Sanctifying the Homeland:

Religionizing the Tibetan and Jewish Diasporas

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Diasporas are traditionally understood as ethnic communities that were dispersed beyond the borders of their perceived national “homeland” through voluntary or forced migration.\(^1\) Although often assimilated after one or two generations, diasporas can be long-lived if the descendants of the original migrants retain a perceived connection with their ancestral homeland.\(^2\) Like nations, diasporas are largely imagined in that most members of the community have never met, yet feel an almost filial bond with one another. A diaspora may hold multiple identities in common, but these identities may shift in relative importance over time, as political agents elevate one element over others to serve different political projects.\(^3\) For example, political agents may choose to elevate the diaspora’s religious identity over others, effectively “religionizing” the diasporic community as a means of binding them more closely to the homeland. This is because religionized diasporas tend to offer greater assistance to their co-ethnics in the homeland.

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\(^1\) The most commonly cited examples include the Jewish, Greek and Armenian diasporas. This paper adopts a broader definition of diaspora given by Yossi Shain and Aharon Barth as “a people with a common origin who reside, more or less on a permanent basis, outside the borders of their ethnic or religious homeland—whether that homeland is real or symbolic, independent or under foreign control” (Shain and Barth 2003). This definition includes diasporas created through border adjustment.

\(^2\) There has been a considerable growth in scholarship on diaspora politics in the past two decades. Most of this work has focused on specific diasporas. For example, much has been written on the Jewish and Cuban and Latino diasporas in the United States (Shain, “The Transnational Struggle for Jewish Pluralism”; Shain, Marketing the American creed abroad; Haney and Vanderbush, “The role of ethnic interest groups in US foreign policy”; De la Garza and Pachon, Latinos and US Foreign Policy). Others have examined the influence of diasporas on their homelands in the cases of Croats in North America (Hockenos, Homeland Calling), Kurds outside Turkey (Lyon and Uçarer, “Mobilizing Ethnic Conflict”), and Armenians around the world (Shain, “The Role of Diasporas in Conflict Perpetuation or Resolution”). The creation of a new Russian diaspora with the collapse of the Soviet Union has also gained attention as of late (Melvin, Russians Beyond Russia; King and Melvin, “Diaspora politics”; Barrington, Herron, and Silver, “The Motherland Is Calling”; Zevelev, Russia and its New Diasporas). The bulk of this scholarship focuses on diaspora politics in the United States (Shain, “Ethnic Diasporas and US Foreign Policy”; Shain, “Multicultural foreign policy”; Shain, Marketing the American creed abroad; Smith, Foreign Attachments).

\(^3\) It is a separate question what motivates members of a diaspora to mobilize on behalf of their homeland. One possible reason is “identity preservation,” where individual members of a diaspora engage in mobilization as a means of protecting in-group solidarity against assimilation into the host society. See especially Shain, Kinship and Diasporas in International Affairs; and Brinkerhoff, “Diaspora Identity and the Potential for Violence.” I do not deal directly with this question here, but instead explore one under-theorized mechanism by which this can be accomplished.
if they believe they are carrying out a sacred duty. Such campaigns may invoke deities or holy scriptures to establish the divine purpose of the homeland. Based on such claims, members of the diaspora are exhorted to “rescue” their people from persecution by aiding political and territorial struggles in the homeland.

This paper examines the religionization of two salient diasporic communities—the Tibetan and Jewish diasporas in the twentieth century—to investigate the motives and consequences of such campaigns. The choice of cases may seem odd, given their obvious differences. However, with respect to diasporic mobilization, they have much in common. Both have a strong religious identity and faced severe political and existential challenges in the recent and distant past. Nationalist leaders in both cases sought to strike strategic balances between secular and religious national projects. Later in the movements, Tibetan and Jewish activists extended their religious identity to attract powerful allies. This paper uses these cases to explore the drivers of such campaigns as well as their effects on struggles in the homeland. The findings of this analysis promise to shed greater light on why and how religion is instrumentalized in national diaspora projects, and with what effect.

**Why Religionize Diasporas?**

Benedict Anderson famously wrote that nations are “imagined communities” in that “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”

Diasporas are also imagined communities that may or may not be territorially contiguous. Some diasporas do reside on contiguous territory, but are not

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accorded nation-state status. This was true for the German diaspora in interwar Czechoslovakia and Poland as well as contemporary cases of the Kurdish diaspora straddling the borders of Turkey, Iraq and Iran, and the Albanian diaspora in Macedonia, Kosovo and Montenegro. There are also semi-contiguous diasporas that have spread beyond their borders but that remain in the general neighborhood. These include Russian diaspora in the near abroad, the Chinese in Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore and the Indians in Sri Lanka, and the like. The latter two cases fall into the category of entrepreneurial diasporas, where merchant networks tie individuals to their homeland states, but the diaspora is individualized and mercantilized, with no strong political orientation toward the homeland. Finally, there are non-contiguous diasporas that have spread far beyond their homeland due to forced migration or economic out-migration. Archetypal examples include the archetypal Jewish and Armenian diasporas.

It is important to note that migration or residence outside the putative homeland does not by itself create a self-conscious diaspora. Instead, there must be an active and concerted effort by diasporic and often homeland leaders to construct a strong sense of community in exile that is oriented toward the homeland. It is this political orientation to the homeland that makes a diaspora a diaspora in the modern sense of the word. Following Anderson, this orientation is usually maintained through ritualistic retelling and remembering of the story of exile. This continual construction has gotten considerably easier in the age of globalization, where increased mobility, porous borders and enhanced communication allow diasporas to connect with the homeland far more easily and frequently than previously.5 The features of globalization that facilitate

5 Adamson, “Globalisation, Transnational Political Mobilisation, and Networks of Violence”; Adamson, “Crossing borders.”
increasingly dense horizontal connections between non-territorially contiguous communities have rendered diasporas increasingly consequential on the global stage. Zlatko Skrbiš has called this imagining of geographically-distant nations “long-distance nationalism.”

The diaspora can be constructed and remembered by elites and organizations in the diaspora community itself, in the homeland, or both. Much of the literature suggests that diasporas, or at least politically mobilized members of diasporas, tend to be more nationalistic or extreme than their homeland counterparts. Hungarian-Americans, for example, are far more interested in regaining the territories lost under the 1920 Treaty of Trianon than are those residing in Hungary. Similarly, Croats in North America gave their support to the ultra-nationalist Croatian elites in the late 1980s and early 1990s, helping to set the stage for Yugoslavia’s violent disintegration. In these cases, the diaspora clearly had a radicalizing effect on politics in the homeland. However, radicalization or mobilization can work in the opposite direction as well, as when the Italian government deliberately sought to maintain coherence and loyalty of Italians who left Italy at the turn of the twentieth century. Indeed, it may be that a small group of powerful individuals in the homeland drive radicalization both at home and abroad.

What seems clear is that diaspora mobilization is a two-way street.

In this spirit, this paper examines how activists in the homeland and the diaspora have strengthened and politicized diaspora ties through the vehicle of religion. This paper explores the deliberate, systematic and specific imagining of a diaspora as a

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6 Cohen, Global Diasporas; Adamson, “Globalisation, Transnational Political Mobilisation, and Networks of Violence.”
7 Skrbiš, Long-distance Nationalism.
8 Hockenos, Homeland Calling; Mandelbaum, The New European Diasporas.
9 Lyon and Uçarer, “Mobilizing Ethnic Conflict.”
strongly religious community with indelible ties to a given territory. Here, diaspora activists layer upon a pre-existing ethnic and/or religious identity a sacred narrative about a given territorial space. The narrative binds the members of the diaspora more strongly to one another and to the territory, inducing members of the diaspora and their allies to support a particular policy vis-à-vis this territory.

The paper is organized as follows. The first section explores the politics of religionizing diasporas. The next section outlines the elements and logic of such campaigns. The fourth section traces applies this framework to the cases of the Tibetan and Jewish diasporas. The final section draws tentative conclusions for further research.

The Politics of Religionizing Diasporas

The reasons for “religionizing” diasporas are no different than the reasons for mobilizing diasporas around any other identity: by securing the loyalty and sympathy of co-ethnics who reside in rich or powerful countries, activists hope to mobilize resources in the service of their cause. Although the ties that bind these diasporas (often imperfectly) to the homeland may be based on numerous identities or ideologies, the religious identity not only binds the diaspora to the homeland, but prescribes a particular set of behaviors outlined by religious leaders of the community—who are often the very people leading the campaign. Campaigns to religionize diasporas may vary considerably, but at minimum they require the following.
Sanctifying the Homeland

Establishing the sanctity and centrality of the homeland or “holy land” in the eyes of the diasporic community is a critical first step to religionizing diasporas. Many contemporary religions already contain sacred space; making the link between this spiritual homeland and a concrete territory in the modern world serves to bind the diaspora more closely to one another and to the territory in a prescribed way. Homeland activists also use religious symbols as a means of linking the diaspora to the fate of the homeland, invoking a sense of a shared destiny. Homeland sanctification requires establishing (or revising) the history of the territory to elevate its importance and project an image of territorial destiny to be fulfilled. This is usually accomplished by invoking events of religious significance that are presumed to have taken place in the territory of the homeland while excluding events that run counter to this narrative. Holy texts and religious figures are mobilized in support of these narratives. The territory of the homeland is thus sanctified as a holy land, one with a sacred past and an exalted destiny. Leaders of the religious community are depicted as the legitimate rulers of the land, whose guidance is critical to fulfilling the homeland’s destiny. Struggles in the homeland are imbued with religious significance and interpreted as conflicts between God’s Chosen People and (His) Enemies. The struggles often result in the defeat and/or victimization of the people, who must, however, prevail in the end. The religious narrative is thus quite similar to Anderson’s description of the nationalist narrative, with the exception that the homeland is endowed with sacred characteristics that transcend earthly laws and concerns.
Embedding Diaspora in the Homeland Myth

The very etymology of diaspora signifies orientation toward a lost homeland. The literal Greek translation of diaspora, a scattering of seeds, connotes a state of exile from one’s origins or place of birth. It also connotes a sense of loss and being lost as well as abandonment. Diaspora in this sense represents death and state of limbo before return and rebirth. However, not every diaspora has a homeland myth, nor are they necessarily oriented toward their country of origin. Diasporas created through voluntary migration, as in the case of economic diasporas, may be entirely oriented toward their host countries with no sense of loyalty or desire to return to their homeland. Building a homeland diasporic identity requires centering the community’s identity around a putative motherland. Religionizing a diaspora takes this one step further—elevating the homeland in the community’s consciousness by connecting the diaspora to the territory through religious narrative rituals. In these narratives, the diaspora is as central to the homeland as the homeland is to the diaspora, and the diaspora plays a vital role in the fulfillment of the homeland’s destiny. If the embedding is effective, then members of the diaspora feel personally and collectively connected to the fate of their homeland and, ultimately, to a particular homeland project.

Evangelizing the Diaspora and Recruiting Allies

With the homeland-diaspora narrative established as truth, members of the diaspora must be personally bonded to their “brethren” in the homeland. This may be accomplished through a number of mechanisms that may all be operating simultaneously. Here, members of the diaspora are brought into contact with homeland co-ethnics through
educational and work exchanges, pilgrimages and direct political engagement on specific issues. Members of the diaspora are also brought into contact with other members of the diaspora—both in their host country and other countries. The aim is to make the connections within the diaspora and between the diaspora and homeland communities denser and more personal, to consolidate the sense of religious duty and commitment to the community and the homeland. If the diaspora is very weak or small, or its adversary very powerful, then allies may be recruited in the service of their cause. These allies may become adopted members of the religious community through conversion. Alternatively, they may be recruited because the homeland activists have infused or combined their religious identity with a distinctive political identity or by directly appealing to values or interests that the potential allies hold in common.

Making the Connection between Religious Duty and Political Activism

The final key step in the process is to make the connection between religious identity and support for certain policies toward the homeland. This “support” can take many forms. Much of the scholarship on diaspora politics explores the indirect influence or support, whereby diaspora organizations lobby their host states to adopt a particular foreign policy toward the homeland. The work on direct support largely focuses on remittances from emigrants to their kin back home.10 Other studies investigate the transfer of goods, services or capital that promote conflict behavior – such as the provision of arms or training for violent insurgencies.11 Diasporas can also assist their kin group economically through development aid or other assistance programs. Moreover, diasporas can provide

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10 Shain, Kinship and Diasporas in International Affairs, chap. 2.
11 Byman, Trends in Outside Support for Insurgent Movements.
specific policies or programs—such as language or religious education—that encourage their kin to mobilize against the homeland.

Narratives of a beleaguered or victimized homeland people are constructed, as is the notion that the diaspora and its allies have a duty to help fulfill the destiny of the homeland and its people. In doing so, the diaspora is continually exhorted to contribute to various lobby organizations or charities that act to further this set of political goals and may be asked to engage in direct action to achieve these goals. For example, Croat groups in North America were a major source of funding for the electoral campaigns of Franjo Tuđman, leading his nationalist party to victory in the early 1990s.\(^\text{12}\) The Tamil diaspora in North America and Europe has long funded the Tamil Tigers in their decades-long military campaign against the Sri Lankan government.\(^\text{13}\) The role of Irish Americans in the “troubles” of Northern Ireland is well known. Indeed, a major source of funding for insurgencies around the world is remittances from ethnic kin abroad.\(^\text{14}\)

**The Jewish Diaspora in the West**

*Historical Background*

The American Jewish diaspora is recognized as by far the most important community of Jews outside Israel. A survey conducted in 2006 concluded that the world population of Jews in 2006 was a little over 13 million; Israel had 5.3 million and the United States

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\(^{13}\) Wayland, “Ethnonationalist Networks and Transnational Opportunities.”

\(^{14}\) Individual members of diasporas can also use the resources and skills they acquired in their adopted countries to launch successful campaigns for political office in their homelands. An infamous example is Gojko Šušak, a Croatian Canadian who assumed the post of Croatia’s Defense Minister after having funneled campaign contributions from the Croatian diaspora to Tuđman.
nearly 5.3 million, together constituting 82 percent of the total population. According to Shain, “[a]t the beginning of the twenty-first century the Jewish world remains bifurcated between Israel and the United States…Given this reality, all other Diaspora centers are secondary or marginal in negotiating Jewish identity.” For this reason, I focus on American Jews as the diasporic segment of critical interest.

Until the mid-twentieth century, the dominant strains of Judaism in America have tended to be universalist and secular. Moreover, the notion that Israel or a national Jewish homeland should occupy center stage in American Jewish life was widely rejected. Like many other ethnic groups in the U.S., American Jews favored integration and assimilation at least until World War II. The universalist strain of Judaism in America at the turn of the century was also apparent in the dominant conceptions of a Jewish homeland. According to a prominent Reform rabbi in the early twentieth century, “Palestine, in my opinion is not an end in itself…Palestine is one of the means, perhaps a chief means, but not the only means of making…the Jews everywhere fitter to perform their historic tasks in the great world.” Other Reform Jews objected to the notion that Zionism referred to a specific place, but rather a universal mission to work for scientific and civilizational progress as well as justice and peace in the world. Ultra-Orthodox denominations also objected to the founding of a Jewish state because, in their reading of scripture, only the Messiah could return the Jews to the Holy Land.

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17 Ibid., p. 96.
In view of these secular and universalist tendencies in the Jewish diaspora, the first Israeli prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, and other so-called Labor Zionists made a deliberate effort to secularize the Jewish identity during the period of state-building, moving from a “revealed” religion (Judaism) to a “lived” or “civil” religion (Jewishness). This was done because Israel’s early leaders believed that a national Jewish identity was needed to gain the support of integrated Jews in Europe and America for a Jewish state. However, events leading up to World War II would change all this. The rise of anti-Semitism and the experience of the Holocaust culminated in calls for a Jewish national state by most leading figures in the diaspora community, producing a “national survivalist” turn in American Zionism.19 In the first half of the century, this position was primarily championed by the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA). After the Holocaust, however, the United Jewish Appeal (UJA) and Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds began to promote a conservative Jewish identity as well.20 The UJA’s classic slogan, “We are One,” asserted the solidarity of American Jews with the wider Jewish diaspora. According to a scholar of these organizations, the campaign to paper over clear differences in a heterogeneous community was motivated by a “yearning for a universal essence that unites Jews worldwide.”21 When the Israeli military captured the West Bank, the Golan Heights, Gaza and Sinai Peninsula in the 1967 War, right-wing Israelis mobilized for retention of Jewish settlement of the lands that had been promised in God’s covenant with Abraham. These events also led the Jewish diaspora to identify

20 In 1999, the UJA, the Council of Jewish Federations and the United Israel Appeal were merged under the United Jewish Communities/The Jewish Federations of North America, an umbrella organization that today represents 157 Jewish Federations and 400 Jewish communities across North America (http://www.ujc.org/index.aspx?page=1).
even more strongly with Israel and to see Israel and the survival of the Jewish people as closely linked.

As time went on, the secular Jewish nationalism of Labor Zionism was increasingly challenged by Revisionist Zionists who believed in the redemption of the entire promised land of Eretz Yisrael from the River Nile in Egypt to the Euphrates River in Iraq. The Revisionist Zionist philosophy of Ben-Gurion’s predecessor, Ze’ev Jabotinsky, inspired the modern Likud Party, which pursued a program of territorial expansionism. Likud Prime Minister Menachem Begin famously called for the recovery of the holy land on both sides of the Jordan River. In 1979, Begin gave up the Sinai Peninsula in return for peace with Egypt but simultaneously oversaw the growth of Jewish settlements in the historic lands of Judea and Samaria on the West Bank. These policies combined with the Lebanon War of 1982 and the 1987 Palestinian Intifada to create a major rift in Israeli domestic politics concerning the nature of the Jewish state and the status of the Occupied Territories.

These events led to a growing rift in the diaspora as well. Militarized conflict in the West Bank and Gaza not only created a “deep split between liberal and conservative Jews in the diaspora,” but also gave “legitimacy […] to open criticism of Israel by Jews.” Indeed, the last few decades witnessed the establishment of more liberal-minded Jewish organizations in the diaspora. Whereas the UJA had been founded in response to 1930s anti-Semitism, the New Israel Fund (NIF) came out of the social upheavals of the 1960s and 70s as a more progressive alternative to UJA in terms of philanthropic endeavors. More recently, the J Street advocacy organization was also founded to lobby in favor of a peaceful solution to the Palestinian conflict.

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Religionizing the Diaspora

The establishment of Palestine as the new Jewish state was anything but pre-given. Early Zionist leaders considered a variety of proposed territories for a Jewish state, including Cyprus, Mesopotamia, Argentina, Uganda and the Sinai. The early Zionists debated whether they should found a state with favorable resource endowments or one that could serve as the Jewish Homeland. Theodor Herzl references this debate in his 1896 pamphlet, Der Judenstaat, where he formalized a proposal for erecting a Jewish state in Zion:

Should the Powers declare themselves willing to admit our sovereignty over a neutral piece of land, then the Society will enter into negotiations for the possession of this land. Here two territories come under consideration, Palestine and Argentine….Argentina is one of the most fertile countries in the world, extends over a vast area, has a sparse population and a mild climate….Palestine is our ever-memorable historic home. The very name of Palestine would attract our people with a force of marvelous potency.²³

Although many Zionist leaders regarded Palestine as an undesirable and inhospitable for colonization, they believed that its symbolic value to the Jewish diaspora made it the superior option. Holy texts buttressed Jewish claims to sovereignty to Palestine. Two passages in the Jewish Bible were routinely cited as incontrovertible proof that God had promised Abraham and his descendents dominion over Palestine. Genesis 15:18 reads: "To your descendants I give this land from the River of Egypt to the Great River, the river Euphrates." In Deuteronomy 11:24, Moses tells the Jews that "Every place where you set the soles of your feet shall be yours. Your borders shall run from the wilderness to the Lebanon and from the River, the river Euphrates, to the western sea." It was understood that the state of Israel could not extend to the entire

²³ Theodor Herzl, Der Judenstaat [The Jewish State], 1896, chap. 2. The full text can be found online at http://www.zionism-israel.com/js/Jewish_State_Chapter_2.html.
Eretz Yisrael, due to European colonial claims and other geopolitical realities.

Nevertheless, the fact that Palestine contained holy sites in the Jewish Bible facilitated the sanctification of homeland. By selecting Palestine as the location of the new Jewish state, Zionist leaders ensured that the Jewish diaspora would equate Eretz Yisrael with the modern state of Israel.

Unlike many other diasporas for whom dispersion was a lived memory, the concept of the Jewish diaspora is thousands of years old. According to one writer, “[d]iaspora lies deeply rooted in Jewish consciousness. It existed in one form or another almost from the very start, and it persists as an integral part of the Jews’ experience of history.”24 The reality, of course, was that the Jewish occupation of the Holy Land was relatively short-lived; far more Jews lived outside the homeland than within it; and the dispersal of the Jews began centuries before the fall of the Second Temple in 70 CE, which took place through forced expulsions but also through voluntary economic migration. Nonetheless, the Holy Land is sacred territory to which the Jewish diaspora is enjoined to return. Jews end their Passover seder prayer with “Next year in Jerusalem.” Jews are instructed to turn in the direction of Jerusalem to pray, and the Western Wall of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem is the holiest site in Judaism, which observant Jews visit on pilgrimages to the Holy Land. Indeed, the three holiest days in Judaism all relate to Jewish exile, including the Passover, which marks the Jewish Exodus out of Egypt, Shavuot, which commemorates the revelation of the Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai, and Sukkot, which honors the 40 years during which the Jews wandered through the desert toward the Promised Land.

To bind the diaspora to the newly-sanctified homeland, Israel’s new leaders institutionalized return in the 1950 Law of Return, which gave any person in the world with Jewish ancestry the right to emigrate to Israel. The Israeli declaration of independence, too, declares Israel “the birthplace of the Jewish people,” and that, “After being forcibly exiled from their land, the people kept faith with it throughout their Dispersion and never ceased to pray and hope for their return to it and for the restoration in it of their political freedom.” In this way, the Israeli state was effectively superimposed upon a Homeland myth that was already deeply embedded in the collective imaginings of diaspora Jews.

Zionist leaders have endeavored to make the bond between diaspora Jews and Israeli Jews more personal as a means of reinforcing it. Part of this effort has focused on philanthropy. The UJA and NIF have enjoined American Jews to contribute to development projects in Israel. In the 1980s, the UJA cooperated with the Jewish Agency in Israel to create the Project Renewal, wherein “diaspora communities were “twinned” with Israeli communities.” The late twentieth century model of philanthropic agencies serve[d] the purpose of “mitigat[ing] the competing values of integration and survival in America that have tugged at the identity of American Jews since the nineteenth century.” At bottom, this was a proselytizing enterprise, in that philanthropy was seen the calling of God to his people, and thus a means of mobilizing the diasporic community around a sacred mission. Jewish agencies have also set up educational exchanges between the diaspora and homeland. Young American Jews were

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27 Ibid., p. 255.
encouraged to work on Israeli kibbutzim, attend courses in Hebrew and visit Jewish sites in the Holy Land.

Zionists have continually sought to mobilize the diaspora around political projects. The main diaspora organizations include the controversial American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. However, many right-wing activists view the support of American Jews and the work of organized lobbies such as AIPAC as insufficient for ensuring the retention of areas of the West Bank and Gaza in the context of waning U.S. support for Israeli expansion in the final years of the Cold War. Moreover, over-time surveys of American Jewish sentiment show that, despite certain radicalizing trends, the overall tendency in the 1990s and 2000s has been toward assimilation and integration of Jews into the American culture and society as well as a decoupling of American Jewish identity from Israel. Identification with Israel is significantly lower among younger American Jews than with their elders. Schisms within the diaspora community have also led to a decline in donations to the National Jewish Fund and to Israel.

As diaspora support for Likud policies have weakened, right-wing Israelis began to recruit allies to support their expansionist aims: Christian Zionists. The neo-conservative journal, the *Commentary*, noted the trend toward secularization among American Jews and their waning loyalty toward Israel since the late 1980s:

_Today, less than twenty years later, it is almost inconceivable that the American Jewish community could muster the will to mount so massive a show of unity. It is not just that, at the moment, no large-scale crisis seems to engage the American Jewish psyche. Rather, something vital in that psyche has changed. Mounting evidence now attests to a weakened identification among American Jews with their fellow Jews abroad, as well as a waning sense of communal responsibility at home._

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28 The organization was founded in the 1950s as the American Zionist Committee for Public Affairs.
Ring-wing activists have therefore made common cause with the far more numerous and politically powerful Christian Zionists, for whom any trading of “land for peace” is anathema. American Christian Zionists, and the extremist subset dispensationalists, believe that God intended the Jews to have control over the entire Eretz Yisrael. They therefore oppose the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza and the West Bank. Since Jerry Falwell formed the Moral Majority in the late 1970s, Christian Zionists have lobbied against territorial concessions in Palestine. The Likud leadership cemented a strong relationship with Falwell, who personally lobbied on behalf of the Likud position. Christian Zionists have not only money, but also numbers and political clout. Since the early 1980s, Evangelical Christians have been the most powerful voting bloc in the Republican Party. Moreover, they are committed to the cause of Israel. Hundreds of thousands of Christian Zionists go on pilgrimages to the Holy Land each year. When other countries protested the 1980 Knesset vote to make Jerusalem the capital of Israel, Christian Zionists set up an International Christian Embassy (ICE) in Jerusalem in a show of solidarity.

Many have criticized the Likud embrace of the dispensationalists as immoral or, at best, cynical, given the motives of the Christians. According to dispensationalist theology, the existence of an expansive Jewish state is a precondition for the return of the Messiah, at which point all faithful Christians will be “raptured” to heaven, while a large portion of Jews will be annihilated. Exchanging land for peace is believed to delay the End Times. Nonetheless, right-wing Israelis and Zionists have defended this marriage of convenience on the basis of shared tactical goals. At a conference of American Evangelicals in Jerusalem, Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu declared that Christian
Zionists were Israel’s best friends: "This is a friendship of the heart, a friendship of common roots, and a friendship of common civilization." Recently, Rabbi Yeckiel Eckstein, founder of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews (IFCJ), asserted that Christian Evangelicals were “our best friends and closest allies.” The Christians were consistently pro-Israel, in contrast to the less reliable American Jews. In the 1990s, AIPAC joined forces with the newly-formed Christian-Israel Public Affairs Committee (CIPAC), the ZOA, the Israeli embassy, and pro-Likud neo-conservative intellectuals to lobby against the peace process in Palestine. The members of this motley coalition had nothing in common save a commitment to aligning Israel’s political borders as close as possible with those of Eretz Yisrael.

This alliance has yielded significant victories. A demonstration of their effectiveness was their successful effort to overturn UN Resolution 3379, which declared Zionism to be a form of “racism and racial discrimination.” After over a decade of unsuccessful lobbying of the U.S. by Jewish organizations to pressure the UN to overturn the resolution, the U.S. government finally relented when Christian Zionists joined the battle. The resolution was successfully overturned in 1991. In 2002, the U.S. administration reversed its appeal to the Israeli government to withdraw from the West Bank City of Jenin when the coalition rallied their constituents to send more than 100,000 email messages and calls to the president pleading with him not to push Israel on the Occupied Territories. The strategy worked, and the president backed down.

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It should be noted, however, the uncompromising ‘support’ of the Christian Zionists may be antithetical to the interests of Jews in Israel, because their support is based on a certain geopolitical agenda rather than protecting the people who live there. While Christian Zionists are uniformly opposed to a land for peace deal, a poll taken in 2002 reported that 72 percent of the Israeli Jews were open to withdrawing from the Occupied Territories. This suggests that adapting one’s religious identity to attract powerful allies may be dangerous and can even backfire. Although formidable allies may indeed further certain tactical aims, forging an asymmetrical marriage of convenience with allies who have their own ideological agenda can yield perverse policy consequences when that agenda begins to conflict with the interests of the people they claim to be championing.

The Tibetan Diaspora in the West

*Historical Background*

The history Tibet is a source of considerable dispute between supporters and opponents of independence. According to supporters, Tibet was an independent entity before the conquest of the Mongols 700 years ago; from the fall of the Mongolian (Yuan) Empire in 1368 to the beginning of the Qing Dynasty in 1720; and from the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1912 to 1951 when the region was incorporated into the People’s Republic of China. China argues, in contrast, that Tibet has been legitimately ruled by China since the Mongolian conquest 700 years ago and that no country recognized Tibet in the first

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half of the twentieth century. As the Communists consolidated control over China and
the Korean War approaching stalemate, the American government began to view Tibet as
a useful tool for destabilizing the Chinese communist government. U.S. Secretary of
State Dean Acheson instructed the U.S. ambassador in New Delhi that the U.S. would
like the “Tibetan military capacity [to] resist quietly strengthened.”

The trigger for violent conflict was a dispute over the succession of the Panchen
Llama, the second highest llama after the Dalai Lama. This led to a Chinese invasion in
1950 to put down a growing resistance movement. In 1951, Tibet was incorporated into
the People’s Republic of China (PRC) as the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) under
the rule of the fourteenth Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso; practically speaking, the province
was subordinated to the administration of a Chinese Communist Commission. Over the
following decade, the Chinese government undertook extensive land reforms and
attempted to rein in the local authority of the monastic orders. From the mid-1950s, the
U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) covertly armed rebel units that were trained to
fight an insurgency war against the Chinese.

On March 10, 1959, Tibetan officials spread rumors that the Chinese government
was laying plans for the removal of the Dalai Lama, leading tens of thousands of
Tibetans to surround his summer residence to protect him from harm. The following day,
an ad hoc People’s Assembly unanimously adopted a declaration of Tibetan
independence, and three major monasteries outside Llasa issued decrees in support. As
the resistance intensified, the Chinese military surrounded the Dalai Lama’s residence

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35 For an excellent account of Tibet during this time, see Shain, “The Role of Diasporas in Conflict
Perpetuation or Resolution.”
and fired two mortars into the compound. The Dalai Lama’s made a decision to escape over the border, having received political asylum from Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. A military crackdown of the Tibetan resistance ensued, leading to scores of deaths and tens of thousands of refugees. No accurate accounting has ever been made of the number of people who left Tibet during this time, but estimates range from 75,000 to 100,000. From his position in exile, Tenzin Gyatso declared Tibetan independence, and in 1960, the Dalai Lama set up a government in exile (GIE) to Dharamsala, India. The Dalai Lama established an administration based on a Constitution that included a Cabinet (kashag) and nine administrative agencies. Today, there are some 150,000 Tibetans in exile; about 95 percent of them live in India, Nepal, and Bhutan—most as refugees.

From his place in exile, the Dalai Lama petitioned numerous countries to support the Tibetan resistance, but failed to get more than relief aid for Tibetan refugees in India. Although he managed to attract some financial assistance for the destitute refugees, covert CIA support for Tibet resistance fighters effectively dried up when the Nixon administration opened China in the early 1970s. Desiring normalized relations with China, other major powers also rejected Tibetan pleas for assistance.

In the 1970s, a split in the Tibetan movement came into the open. While the Dalai Lama and the GIE consistently eschewed demands for secession in favor of peaceful negotiations for territorial autonomy, more radical groups emerged to challenge

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37 The CIA ensured the Dalai Lama’s safe flight over the border to India.
39 The Government-in Exile is also called the Tibetan Central Administration (CTA). I use the former term in this paper.
this position. In the early 1970s, the Tibetan Youth Congress was established as an alternative voice for the Tibetan movement. They generally attracted more radical, disaffected Tibetans who believed that the GIE was too cautious and that the movement had to be more confrontational if they were to bring international pressure to bear on the Chinese government. Moreover, they were far more inclined to pursue de facto or de jure independence for Tibet. The Tibetan People’s Freedom Movement was another organization that in 1977 held a demonstration in favor of Tibetan freedom in New Delhi—the first mass political action by the Tibetan activist community. Meanwhile, the Dalai Lama continued to adhere to his approach of negotiating with the Chinese government, a position that generated consternation among more radical Tibetan activists who despaired as Chinese repression continued into the 1980s. In the late 1970s, Chinese officials began to negotiate with the Dalai Lama over a compromise solution. Active negotiations between His Holiness and the Chinese government continued until the mid-to late-80s when the Chinese government hardened its position in the face of a growing wave of political dissidence and social unrest.

Religionizing the Diaspora

The sanctification of the Tibetan homeland began as early as the first half of the twentieth century when the Thirteenth Dalai Lama returned from exile in 1913 and issued a declaration of independence from China. The declaration contained a proposal for a sovereign Tibet with a strongly religious overlay. In the proclamation, Dalai Lama established his connection to the Avalokiteśvara, Tibet’s most important deity—hearkening back to the period of chos rgyal, the religious kings. He then described his
vision for Buddhist state. Later, the Dalai Lama designed a flag, postal stamps, and began to forge independent relations with foreign powers. In 1954, following Tibet’s incorporation into China, local officials created People’s Committees that combined “traditional worship of local deities, anti-Chinese protests, and attempts to develop institutions such as the army and the mint.” The next step in the sanctification of Tibet came in 1957 when rebel leaders from Kham established a resistance movement against the Chinese called “Four Rivers, Six Ranges” and offered the fourteenth Dalai Lama a golden throne in an elaborate ceremony. They thus forged a connection between the landscape of Tibet, the Tibetan people, and their religious and political leader—the Dalai Lama.

When the Dalai Lama fled Tibet in 1959 with tens of thousands of Tibetans in his wake, efforts were made to embed the Tibetan diaspora in the myth of the Homeland. Soon after arriving in his place of exile, the Dalai Lama penned the “Prayer of Truthful Words,” which was a ritualized homage to the Tibetan Homeland, the alleviation of the suffering of the remaining oppressed Tibetan people, and the intent of the Dalai Lama to return one day to claim sovereignty over it. One verse reads,

May this heartfelt wish of total freedom for all Tibet,
Which has been awaited for a long time,
be spontaneously fulfilled;
Please grant soon the good fortune to enjoy
The happy celebration of spiritual with temporal rule.

This was to be recited by observant Tibetan Buddhists each day with their daily prayers. It embodies a blend of Buddhism and Tibetan nationalism by calling on the protector Chenrezig to administer “compassionate care” to those who have sacrificed “for the sake

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43 Ibid., p. 41.
44 Ibid.
45 A full text of this prayer can be found at http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/tib/trueword.htm.
of the teachings, practitioners, people and nation of Tibet.” Through daily recitation, the Tibetan exile community bound itself spiritually to the suffering of the Tibetan people in the homeland. Another ritualized link between the homeland and the diaspora is the March 10, 1959 “National Uprising,” which is commemorated by Tibetan exiles as a day of national awakening and resistance against Chinese rule. On this day, in major cities around the world (and often in front of Chinese embassies), Tibetan exiles and their allies recite the “Prayer of Truthful Words” and sing the Tibetan national anthem; participants attend the rallies bearing pictures of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan national flag. The Dalai Lama and other national leaders offer speeches that are circulated via the Internet. Religious symbols are critical to the diasporic imagining of the Tibetan nation.

According to the Tibetan Government-in-Exile White Paper,

> Buddhism has not been a mere system of belief to the Tibetans; it encompasses the entirety of our culture and civilization and constitutes the very essence of our lives. Of all the bonds that defined Tibetans as a people and as a nation, religion was undoubtedly the strongest. Tibetan national identity became indistinguishable from its religion.46

The government at Dharamsala has ensured control over the Tibetan movement for independence; the Tibetan Freedom newspaper started by the Dalai Lama’s brother was later conferred upon the Tibetan government to manage. Other newspapers like the Sheja and Voices of Tibet were also begun in the 1960s. The latter newspaper, which later became the Tibetan Review, was the first magazine of Tibet-in-exile written in English—clearly for dissemination to international media outlets in the west. Later, the Dharamsala took over management of both publications under the Information Office. Thubten Samphel writes that the impact of the Tibetan Review was “planetary. It became a forum for Tibetans from all four corners of the world and their friends to throw up new

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ideas and inspirations to strengthen the worldwide Tibet movement…the Tibetan Review became an increasingly credible tool in persuading an ill-informed international community to see the appalling situation in Tibet from the Tibetan-exile perspective.”

When talks over the status of Tibet broke down and seemed to be becoming less productive in the mid-1980s, a decision was made to internationalize the issue of Tibetan independence. A critical component of this plan was to establish pockets of support in western countries (particularly the United States) that would be called upon to lobby their governments for championing independence. Given the small size of the Tibetan exile community as well as the formidable power of their adversary, there was a perceived need to market the Tibetan cause beyond the exile community.

Tibetan activists have sought to attract powerful allies, particularly celebrities involved in human rights campaigns and movements for indigenous rights around the world. To do so, Tibetan activists have utilized the western language of human rights while invoking the spirituality and mysticism of the New Age movement, which had drawn inspiration from Tibetan Buddhism in the 1960s. In 1986 and early 1987, meetings were held in London, New York land Washington, D.C. from which a network of activists emerged to promote the Dalai Lama and his goals for Tibet; this was informally dubbed the “Tibet Lobby.” Besides the formal breakdown of communication channels with the Chinese government, a second reason for the new, more proactive

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48 The seeds of western support had already been sown in the 1960s and 70s with the emergence of a small group of western academics and students of Buddhism who had become avid proponents of the Tibet cause. These included Jeffrey Hopkins, who was the Dalai Lama’s official interpreter for ten years; he returned to the west as a committed Buddhist and became an outspoken advocate for Tibetan independence. Other academics and journalists traveled to Tibet and wrote books about their travels as well as Tibetan people and Tibetan Buddhism. Wisdom Publications and Snow Lion Publications were presses founded with the express purpose of publishing work related to Tibet.

strategy was the active engagement of a powerful D.C. law and lobbying firm that took a leading role in creating an effective public relations campaign for the Dalai Lama in the U.S.50 A third galvanizing factor was the 1987 uprising and subsequent Chinese crackdown in the Tibetan capital of Lhasa on the anniversary of the 1959 revolt. A westerner who was in Tibet at the time of the crackdown returned home to establish The International Campaign for Tibet, which today serves as an umbrella organization for all such movements. The foundation immediately founded two pro-Tibet publications *Tibet Press Watch* and the *Tibet Forum* to propagate the Tibetan perspective on events in China for the international media.

To recruit the secular left, Tibetan activists have endeavored to downplay the religious elements and illiberal elements of Tibetan Buddhism, in favor of more symbolic representation of Tibet and Tibetans as oppressed guardians of sacred texts that contain the keys to Enlightenment in a materialistic consumer-driven world. To attract human rights activists to their side, the narrative of oppressed and victimized Tibet has also been mobilized. Following this narrative, the then Prime Minister of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile wrote in 1995,

> Our struggle is not primarily an ethnic or political struggle…Our ultimate goal is the preservation, maintenance and dissemination of the sublime cultural traditions of the unique inner sciences for the sake of all sentient beings. However, without proper means and favourable conditions, it is not possible for us to fulfill this responsibility. We must therefore first undertake the spiritual practice of liberating Tibet without delay.51

By universalizing Tibet and thus the mission of liberating it, Tibetan Buddhism has been simultaneously neutered and instrumentalized to draw non-Tibetans and secular activists to the cause. Tibetan activists continue to emphasize the religious aspect of their

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community, but in a way that essentializes Buddhism to symbolic and aesthetic representations of compassion, spiritualism, and loving kindness. At the same time, the Tibetan movement has been fused with leftist concerns such as human rights, environmentalism, and peace that have animated contemporary social movements. The Tibetan GIE maintains a website with links to press releases and Tibetan Buddhist positions on issues such as environmental degradation (including climate change), religious tolerance, treatment of animals, democracy and universal human rights. Over the years, the GIE has forged a network of supporters that go far beyond the miniscule and impoverished Tibetan diaspora. In doing so, diaspora activists have made deliberate use of the human rights discourse embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to mobilize support within Europe and North America. As a result of their outreach, the “constituency of Tibetan supporters overlaps with those of many transnational social movements.”

As late as 1979, the Dalai Llama could not even get a visa to enter the United States due to efforts by the U.S. government to cultivate better relations with China. However, after the Tainnanman Square massacre and the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to the Dalai Llama, His Holiness began to make state visits all over the world. The Tibet Lobby began to accelerate efforts to lobby the U.S. government on the back of the Dalai Llama’s Nobel Prize, attempting to insert Tibet into the debates of the UN Committee on Human Rights and the Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. The International Campaign for Tibet was launched in 1988. Notable celebrity activists include Harrison Ford and Adam Yauch from the Beastie Boys as well

52 Santianni, “The movement for a free Tibet.”
as Alec Baldwin, Carmen Electra, Barbara Streisand, Todd Oldham, Oliver Stone, Sharon Stone, Willem Dafoe, Dennis Quaid, Meg Ryan, Steven Seagal, and Goldie Hawn. Big budget Hollywood movies were made about Tibet such as *Kundan*, which was a dramatization of the Dalai Lama’s early life, and *Seven Years in Tibet* in which Brad Pitt plays an Austrian adventurer who developed a personal relationship with the Dalai Lama in Tibet. Richard Gere pledged to raise sufficient funds to purchase a house in New York that would serve as the headquarters of the American operations. The Dalai Lama declared 1990 The Year of Tibet; this was pushed back to 1991 and involved 3,000 events in 36 countries. Although the majority of members in the movement identify as Western Buddhists, other activists were attracted to the movement out of a commitment to human rights.

In the 1990s and 2000s, the Dalai Lama has played a central role in the Free Tibet movement—making speeches, meeting with world leaders, and publishing and promoting books on spirituality and Buddhism. The Tibet Lobby has focused its attention on the United States, and the Dalai Lama has directly lobbied the president and the U.S. Congress for support in resisting China. In 1990, the Bush administration signed a bill that authorized a Tibetan language broadcast on the Voice of America. The U.S. Congress decreed May 13, 1990 the National Day in Support for Freedom and Human Rights in China and Tibet, and in June 1997, the House of Representatives unanimously passed a resolution that denounced “human rights violations” in Tibet and opposed China’s “occupation” of Tibet.

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Clearly, the movement for a Free Tibet is far more powerful than one would expect given the diminutive size of the Tibetan diaspora. As Clifford Bob has noted, effective marketing of the Tibetan cause to secular activists has allowed Tibet to attract far more advocates than their hapless, oppressed Uighur neighbors, who are Muslim and have no celebrity leaders.\textsuperscript{56} In cultivating powerful allies, however, the Tibetans may have lost control of the movement, leaving them vulnerable to the consequences of the actions of allies who do not have their best interests at heart.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper is to offer a provisional conceptual framework of the instrumentalization of religion by diaspora activists. By deconstructing campaigns to religionize diasporas and recruit allies in the Tibetan and Jewish cases, suggestive commonalities emerge. First, religion appears to be a particularly powerful and versatile mobilizational device. Religious symbols can be employed to establish claims of national self-determination over a delimited territory; such claims are usually made in tandem with a narrative of persecution, victimization and exile, which helps to reinforce these territorial claims. In seeking to recruit allies both within and outside of diaspora community, diaspora activists routinely emphasize the aspects of their religion that are attractive to prospective allies, while playing down aspects that can be expected to alienate them. Thus, the early Zionists built a deliberately secular Jewish state based on a “civil religion” on the reasoning that the Labor Zionists of Europe and North America were more likely to support a straightforward Jewish nation-state. In their quest to attract Christian Zionist support for territorial expansion, in contrast, Revisionist Zionists emphasized the Biblical promises made by God to Abraham that his people would eventually claim the territory of Eretz Yisrael. They also downplayed the troubling eschatology of their dispensationalist allies who believed that the expansion of the Israeli state would lead to the ushering in the Second Coming, followed by mass extinction or conversion of Jews residing in Israel.

Similarly, the Tibetan exile leaders (led by the fourteenth Dalai Lama) established a religious nationalism by connecting Buddhist theology with Tibetan territory in the daily “Prayer of Truthful Words” and the Tibetan National Anthem. The
commemoration of the National Uprising is also understood as both a national holiday and a ritualized plea for the religious freedom of Tibetan Buddhists against the totalitarian Chinese government. The national symbols are embodied in the religious leader of the community, the Dalai Lama, and in the narrative of religious persecution by the Chinese. The diaspora is ritually tied to the fate of the Tibetans in Tibet through daily prayers, songs and other rituals. When the diasporic activists chose to internationalize the movement to attract powerful secular allies, their religious beliefs were played down in favor of superficial representations of Buddhism embodied in the Dalai Lama and the eclectic New Age movement. The diasporic leaders also played up the universalistic concerns that derive from their religious beliefs, such as human rights and environmental conservationism. This subtle adaptation assisted the Tibetan exiles in attracting powerful secular allies in the transnational social movements.

Second, the power and versatility of religion as a mobilizational device may make it dangerous to those who wield it. A diaspora’s religious identity may lend activists the resources to attract powerful allies to their cause, but adapting the identity to incorporate the agenda of their prospective ally may subvert the interests of the community to those of the ally. The alliance could thus endanger the welfare of the very people it purportedly serves. The Christian Zionists, for example, may be excellent allies in a campaign to expand Israeli territory and wage war on Israel’s enemies. However, given that the Christian dispensationalists are fighting for an expanded Israeli state and not the safety and welfare of its denizens, this ally may very well stand in the way of peace agreements that would on balance benefit the Israeli public. In the case of Tibet, supporters of independence, like the CIA in the 1950s, may be motivated by factors other than the
wellbeing of Tibetans, such as a determination to undermine or weaken China. Thus, insofar as external allies may be a blessing, they may also be a curse; and it is the very plasticity of religious identities that permit the recruitment of allies who ultimately harm more than they protect.
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