processes (SENEVIRATNE, 1999) characterizing Evangelical fundamentalism. As a consequence, the traditional status of the monk began to alter in the 19th century as that group began to monopolize the interpretation of some of the texts belonging to the non-canonical Theravāda tradition and developed a religion and national ideology consistent with the idea of an ethical, i.e. a Buddhist State. Since the religious-nationalist ideology has become the language of the ruling class that was building the new, post-colonial State, Tambiah realized that a dramatic confrontation was taking place in Sri Lanka between two types of Buddhism: a compassionate one promoting universal values and a dark, potentially violent one betraying the former's goals. The *religious* violence expressed by a group of monks and, more recently, echoed radically by the BBS can be considered the socio-logical consequence of the political reification (or *bibliification*) of the Buddha Dharma.

It is important to clarify that the communication strategy adopted by some neo-Buddhist movements in Sri Lanka was partially the result of the complex historical process that originally began with Portuguese colonization (1505-1630) and continued first under the Dutch (1658-1796) and then under British rule (1796-1948). Colonization set in motion a long, intensive contact with various European cultures. Sri Lanka was the ancient kingdom⁵ of Sēlām, so named when it was conquered by the Sinhala, an Indo-Aryan ethnic group from Northern India that began to invade the island in the 6th century BC. The island was renamed Ceylon by the British⁶, who established large tea plantations and imported many workers, the majority Tamil, from Southern

5 Vijaya, the first legendary king, was mentioned in the Pali Chronicles, which include the Mahavamsa (the Great Chronicle); he ruled the island from his Lanka fortress from 543 BCE onwards. The Sinhala alphabet, a descendent of the Brahmi script, began to appear in Prakrit inscriptions during the 3rd and 2nd centuries BCE. Both the alphabet and the language have changed considerably since that time. The earliest surviving literature in Sinhala dates from the 9th century AD. The Sinhala alphabet is also used to write Pali and Sanskrit in Sri Lanka.

6 Ceylon became an immensely famous type of aromatic black tea.

India. Independence for modern Sri Lanka was a gradual process that began in 1948 when it became a Dominion within the Commonwealth and was completed only in 1972. The process leading to Sri Lanka's independence can be described then as a peaceful political movement led by a variety of politicians and activists including leaders belonging to various cultures and religions (Hindu, Buddhist and Christian) with different ideological orientations, but united by the ideal of national independence. The Sri Lanka Freedom Party, which was founded by Solomon West Ridgeway Dias Bandaranaike in 1951, came into power in 1956. It has remained one of the two largest parties in the Sri Lankan political arena ever since. The new government immediately set out to change the country's political structure. The passing of the *Sinhala Only* Bill made Sinhala the sole official language and Buddhism the pillar of the nation's cultural identity. Solomon Bandaranaike was assassinated in 1959, and his widow was elected prime minister. The opposing political pole was occupied by the more conservative United National Party (UNP). From 1948 onwards, the country's political system succeeded in establishing a viable parliamentary democracy based on a two-party alternation. From a constitutional standpoint, Sri Lanka experimented successfully with a republican democracy and a unitary state under semi-presidential rule. A dramatic crisis developed in 1980 when the Tamil minority, which had been excluded from the political establishment and discriminated against (including the refusal to recognize Tamil as the second official language of the State), demanded the political autonomy of some provinces and, in particular, those located in the Northern part of the island. This triggered the beginning of a long, violent civil war that ended in 2009 when the Tamil forces were defeated by the national army. In the 1970s, Buddhist monks appeared on the religious-political scene in Sri Lanka. The new class of educated monks provided the Sinhalese citizens with a set of social norms based on religious principles: the monks were trained to put the Dharma (Buddha teachings) into practice by assisting the laity with worldly problems, providing advice and leadership on matters of social welfare and economic developments in rural areas. The Buddhist sangha (monastic community), which refers to the monastic community, has historically been considered the pillar of the state since the 5th century BCE. The monasteries scattered throughout the island (there was one in every village) were not just centers where monastic

communities meditated and studied; as in the Catholic or Muslim traditions, they formed micro-social cells that provided the rural people with education and assistance. According to Seneviratne (1999, p. 17):

The monk/village nexus was local in the pre-colonial era, but as colonial rule advances, a supra-local Sangha came into being, enabled by colonial technologies, especially the print media....The supra-locality of the Sangha does not make it a power. It only confers on the Sangha a ceremonial and symbolic status. It can only be a handmaid of power. This is well understood by perceptive members of the culture who call the Sangha a tool of politics (*despalana atakolu*).

In accordance with the Sinhala tradition, one of the most important chronicles that the monks adopted as their fundamental sacred text was the *Mahavamsa*⁷. The book has a crucial ideological relevance in the modern Buddhist sangha, and the monks used it to support the indissoluble link between religion, language, and the land. In the land that belongs to Buddha himself, this sacred text was the first exercise and elaboration of the Sinhala language conducted by the monks. The island of Sri Lanka is thus regarded as the *Dharma-dipa* (the island of Dharma) and the monks the guardians of its sacred territorial boundaries and of the people's moral unity. Even in modern day Sri Lanka, the monks are the defenders of Buddhism and of the national identity. The *sangha*, an extra-political authority, is where the authorized (religious and political) language continues to be produced. This mythopoetic reconstruction on the part of the monks has nevertheless distorted and partially concealed the history of kingship in ancient Ceylon because at least three kings (including the first, Vijaya) were Tamil. The monks' new role was forged during the post-colonial era, the outcome of a process of modernization of Sinhala Buddhism⁸ which was initiated during colonial times when Christianity became a competitive model for the renaissance of

7 "The Mahavamsa, or the Great Chronicle of Ceylon. London: The Pali Text Society, 1912, rpt. 1960 (trans. by Wilhelm Geiger)". The book was composed in the late 5th or early 6th century AD, by the Ven. Mahanama Thera. The book is divided into 36 chapters and tells the story, in the form of an epic poem, of the kings of Sri Lanka from the first, Prince Vijaya (543 BCE), to the last, Mahasena Anuradhapura (277-304 AD). It is not a canonical text, but it became fundamental to Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

8 Called Buddhist Modernism by Seneviratne (1999, p. 25) or Protestant Buddhism by Çananath Obeyesekere, in: Çombrich, r.: Obeyesekere, Ç.: "Buddhism Transformed. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1990"; and by John Holt, in "Protestant Buddhism?", *Religious Studies Review*, v. 4, p. 307-312, 1991".

local Buddhism. Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933), an important reformer and revivalist of Sri Lankan Buddhism, became internationally famous figure at the time he took part in the Parliament of the World's Religions held in Chicago in 1893. It was Dharmapala who propelled the transformation of traditional Buddhist monks into caretakers and social workers, similar to Christian priests who minister to their flock.

The birth of this new order of monks engaged in the social and political sphere coincided with the beginning of the Sinhalese nation-building process (1946-50). Walpola Rahula (1907-1997)⁹ was instrumental in developing the *Declaration of the Vidyalandkara*¹⁰ *Pirivena* drafted by another monk, Yakkaduve Pragnasara. Briefly, the document represents the coherent exposition of the ideas developed by the two monks with regard to the nationalist agenda. The monastic elite supported the post-colonial politicians committed to the *Sinhala-Only* policy that fueled conflicts, divisions, ethnic riots and civil war. It is important to remember, however, that not all politicians agreed with the ideological campaign launched by the modernist monks. At least during President Premadasa's administration (1989-1993), the political establishment reacted negatively to the *Sinhala-Only* campaign supported by the Sarvodaya Shramadana¹¹, which has been regarded by researchers as a fundamentalist movement and by the government as a threat to national unity. The most relevant effect of the *Sinhala-Only* policy can be described as triggering the *mirror syndrome*: the non-Sinhala minorities (particularly the Tamil and Muslim) were forced to face the reality of what it meant to be Tamils or Muslims living in a predominantly Sinhala state and thus to re-examine their own identities. As religious assumptions were translated into political commitments, the quest for a Muslim identity also spread to the Muslims

9 His most important book is "**The Heritage of the Bhikkhu**. Kalaniya: Vidyalandkara Press, 1946 (English trans. New York, Grove Press, 1974)".

10 Located in Peliyagoda and founded by the Ven. Hikkaduve Sri Sumangala Thero in 1873, Vidyalandkara is one of the largest monastic colleges in Sri Lanka.

11 Beginning in the late 1950s, a lay Buddhist association spread throughout the rural villages thanks to its charitable work on behalf of the poor peasantry. The movement was conceived in an important Buddhist college (Nalanda, in Colombo). The term sarvodaya ("progress for all") has been linked to Ghandi, while shramadana means "gift of labor" (reflecting the idea of a compassionate and voluntary action). Led by A.T. Ariyaratne, the movement is active in more than 15,000 villages, providing funds from a financial reserve bank of 1,6 billion rupees.

who spoke Sinhala as well as Tamil – indicating that the term “Muslim” no longer denoted an ethnic boundary and category.¹²

As far as the socio-religious and political background of modern Sri Lanka is concerned, it is important to remember that the fundamentalist approach favored by the BBS (and other neo-traditionalist Buddhist monks) focusing on the *enemy* of the religious and national identity of the Sinhalese people produced two important effects:

a) it ended the era of a relatively *free* production of meanings attributable to a set of religious symbols and signs;

b) it transformed rituals into public performances, forging representations through which the participants were urged to perceive certain meanings and accept them as *natural* and inevitable.

The BBS competed with other national religious and political entities and invested socio-linguistic resources to take its religious rituality into the public space, using ritual as a code for generating connotations of its socio-political production. When the BBS activists radicalized the belief that the roots of the Sinhalese language can be found *only* in the sacred texts of Sinhala Buddhism, their strategy became more effective in social terms as they organized public performances (extra-ritual spaces) to demonstrate that the *sacred grammar* of the Sinhalese language is part of a coherent *theory of reality*¹³.

Since ritual is a means of communication,¹⁴ it can be seen as an act by which the BBS monks produce dominant signifiers (in semiotic terms) or a *sealed world* of words and gestures laying claim to an imagined collective identity threatened by an enemy. It is important to bear in mind the notion of over-coding as it was delineated by Umberto Eco¹⁵: over-coding is the

12 For more information on this topic, see Chandra R. de Silva: “**Managing Ethnic Tensions in Multi-Ethnic Societies: Sri Lanka 1880-1985.** Lanham: University Press of America, 1986” and J. Stanley Tambiah, “**Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy.** Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986”.

13 My own way of thinking is in accordance with that of scholars who consider language as an ideology, particularly with regard to the peculiar language of religion. See Benjamin L. Whorf: “**Language, Thought, and Reality.** New York: Wiley & Sons, 1956”; Gunther Kress, and Robert Hodge: “**Language as Ideology.** London: Routledge, 1979”; Robert Hodge, and Gunther Kress: “**Social Semiotics.** Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988”; Terry Eagleton: “**Ideology.** London: Versus, 1991”.

14 With reference to this idea, see Pace (2011).

15 See “**A Theory of Semiotics.** Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976”.

process whereby secondary meanings are attached to messages generated by a primary basic code. In the case examined here, the basic code is a sacred text (*Mahavamsa*) from which the monks draw secondary meanings to attach to their social action, presenting them as an extension of their ritual action.¹⁶

Generally speaking, Buddhist monks abstain from eating beef more for symbolic reasons of purity than in compliance with a real taboo of the Hindu tradition. In the radical collective imagination of the Sinhala-Buddhist monks and in public rhetoric, purity is connected to defending the sacred integrity of Sri Lanka, the island of Dharma. Although Buddhist monks are usually vegetarians, it was not a prerequisite for militants who joined the first nationalist groups before the BBS were founded. From the beginning, in 2012, the BBS targeted the Muslims' religious diet, objecting not only to their consumption of beef, but also to the way the animals were slaughtered¹⁷. According to Badone Jones¹⁸, supporters of the BBS consider how Muslims slaughter cattle evidence of their cruelty and proof of their deliberate infliction of pain on animals. This is clearly an example of over-coding: a secondary message (criticism of the Muslims' cruel treatment of animals) is attached to the one generated by the basic symbolic code (the Bo, or Bodhi tree is the sacred fig tree under which Siddhartha Gautama is said to have attained enlightenment, or nirvana). The campaign launched by the BBS against cattle slaughter has also had political effects. In November 2015, Mervyn Silva, a former Sri Lankan government minister, inaugurated a signature campaign (supported by the BBS) calling for a ban on halal animal slaughter methods: the blood of the animals killed by Muslims became the symbol of their contamination of the land of Dharma.

A similar process is also underway with regard to the female body. As Friedland put it¹⁹, "[...] nationalism is a way to mark the land, to defend

16 Rite is the pillar of the religious system, according to a lecture by Émile Durkheim, as Massimo Rosati pointed out in his book: **Ritual and the Sacred**, New York: Routledge: 2009".

17 See John Stewart: "Muslim-Buddhist Conflict in Contemporary Sri Lanka. **South Asia Research**, 34, n. 3, p. 241-260, 2014", and "**Vegetarianism and Animal Ethics in Contemporary Buddhism**, London: Routledge, 2015".

18 See Robin N. Badone Jones: "**Sinhala Buddhist Nationalism and Islamophobia in Contemporary Sri Lanka**, Levinstone (Maine): Bates College: Honor Thesis, 2015".

19 See Roger Friedland: "Money, Sex and God. **Sociological Theory**, v. 20, n. 3, p. 381-425, 2002". See also Mahinda Deegalle: "Sinhala Ethno-Nationalism and Militarization in Sri Lanka. In: TIKHONOV, V. (Ed.).

or redefine a nation's boundaries [...] then we might interpret religious nationalism's obsessive control of women's bodies as a parallel figuration, the policy of a bodily frontier". The embodiment of a nation is a deeply gendered process. Controlling the purity of women's bodies is a way to preserve the nation against the risk of contamination. The methods range from restricting intermarriage, to repressing lesbian associations, to condemning fashions imported from the West, to forbidding promiscuity in public places.

The BBS movement is drawing the sacred boundaries of the nation using its religious compass, cleansing it of all impurities deemed hazardous to Sinhalese identity. Like the body of Buddha, the territory of Sri Lanka has transmigrated into the Land of Dharma. According to Sri Lankan Buddhist tradition, when Buddha died in 543, his body was cremated, but his left canine tooth (Sri Dalada Maligawa) was retrieved from the funeral pyre by his disciple Khema and after countless setbacks, the relic was taken to Sri Lanka in the 4th century by a princess who hid it in her hair. The relic came to be considered the symbol of the living Buddha and, at the same time, the sign of a sacred land, the Dharma-island, that was blessed by Buddha.

3 The politics of *Hindutva* in India

The case of Ayodhya²⁰, India, is emblematic and possibly the most well known event we can evoke when we turn our attention away from Sri Lanka and towards India. It forms a part of a long series of disputes, uprisings, protest marches and controversies regarding conversions that have repeatedly plagued the recent history of the Indian democracy, or at least from 1990 to the present. Built in 1528, the Babri Mosque was one of the largest mosques in the Uttar Pradesh state although it was naturally not the only place of Muslim prayer in the city of Ayodhya or in the surrounding state where approximately 31 million Muslim out of a total population of more than 166 million were residing. According to Hindu tradition, the hill where the mosque was built, known as Ramkot (Rama's fort) was once occupied by a temple dedicated to Rama, the King of Ayodhya and the seventh incarnation of the god Vishnu as

Buddhism and Violence. *New York: Routledge, 2013, p. 15-36*, and Ananda Abeysekera: "The Saffron Army. Violence and Terror(ism): Buddhism, Identity, and Difference in Sri Lanka, *Numen*, v. 48, p. 1-46, 2001".

²⁰ An ancient city of Uttar Pradesh with has a population of 55.000 in habitants.

well as the place where Rama (his full name was Ramachandra) was thought to be born 7000 years ago. Although the site had not been claimed by the Hindus for centuries (ELST, 2001; SMITH, 2003), beginning in the 19th century, there were several conflicts and court disputes between Hindus and Muslims over the mosque. On December 9, 1992, the demolition of the mosque by militant Hindu nationalist groups triggered riots throughout India and led to numerous deaths.

The mosque's destruction in 1992 symbolically marks a divide in contemporary Indian history and triggered the reawakening of some Hindu cultural and religious movements which sprang up during the second half of the 19th century. The thought of those political-religious movements became crystallized as the ideology of *hindutva*, a neologism coined by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1928) meaning the *pure Hindu identity*. Savarkar regarded Hinduism as an ethnic, cultural and political identity and considered India its birthplace, the land where the religion originated. From an historical point of view, it is important to remember that several socio-religious reform movements emerged during the 19th century in colonial India. These had a variety of exponents, the most important of which (with regard to the past and present influence on contemporary political and religious movements) was Dayananda Saraswati, who founded in 1875 the Noble Society (*Arya Samaj*), a reform organization (SEN, SINGH, 2002). The project was a genuine hermeneutic effort to renew Hinduism so that it would be able to meet the challenges of the modern world imposed by British colonial rule. There are some interesting analogies between the great awakening or Protestant religious revival during the first half of the 19th century and the reform of the Sunnite Muslims, i.e. in very different parts of the world and in profoundly different settings. The Arya Samaj movement proposed to redefine the fundamentals of the Hindu faith. In order of importance, these are: faith in a single, supreme God, the source of all knowledge, an intelligent and merciful, right and universal presence, the only entity worthy of being venerated; the *Veda* (or scriptures) are the only source of truth and understanding, the infallible, unchangeable holy word to which all Arya must conform; all human actions must comply with the cosmic law of the Dharma and must consequently be inspired by principles of love, justice and rectitude; all this is achieved by promoting the well-being of the entire human family and by being aware of and defeating ignorance (BATTAGLIA, 2015; JAFFRELOT, 2007, 2011).

Dayananda's thinking tends to redefine Hindu tenants into monotheistic terms, translating the foundations of the faith into a simplified belief system which can be summarized as follows: a) believing in one supreme God; b) considering the Veda (Sacred Scriptures) an infallible source of truth; c) providing social and moral norms and a symbolic resource for national identity. Arya Samaj thus stood at the crossroads between two powerful movements in Indian society at the end of the 19th century: on the one hand, the quest to be free of the British colonial yoke; on the other, the hope of a cultural and spiritual redemption achieved by returning to the purified and revitalized religious roots of Hinduism, the starting point on a path of reawakening. One of Dayananda's closest collaborators rehabilitated the ancient *shuddhi* (purification) ritual, adapting it into what we might define as a *reversion practice*. In fact, it literally means purification, but also reversion (or reverting after converting). Its origins can be traced to the time when India was dominated by the Mogul empire and many Hindus converted to Islam. With the decline of Muslim rule, the *shuddhi* was subsequently perfected to facilitate the reinstatement of these converts to Hinduism, their original religion. Individuals who undergo the ritual are persons who are, because of their conversion, considered tainted with an infamous sin, making them perverts, traitors of the faith and of their forbearers. The ceremony involves washing one's feet and drinking water from Ganges (*Gangajal*) the sacred river of Hindu mythology. This re-baptism in water symbolically cleanses the person contaminated by another religion. According to the Arya Samaj, it means bringing the lost "home", returning them to the fold.

The context in which the *shuddhi* ritual takes place today is characterized by recurrent socio-religious disputes that are more acute in some areas and less so in others, but generally arising in all the states where Hindu extremists are particularly active in accusing persons who have converted to Islam and Christianity of being responsible for the Hindu people's loss of traditional values and identity. It is also linked to the political rhetoric of movements such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) founded in 1925 by K.V. Hedgewar. Another organization that owes its origin to the RSS is the Vishva Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council) which was founded in 1964 as its cultural and religious branch. The *shuddhi* is part of a network of collective

activities that gather political consent in favor of the Bharata Jamata²¹ (the Indian People's Party) which has close ideological and organizational links with the RSS. The party's activities are characterized by variable degrees of violence, both symbolic and physical including insistent efforts to persuade individuals who have converted to convert back to their original religion, to assaults on places of worship (as in a case of the mosque in Ayodhya), to acts of vandalism against religious confessional schools. In September 2006, for example, a group of Hindu extremists stoned the Catholic school annexed to the Loreto convent in Lucknow, the capital of Uttar Pradesh, where they claimed that Hindu girls were being forcibly converted to Catholicism in violation of the laws of the state (one of the few states in India where religious conversion is prohibited). In August 2008 violent riots organized by the Vishva Hindu Parishad militants burned down a Catholic orphanage in the State of Orissa after their leader Swami Saraswati was murdered. A political battle was waged to extend the law that forbids the slaughtering of cows (animals Hindus traditionally consider sacred), and finally activities were organized to re-convert the so-called tribal communities or Dalits ("outcastes") who frequently, and hardly surprisingly, embraced other religions preaching equality before God and salvation as an individual opportunity (Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Bahá'í).

It is important to remember that controversies over conversions have been reinforced not only by tensions between different religious belief systems but also by recurrent political and social arguments concerning the position of the Dalits (literally the oppressed) and the aborigines (*Adivasi* in Sanskrit). The former accounts for approximately 167 million people, the latter for 70 million. Both continue to be relegated to the margins of the social scale despite the abolition of the caste system and affirmative action laws promoting the outcasts and the many ethnic minorities residing throughout India, although mainly in the states of Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. Since the 19th century, with the arrival of the Catholic and Protestant missionaries and up until the present time, there have been massive conversions to Christianity and increasingly, to Buddhism. A ceremony was held in September 2006

²¹ Founded in 1981, the People's Party is one of the major political parties in India. It won the election in 1998 and recently in 2014 making Narendra Modi India's current Prime Minister.

in Nagpur, in central India, for example, to celebrate the conversion of approximately 100.000 persons to Buddhism. The Dalit Buddhist Movement which was one of the leading organizers of the ceremony was founded by Bhrimao Ramji Ambedkar (1987, 2011), himself a Buddhist convert (1956) and a social reformer who campaigned against social discrimination against the Untouchables. The Dalits and aborigines converted to Christianity who re-converted to Buddhism during reversion rituals are invited to reinstate the name they abandoned when they were baptized, they are given new clothes and they have a ritual purifying bath.

It is not easy to distinguish between where religion ends and politics or economics begin, and vice versa within the different dimensions of these conflicts. There was certainly an increase in the number of conflicts between 1980 and 1990, a decade in which the Indian society underwent profound economic changes that altered the social stratification deeply rooted in the caste system (BRASS, 1996, 2003). The most evident sign of these changes was the development of the Dalit movement which has been endeavoring to overcome the cultural and socio-economic obstacles that currently prevent 16,2% of the Indian population from fully accessing citizenship rights. There is often a close link between their expectations of social justice and economic reinstatement on the one hand, and a propensity to abandon the mainly-Hindu religion of their birth in favor of other religions on the other (FERNANDES, 1981).

The case study on conversions in the Indian subcontinent is an interesting test bench for analyzing the phenomenon as a battle being waged along the symbolic boundaries between belief systems in a historically pluralist society from a religious standpoint. The battle is fought not only in the religious arena. Indeed the ideological premise is entirely political. Defending the boundaries of a religious system implicates affirming the supremacy of one ethnic group over others, and, at the same time, to presiding over their territories and their national boundaries. In accordance with the Purity and danger theory, as espoused by Mary Douglas (1966), people of other religions are considered enemies of the true religion and a threat to their cultural integrity. The conversion-reversion movement stands at the crossroads between religion and politics. Defending the religious truth also means supporting the nationalist

ideology, the *Hindutva*, that proclaims India only for Hindus or Hindus before everyone else²².

4 Conclusion

These reflections will conclude with some final remarks on the cases examined focusing on the theoretical and methodological challenges of the sociology of religion. Both cases are characterized by collective movements seemingly capable of challenging and undermining the secular state model. Fundamentalist movements have countered the idea of secular states claiming to be able to neutralize religious conflicts and to manage religious pluralism (BEYER, 2011). In the eyes of the fundamentalist state, there is only one people recognizing only one religion using a language that is rooted in sacred texts and in a sanctified land with inviolable symbolic and territorial boundaries. Scholars and opinion makers have already begun to analyze European neopopulism and Donald Trump, the new anti-establishment American leader. In countries such as in India and Sri Lanka, the significance of populism is more specific as the collective movements are mobilizing symbolic resources taken from the religious field and investing them in the political sphere. In a word then, we are witnessing the emergence of ethno-religious nationalism in various parts of the world. Fundamentalism in this respect is a password to enter into a different world, appropriating the secrets of symbols, doctrines and rituals translating them into a strategy for social and, above all, political action that does not condemn the use of violence which has been sanctified by those who believe that the end certainly justifies the means as far as faith and fatherland are concerned.

The sociology of religion is experiencing a period of self-reflection (POULSON; CAMPBELL, 2010). While the old paradigm of secularization has been criticized, new ones are being proposed (rational choice, systems theory, post-secular literature, every-day or lived religion). At the same time, scholars are questioning universally accepted concepts of the past because they have come to the conclusion that traditional tools are no longer adequate to analyze the social and cultural changes taking place in many contemporary

22 Similar to "America first!" or "France to French People!".

societies. One of the most interesting effects of deconstructing concepts and methods is the realization that what we call religion has returned to occupy a space in different areas of the society. The sociology of religion, therefore, looks beyond its disciplinary boundaries and examines the relevance of the Religious (R) factor not so much and not only in churches or in recognized holy places but in the political as well as economic spheres, in the media (especially with regard to digital religion²³) as well as in advertising. In short, the sociology of religion is increasingly on the edge (BENDER et al., 2011) meaning that it has realized the importance of learning to de-center or no longer taking for granted many concepts belonging to the European and North American culture and to re-center or to focus on basic concepts, including the word religion, in the light of post-colonial studies. By studying the *magnificent and progressive* destiny of the secular state as young nations enter the limelight of contemporary history in a post-colonial era, we are able to come to terms with the limits of the Eurocentric approach towards the religion-politics relationship and the idea that religion is destined to become a private affair, eclipsed by the public sphere. The two cases examined here have demonstrated how unstable the conceptual tools of the old paradigm of secularization are. It also highlights the urgency of adopting a better toolbox for understanding (in the Weberian sense) how and why collective actors tend to attribute religious meanings to their actions to conquer and attain social justice or political power, promoting the selection and circulation of the elite. Fundamentalisms are perhaps the political expression of a religious narrative that has filled the void left by the great ideologies of the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries.

References

AMBEDKAR, B. R. Buddha or Karl Marx?. In: _____. **Writing and Speeches**. Bombay: The Government of Maharashtra, 1987. v. 3. Disponível em: <<http://www.ambdekar.org>>. Access in: 10 jun. 2017.

_____. **The Buddha and His Dhamma: A Critical Edition**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

²³ For this notion see Campbell (2012) and Enstedt, Larsson, and Pace (2015).

- BATTAGLIA, G. **L'altro fondamentalismo**. India, nazionalismo, identità. Napoli: Guida, 2015.
- BECHERT, H. The Beginnings of Buddhist Historiography: Mahavamsa and Political Thinking. In: B. SMITH (Ed.). **Religion and Legitimation of Power in Sri Lanka**. Chambersburg: Anima Books, 1978. p. 1-12.
- BENDER, C. et al.. **Religion on the Edge**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- BEYER, P. Religious Pluralization and Intimations of a Post-Westphalian Condition in a Global Society. **Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion**, v. 2, p. 3-29, 2011.
- BRASS, P. (Ed.). **Riots and Pogroms**. New York: New York University Press, 1996.
- _____. **The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India**. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003.
- CAMPBELL, H. **Digital Religion**. London: Routledge, 2012.
- CHAKRABARTY, B. **Social and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi**. London: Routledge, 2006.
- DOUGLAS, M. **Purity and Danger**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966.
- EISENSTADT, S. **Fundamentalism, Sectarianism and Revolution: The Jacobin Dimension of Modernity**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- ELST, K. **The Saffron and the Swastika**. New Delhi: The Voice of India, 2001.
- ENSTEDT, D.; LARSSON, G.; PACE, E. (Ed.). Religion and Internet. **Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion**, v. 5, p. 1-214, 2015.
- FERNANDES, W. **Caste and Conversion Movement in India**. New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1981.
- HEILMAN, S.; FRIEDMAN, M. **The Rebbe**. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.
- IANNACCONI, L. Toward an Economic Theory of Fundamentalism. **Journal of Institutional and Theoretical Economics**, v. 153, p. 100-115, 1997.
- JAFFRELOT, C. (Ed.). **Hindu Nationalism. A Reader**. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.
- _____. India: The Politics of (Re)conversion to Hinduism of Christian Aborigines. **Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion**, v. 2, p. 197-215, 2011.

- JOHNSON, R. **A Region in Turmoil**. New York: Reaktion, 2005.
- JUERGENSMEYER, M. **Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence**. Oakland: University of California Press, 2003.
- KEPEL, G. **La revanche de Dieu**. Paris: Seuil, 1991.
- KHOSROKHAVAR, F. **Les nouveaux martyrs d'Allah**. Paris: Flammarion, 2002
- LAWRENCE, B. **Defenders of God**. San Francisco: Harper, 1989.
- LING, T. **The Buddha**. London: Temple Smith, 1973.
- MARTENSSON, U.; RINGROSE, P.; BAILEY J. **Fundamentalism and Communication** (vol. II), London: Tauris, 2011.
- MARTY, E.; APPLEBY, R. S. (Ed.). **Fundamentalism Observed**. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.
- _____.; _____. (Ed.). **Fundamentalism and Society: Reclaiming the Sciences, the Family and Education**. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993a.
- _____.; _____. (Ed.). **Fundamentalism and the State: Remaking Politics, Economics and Militancy**. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993b.
- _____.; _____. (Ed.). **Accounting for Fundamentalism: The Dynamic Character of Movements**. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- _____.; _____. (Ed.). **Fundamentalism Comprehended**. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- MEYER, T. **Fundamentalismus**. Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch, 1989.
- PACE, E. **Il regime della verità**. Bologna: Il Mulino, 1998.
- _____. Extreme Messianism: the Habad Movement and the Impasse of the Charisma. **Horizontes Antropológicos**, v. 25, p. 37-48, 2007.
- _____. Politics of Paradise. **Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia**, v. 1, p. 25-42, 2003.
- _____. **Religion as Communication**, London: Routledge, 2011.
- POULSON, S.; CAMPBELL, C. Isomorphism, Institutional Parochialism, and the Sociology of Religion. **American Sociologist**, v. 41, n. 1, p. 31-47, 2010.
- SCHMITT, C. Begriff des Politischen. **Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik**, v. LVIII, 1, p. 1-33, 1927.

_____. Das Zeitalter der Neutralisierung und Entpolitisierung. **Europäische Revue**, v. 8, p. 517-530, 1929.

SENEVIRATNE, H. L. **The Work of Kings**. The New Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

SEN, A. **Identity and Violence**. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2006.

_____.; SINGH, K. P. **Arya Samaj Movement: A Study of Socio-Religious Consciousness in Western Uttar Pradesh**. Lucknow: Tarum Prakasham, 2002.

SILVA de, C. R. The Plurality of Buddhist Fundamentalism. In: BARTHOLOMEUSZ, T. J.; SILVA DE, C. R. (Ed.). **Buddhist Fundamentalism and Minority Identities in Sri Lanka**. New York: State University of New York Press, 1988. p. 53-73.

SMITH, B. **Buddhismus, Staat und Gesellschaft in den Länder des Theravāda Buddhismus**. Frankfurt A.M.: Metzner, 1966 (I vol.).

_____. **Buddhismus, Staat und Gesellschaft in den Länder des Theravāda Buddhismus**. Frankfurt A.M.: Metzner, 1973 (II vol.).

SMITH, J. D. **Hinduism and Modernity**. London: Blackwell, 2003.

SWAMY, M. R. **Tigers of Lanka: from Boys to Guerrillas**. Delhi: Konark Publ., 2002.

TAMBIAH, S. J. **World Conquerer and World Renouncer**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.

_____. **Buddhism Betrayed?**. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992.

WRENCH, S. J. et al. . Religious Fundamentalism and Intercultural Communication. **Journal of Intercultural Communication Research**, v. 35, n. 1, p. 23-44, 2006.

Sacralizando o secular. Os movimentos etno-fundamentalistas

Resumo

Os movimentos religiosos fundamentalistas encaram o Estado secular como um inimigo, porque pretendem sistematizar seu poder como se Deus não atuasse. Esses movimentos consideram sua religião como o repositório de verdade absoluta, a fonte derradeira que legitima as leis humanas. Assim, conquanto sejam pós-seculares, ao mesmo tempo tentam transformar os princípios religiosos em agendas políticas. Com efeito, os militantes agem frequentemente de acordo com princípios políticos, procurando afirmar o primado de sua própria fé sobre a dos outros. Eles se movem dentro das sociedades contemporâneas em nome de uma teologia política radical. Os principais argumentos baseiam-se em dois estudos de caso: o Bodu Bala Sena no Sri Lanka e os movimentos para o *Hindutva* na Índia.

Palavras-chave: Fundamentalismo. Etnonacionalismo. Estado secular.

Recebido em: 02/03/2017.

Aprovado em: 01/05/2017.