

by Reyntjens's discussion of the rise and fall of General Laurent Nkunda. He was offered a position in the DRC army, but instead accepted the patronage of Rwanda (p. 211).

Security Cooperation in Africa and the edited volume, *Africa's New Peace and Security Architecture*, tell a similar story, if they nonetheless come to different conclusions. The story that Reyntjens tells about "Africa's first world war" and the nature of the ongoing conflict describes an Africa still very much struggling to cohere on, and then act on, a new security mandate. Finally, because Africa's wars are rarely between states, the measure of success is the strength of the R2P norm and not whether or not one state goes to war with another in Africa.

War on Sacred Grounds. By Ron E. Hassner. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009. 248p. \$29.95 cloth.
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— Ian S. Lustick, *University of Pennsylvania*

In his classic book on nationalism, Ernest Gellner suggested that religion could have served as the functional equivalent of nationalism. By that, Gellner meant that religious ideas could have been manipulated by "political conjurers" just as easily as nationalist ideas in order to wed political power with mass sentiment across territories large enough to achieve linguistic unity, operate countrywide educational systems, and incubate internal markets sufficient to support industrialization.

Gellner's is not an isolated view. Robert Bellah's theory of nationalism as a secular religion is well known. In the contemporary period, it appears more often than not that successful political formulas meld secular/nationalist/tribal ideas and religious themes quite effectively. Consider, for example, the political mythologies of Ireland, Sri Lanka, Iran, Israel, Russia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan, and India. It certainly may be that religious ideas have impacts on politics that are systematically different from those of nonreligious ideas. But so far at least there is no good theory of why that should be so or what those differences are.

In the volume under review, Ron Hassner does not present such a theory, though he does encourage readers to think about its importance. He asks whether disputes over places deemed to be holy pose more difficult challenges for those seeking to resolve them than do disputes over nonsacred spaces. His overall answer to this question is in the affirmative. Religion, as an ideational variable, has genuine and distinctive explanatory power. When spaces are recognized as sacred, he contends, opportunities to prevent violent conflict by dividing the area, sharing it, or excluding one group in favor of the other are difficult if not impossible to achieve. Hassner argues that to overcome these challenges, politicians must turn to reli-

gious elites, availing themselves of the esoteric knowledge and inventiveness they possess.

The author comes to this topic from an international relations perspective, even though most of the data come from monographic research on fascinating, often obscure, religious conflicts having to do with disputes over sacred space occurring within particular states or the same system of political governance or control. The episodes discussed are documented well, drawn from many countries and historical periods, and presented in a lively fashion highlighting evidence of the sincerity of beliefs by protagonists. The sites that occupy most of the author's attention are the destroyed mosque in Ayodhya, India; the Haram el-Sharif/Temple Mount in Jerusalem; and the Grand Mosque in Mecca.

One key objective of the book is realized. For readers not already persuaded, Hassner presents a convincing case that religious ideas and religious beliefs have autonomous political importance. He is less successful in accomplishing his other objectives. Much of the book is devoted to highlighting the suggested inadequacy of either materialist or constructivist approaches for understanding how deep and essentially intractable are genuine religious disputes over "sacred grounds." To *vershte*, as it were, the hard realities confronting would be peacemakers, an "interpretivist" approach is emphasized. This entails Geertzian presentations of realities from the points of view of the believers as if those beliefs were accurate claims about the world and the implications of the "holy" status of a piece of land, an icon, or a building. While the inadequacy of sheer materialist analysis is easily established, Hassner's more important goal is to convince readers of the inadequacy of constructivist approaches for analyzing the obstacles associated with the ascription of holy status to a place.

The focus of this effort is the question of "indivisibility." "Prevailing views on indivisibility," writes Hassner, "are counterintuitive because they take the social construction of reality too far" (p. 39). With the Temple Mount/Haram el-Sharif controversy between Jews and Muslims in Jerusalem as both the inspiration and primary test case for this question, the author contends (albeit not entirely consistently) that when a place is sacred it becomes indivisible, ensuring the failure of arrangements for sharing or dividing the site between different religious communities. On the other hand, since sacred sites vary as to their vulnerability to contamination and their theological centrality, violent conflict over every disputed religious site is not inevitable.

There are three problems with this argument as Hassner presents it. The first is definitional. He boldly, but fatefully, refuses to define "religion": "I have dodged altogether the responsibility of grappling with the definition of religion" (p. 5). That is an admirably frank admission, but when the central themes and claims of the book entail repeated use of the term or one of its very close relatives (e.g., religious, holy,

sacred, consecrate), the consequences of not defining it are serious indeed. For example, by invoking the work of various scholars who use one of these terms in different and particular ways, Hassner implies an accumulation of evidence or patterns of corroborative insight that are not justified. Also, without a definition the reader can appeal to, sentences that use a term such as “religious” problematize precisely the issue the book is designed to resolve. For example, referring to practices of communities to demarcate, patrol, and enforce the boundaries of their sacred spaces, he comments that “[t]hese actions, though derived from religious reasoning, are ultimately political” (p. 34). But without a proper definition that enables the reader to understand how that reasoning is different from political reasoning, it can be neither clear nor interesting to be informed that ideas arising from “religious” reasoning can, “ultimately,” be “political.” The definitional lapse has even more potent consequences when Hassner uses the term with a hyphen, as in “religious-nationalist” (p. 118), “quasi-religious,” (p. 167), and “civil-religious” (p. 168). Without stipulating what it means to be religious that is not nationalist, nonreligious, or civic, such qualified versions of “religious” cannot communicate meanings to the reader clear enough to enable evaluation of the empirical content of the claims the terms are employed to make.

A second problem with the argument involves a mis-specification of the constructivist approach. On the one hand, Hassner explicitly labels his analysis as “anchored in a social constructivist approach” (p. 8). On the other hand, he expends considerable effort to criticize those who would deconstruct the idea, for example, of the “indivisibility” of a sacred space, as a kind of “‘ideas all the way down’ sociology” that is “all but postmodern” (p. 40). Nor do the data he provides support the claim that an approach treating the religious content of a site as a social construction is inadequate for the task of understanding the consequences of the sanctity or “sanctity” with which it has been endowed. Indeed, the author’s most reasonable and promising formulations, such as his classification of “sacred sites based on the extent to which they have become institutionalized,” are thoroughly constructivist. The problem seems to be that by ignoring the nonlinear and hegemonic aspects of constructivist theory (though Antonio Gramsci is cited once), Hassner is led to caricature constructivism as wedded to a view of reality as completely fluid, subject only to the whims of one’s “reading” of the “text” of that reality. What seems to be happening in the book is that in order to mount an attack on “poststructuralists” who do not accept the existence of “social facts” (p. 10), that position is caricatured as equivalent to “constructivist,” even as the ability of socially constructed beliefs to achieve different degrees of embeddedness appears as a key element in most of his accounts of sacred space.

A third issue reflects in a somewhat ironic way the force of this point. Hassner is keen to emphasize the ignorance

of political elites about the specific content of religiosity and the meanings associated with the holiness ascribed by different communities to particular places. He also stresses the importance of involving religious elites and their specialized knowledge and appreciation of this realm if efforts to ameliorate disputes over sacred grounds are to succeed. However, despite detailed and extraordinarily revealing analysis of the Temple Mount/Haram el-Sharif case, and despite evidence presented about a host of other disputes and their sad histories of violent conflict and its avoidance, Hassner never supplies an illustration of an instance in which religious elites contributed a formula drawn from their special knowledge that was then exploited by otherwise ignorant politicians or diplomats to achieve a solution, resolve a conflict, or ameliorate a dispute. On the contrary, where conflicts are at least temporarily avoided or contained (most notably as a result of Moshe Dayan’s brutal manipulation of the rabbis to force from them the religious rulings he needed in order to justify Jewish concessions on the Temple Mount), and even when such conflicts are inflamed, such outcomes are described as the result of the manipulation of religious authority figures by politicians and an entrepreneurial reconstruction of religious beliefs that serves the anything-but-holy interests of the politicians.

The second and third problems identified here could have been avoided had Hassner paid more systematic attention to the rich literature in comparative politics on the dynamics of institutionalization and the creation and deconstruction of hegemonic ideas. To be sure, a great deal of attention is devoted to Max Weber’s famous thoughts about charisma and traditional authority. But much good theory about how authority is institutionalized and deinstitutionalized has appeared since Weber. Some of this literature, though not exploited, is cited in the book. On the other hand, most references to deployments of “constructivist” versus “materialist” arguments come from the international relations literature, even though that conversation is well known for an exceedingly high ratio of heat to light, quite limited in its theoretical and empirical focus, and rarely engaged in any nuanced way with the kind of disputes between groups within countries that are the central concern of this rewarding, highly informative, but conceptually unsatisfying study.

To conclude, Hassner’s study makes a strong case for treating religion and the realm of the sacred as ideational variables of autonomous importance. The study’s coverage of obscure and complex cases is detailed, reliable, illuminating, and successful in establishing the breadth of his argument’s applicability. However, the extended argument about how religion and the sacred interact with politics does not succeed, although it might have if the book had more thoroughly engaged important and relevant literatures in comparative politics.