

Theme Song ([00:16](#)):

[inaudible]

Ilyse ([00:17](#)):

This is Keeping it 101, a killjoy's, introduction to religion podcast.

Megan ([00:22](#)):

What's up nerds!?

Ilyse ([00:24](#)):

Hi. Hello. I'm Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst a scholar of religion, history and Islam, raiser of killjoys, razer of patriarchies and raiser of gobbles of Rosé because: it's summer!

Megan ([00:36](#)):

Huzzah! Yeah, you are. Hi, hello, I'm Megan Goodwin, a scholar of gender sex, sexuality, and American religions, public scholarship maven, and a fan of a bubbly drink or two cause it's summer! In fact, it's Smart Grrl summer. So we're riffing on the punk movements of the seventies, eighties and nineties of feminist women led bands. We are thinking Bikini Kill heralds of the Riot Grrls of course were scholarship and podcasting is a place of resistance and sustenance and politics and community. And good news nerds. We have a riotous treat for you all summer! Four freestanding episodes for you on religion and big topics y'all sounded into. Today's installment: religious nationalism and why you should care. Do we know how to have a good time or what?

Ilyse ([01:26](#)):

Well, religion so bright. We got to wear shades. So let's get started with a lesson plan.

Riot Grrls ([01:38](#)):

[inaudible]

Megan ([01:38](#)):

Today we're talking about religious nationalism, a set of problems near and dear to my rage. Ilyse's rage. So much rage. Because like we've been telling y'all religion is politics and political, and politics darn near always has a religious dimension. Religious nationalism is one of those places where separating the thread of "just politics" from "just religion" is truly impossible. Not that we think it's ever really possible just that this is one of those phenomena where it's a hundred percent impossible, even to those shut-up-heads who refuse to believe that religion is important. So today we'll define religious nationalism, which means defining nationalism and then we'll harp on why we should care by way of a few examples. This is a bit of a patented Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst "shock and awe" episode. So please hold onto your butts!

Ilyse ([02:27](#)):

In short--

Detox ([02:30](#)):

It's our secret word of the day!

Ilyse ([02:30](#)):

--religious nationalisms position a particular way of being religious through identity, practice, linguo-ethnic- religio, racialization as being central, to being a full citizen of a particular state.

Megan ([02:47](#)):

Okay.

Ilyse ([02:47](#)):

Religious nationalism also positions a specific religion usually as being inherently more compatible with being a citizen of a state. Yes, nerds, even when that state claims things, like I don't know, multiculturalism and religious freedom. It's complicated because different state's religious nationalisms look well, uh, unique to that state, but that's kind of the gist of what we're doing today. And don't worry. We're going to walk you through and point you to what to read when we inevitably don't cover everything

Megan ([03:18](#)):

Good times.

Megan ([03:19](#)):

No,

Megan ([03:21](#)):

Keeping it one on one on today. Oh girl. The segment where we do some professor work.

Ilyse ([03:31](#)):

Alright. Goodwin. So I pitched nationalism as a smart girl summer episode, and you basically did a like, Oh, okay, fine. But only since you write the scripts and--

Megan ([03:41](#)):

Accurate. Yeah.

Ilyse ([03:42](#)):

--and some other jokes about this being a hard one to tackle in like 43 minutes. I think I want to jump in though, since I I'm going to truly annoy every single listener with, "but there isn't one definition here." So sorry, nerds, this is one of those, "everything is a moving part, but the sum of these parts is everywhere we look" kind of episode. And we're going to need to examine it, even if we're probably not going to quite pin it all down all at the same time. So since this is summer and we know how to have a good time, the first word of the day is nationalism.

Detox ([04:16](#)):

It's our secret word of the day!,

Ilyse ([04:19](#)):

Which like for real, is harder to define than it would seem. Let's start with just getting our senses of it. But since that often works for our dear nerds out there, Goodwin, what do you think when I say nationalism?

Megan ([04:32](#)):

Okay. I usually shorthand nationalism as conflating national belonging or the right to be seen and protected as a quote unquote scare quotes, "real" member of a nation with race, ethnicity, and or religion. So anyone outside that "real"--again, please hear my scare quotes listeners--so anyone outside that "real" race, ethnicity, religion, can't be a "real" member of that nation and should be seen as a threat to the nation if they argue for inclusion. So when I talk about nationalism in my research, I look at the ways many Americans collapse, Americanness into white supremacist Christianity. In my classes, we look at like how Japanese identity and Shinto worked to fuel military aggression in World War II or how Partition divided the Subcontinent into India, Pakistan, and what's now Bangladesh along religious lines and how that is still causing conflict today.

Ilyse ([05:27](#)):

Yeah, that's, that's really helpful. I think for me, I'm gonna, I'm going to go really at some level basic, uh, and say that nationalism is an ideology, which is a system of ideas, especially one that shapes worldview. So nationalism is a system of ideas that shapes worldviews, and nationalism is a kind of ideology that suggests people are a nation and that nation ought to be sovereign. So by that, I mean like in charge their own ish--able to rule themselves for themselves without anybody, like, telling them what to do or how to do it. So I guess that seems simple enough. A group of people who think that they are one thing and they should be in charge of themselves. Except that when we use the word nation, we also use it to mean a nation-state. So nationalism can have this double valence: when we say nationalism, nation in that word can mean a group of people defined by say an ethnicity or a language who do not actually have a state that's theirs, like say Kurds an ethnic group in Western Asia.

Ilyse ([06:36](#)):

But we can also mean a current state, like the U S who defines its nation in particular terms and ways with land, with borders and asserts through force, uh, sometimes and through law and discourse that its sovereignty is dependent on that definition of nation. So it's a little bit convoluted, but a nation can be a group of people and it can be a state.

Megan ([07:03](#)):

Okay. So if I'm understanding this correctly, nationalism is a kind of group belonging, right. Which isn't necessarily tied to nation-states or what we recognize now as countries. So you can have nationalism without running your own state or your own country, but you can also have nationalism within established states.

Ilyse ([07:23](#)):

Yes.

Megan ([07:24](#)):

Okay.

Ilyse ([07:26](#)):

That's a lot right.

Megan ([07:27](#)):

Already. It's a lot. I'm tired already. It's hot out.

Ilyse ([07:29](#)):

It's already a lot. So, um, uh, listeners, if you need to, since it's smart girl, summer, take a pause, have a beer, have like a headbang moment, get yourself a rosé and come on back.

Megan ([07:42](#)):

Yeah. Like have icy beverage, but like yeah.

Ilyse ([07:44](#)):

Like get like something light. No, one's going to judge you. If you put an ice cube in it, possibly with bubbles.

Megan ([07:51](#)):

I love a bubbly beverage.

Ilyse ([07:53](#)):

Yeah. Okay. Nationalism, let's dive back in. So I think that would, that really complex set of ideas. I want to hit the ground running with an example that I think really helps us illustrate. I want to state out loud though, that this example is one of those things that will almost certainly draw ire on the internet. It is a thing that people have lost jobs over, having the wrong set of ideas about, and as a Jewish woman, particularly I am both especially vulnerable and especially grumpy about it. So we're going to talk a little bit about Zionism, the nationalist movement of Jews, specifically in the historic moment in the 19th century to gain and maintain a so-called Jewish Homeland.

Ilyse ([08:40](#)):

Zionism is a movement that is both of these valances of nation. Before Palestine was partitioned, Zionism was a movement of people defined religio-racially and ethnically: people who saw themselves as a distinct nation, despite never having one, right. Jews didn't have a state. Zionism was the move, the intellectual and social movement to get a state for Jews. And Zionism as a, as a movement demanded sovereignty for Jews and the sovereignty of Jews. But once Israel was created, Zionism served and serves as a way to maintain that sovereignty, often with allegiance to the state of Israel as an underlying, out loud, have to do it, part of it for both Israeli and non Israeli Jews alike.

Megan ([09:39](#)):

Okay. I have to, I have to raise my hand now.

Ilyse ([09:41](#)):

Okay. Megan.

Megan ([09:43](#)):

Okay. So Israel, um, that's the same Israel that's like in the Bible, right?

Ilyse ([09:51](#)):

That's an awesome question. I mean, yes and no. Right? So the answer is, of course not: Israel is a modern nation state founded a year after my dad was born. And yet it gets that name from the understanding of the Hebrew Bible's, self imagination of who Jews were as a group.

Megan ([10:16](#)):

That's really helpful. Thank you. Wait. So Israel and your dad are basically the same age?

Ilyse ([10:20](#)):

But they're a year younger--like Israel's a year younger than my dad. It is one of the things I talk about in class a lot because it never doesn't strike me that my dad is the same age as, um, India and Pakistan sort of, and the--an--a year older than in Israel.

Megan ([10:39](#)):

Yeah. Cause like I knew, I knew that numerically, but also--

Ilyse ([10:44](#)):

right, no, knowing it numerically is different than being like Lloyd also takes like really long walks in the morning and likes to send pictures of deer to my kids--

Megan ([10:52](#)):

and like has cookies for breakfast, like--Lloyd has sneaky cookies for breakfast.

Ilyse ([10:57](#)):

Right.

Megan ([10:57](#)):

And is older than Israel. Okay. Okay.

Ilyse ([11:00](#)):

When you personify it and like, I think, I think, I think dear nerds, this is not just me. I'm like bro-ing down with Megan. This is a way to hold on to how the very world we live in is so shaped by religious nationalist identities.

Megan ([11:17](#)):

Yes.

Ilyse ([11:18](#)):

In that vein, Zionism is an example for me, that is spot on, but also throws shade at some of the OG theorists of nationalism. Most of who came out of political science, almost all of them were white Christian men. And who claimed that nationalism equaled secular movements, equaled modernity. All

the while Zionism is just sitting there like an example that no one wants to touch because they could not make it make sense. Zionism's self-definition as Jewish nationalism all the way back at its founding blends together all these ideas like a nation of people that is defined by ethnicity, race, land, or States, and of course religion. So when Zionists were trying to figure out how to make this make sense, why Israel, why this particular location, why this particular name. And it's really obvious to say, just like your question, Megan w like, because religion, right? The thing that ties a largely white Ashkenazi European Jews to the particular land of Palestine was not defined by culture. It was not defined by language. These are not Arabic speaking Jewish people. Those people existed and were not always part of Zionist movements. And not usually part of Zionist movements. It's not tied by ethnicity because these are not Arabs, but this is an understanding of nation that exists, um, that both exists and is drawn from Jewish holy sources.

Megan ([12:50](#)):

Can I ask another question before we hop on one, one real quick,

Ilyse ([12:54](#)):

You could ask as many as you want.

Megan ([12:56](#)):

There's some, there's some there's so much here. This is going to be a long episode, listeners just, just buckle up. I'm going to use a lot of chapter markers--don't worry about it. What I hear you saying is that white Jews from Europe mostly are driving the Zionist movement in the 19th and 20th centuries. And they're imagining what is now the state of Israel as the, the space they're most connected to not because they speak Arabic, like most of the people who are already living in the spot that becomes Israel, and not because they're themselves ethnically Arab, but because they have this textual and religious connection to that area,

Ilyse ([13:40](#)):

they are neither Arabic speakers nor Arabs, but they have a mythic history that allows the imagination of where they could be state-ed as opposed to state-less as, as having meaning,

Megan ([13:58](#)):

Hey, were there people, um, in that area that they moved into, that that became Israel.

Ilyse ([14:04](#)):

Indeed. There were indeed, there were, and that's a very long conversation with the campaign of Zionism, which, uh, very famously said a land for people, for a people without land. And that all assumed that this was like empty in the same--and like, we could make a thousand connections here, like to manifest destiny and the way that the American West was imagined, but like, just like the American West was imagined as a big open expanse for settlers that required the cleansing and removal of Native (capital N) Americans and Indigenous (capital I) folk like so two was Palestine inhabited by people.

Ilyse ([14:45](#)):

I--I'm just going to say, I am--I have to say, I'm sweaty talking about Israel, Palestine and Zionism. Because as a Jewish woman who studies Islam, there is literally no more fraught, and frankly, no more

toxic subject for me to even attempt to talk about. And frankly, rightly so. Nationalism and in this case, religious nationalism, has done genocidal violence in my name, ethnicity, religio-racial formation against part of the group of folks whose cultures make up my intellectual life and career.

Ilyse ([15:18](#)):

That doesn't change the fact that the trolls always come out when you talk about Zionism in any way, shape or form. But it does mean that there's a, there, there--that this movement, which had the imagination of a people, the imagination of a nation that had previously been stateless, the movement of that argued for a state, and then the maintenance of that nation-state is its own ideology that assumes some people can be citizens and that those people are usually of a particular religion.

Megan ([15:52](#)):

Yeah. That's yeah. This is a lot.

Ilyse ([15:56](#)):

And it's summer. Oh my goodness. Do we need another break? Who needs a second rosé?

Megan ([16:01](#)):

More bubbles! And like, if you're not drinking, like, hmm...

Ilyse ([16:06](#)):

Get a good kombucha. There's great kombucha.

Megan ([16:09](#)):

Okay. So get your beverage of choice. Come back. Let's sit

Riot Grrls ([16:20](#)):

[inaudible].

Megan ([16:21](#)):

I want to echo what Ilyse just said. This is not--nationalism broadly and Palestine / Israel conflict specifically--are not safe topics to talk about in the academy. People wind up on the watch lists, people get heckled and harassed and threatened on the internet and in their homes for talking about this. But, for us, it did not feel ethical to discuss religious nationalism without including this issue of Palestine / Israel, both because, uh, we live in the United States, right? So I, I am not a Jewish person, but I am an American person, which means Israel being the largest recipient of U S foreign aid means that Israeli state violence is also done in my name. And at the same time, theoretically, we have to acknowledge that like nationalism is not secular. It is, it is just not. And Israel/Palestine, and also Partition will help us think through why that is.

Megan ([17:27](#)):

But all of this is it's, it's so much, it's so much, we have beverages, we're taking deep breaths. We're like doing cleansing stretches. And we definitely don't want Ilyse to be so sweaty that she cannot finish the podcast. She's a sweaty lady already. So let's just,

Ilyse (17:43):

just out me out me.

Megan (17:47):

I love you, but your soul is sports. Your body sweats about it. Sorry about it. Um, okay. So just to just get our, our theoretical building blocks in line so that we know where we're going. So, okay.

Megan (18:00):

One! Nationalism is the idea that a people or a nation should be sovereign that is self ruled or self-determined okay.

Megan (18:11):

Two! Nation. When we're talking about nationalism, maybe refers to a country or a nation state, maybe? It's a group of people or a way of belonging tied to an identity or a region that's not recognized as a country per se. And my go to example here is, uh, thinking about, uh, Sikhs and the Punjab, right? Like the Punjab is not a country, but it is absolutely a region that, uh, practitioners of Sikhi feel deeply tied to religiously, ethnically, linguistically.

Ilyse (18:45):

Yes.

Megan (18:46):

Okay. Nationalism also assumes that the nation, that, that category of belonging knows who it is and what it needs to keep being self-determined, right? Like they don't want or need outside influence to tell them how to be Sikh, how to be Jewish, how to be a part of this nation. So having established all of that, how do we think about the relationship between religion and nationalism? You talked about Zionism already. I mentioned Sikhi and what's now India and Pakistan. And I mentioned Shinto in Japan. And you got super sweaty about Zionism. Rightfully so. But what, what's our big picture here? What's what's the big takeaway.

Ilyse (19:29):

Yeah. Okay. So I'll, I'll answer that. And then I'm going to do a little bit of a shock and awe to prove it, but yes, do it, do it.

Megan (19:36):

Shock me and awe me. Shock me and awe me! Shock me, shock me, shock me with that big overview.

Ilyse (19:43):

Yeah. Okay. So the big picture question--uh, the big picture takeaway in some ways--is that religious nationalism looks differently, of course, across time, place, and space because people and the nations they create are constantly changing. And I want to say that scholars of nationalism or religious nationalism often want secular nationalism to be pitted against religious nationalism. You and I are not in this camp.

Megan (20:08):

We are not. We're Blue Rill. Who are they?

Ilyse ([20:13](#)):

So I want us to, um, say that one of our big takeaways is that when we're talking about nationalism, religion is part of the definition period. The end.

Megan ([20:25](#)):

Yes. Good. Yes. Um, also this sounds familiar to me, like when we said that religion isn't done with us, even if we're done with religion. So like even States that are claiming that they're secular probably definitely have opinions about religion and how they should do it.

Ilyse ([20:42](#)):

Yes. And also religious nationalism is like, so here's what I really want folks to focus in on religious nationalism is when religion is specifically linked up to how a nation sees itself.

Ilyse ([20:57](#)):

And that can play out in a few ways. So one of those ways could be a litmus test for who gets to be a citizen as in barring particular religious groups or ethnic groups affiliated with one religion. And it could be the, I could on the flip side be an issue of a default religion. So not to bring it back to calendars again. But if you're one way that you can see in it, I know you got it--I got a runner and it's just going to stay.

Megan ([21:25](#)):

I'm into it, I'm into it.

Ilyse ([21:25](#)):

Calendars aren't by default interfaith calendars, even in multiethnic multi-religious States, nor are they scrubbed of religion entirely, even in secular States, precisely because States imagine themselves as having a religion and in the U S the U S sees itself--has seen itself--as a Christian nation, even as it purports to be both secular and multi-religious.

Megan ([21:54](#)):

Can confirm.

Ilyse ([21:57](#)):

Religious nationalism is also evident in the ways that non-religious folks are barred from particular practices in public. The ways that racialization happens, the ways that oath songs and patriotic behaviors map onto and into religious spaces. It's things like swearing on Bibles for you, Megan, in your primary source from back when to get married, it's saying in God, we trust on our money and under God in our pledge of allegiance, right? In order to prove that we are allegiant citizens, we have to say in God we trust.

Megan ([22:35](#)):

so creepy. It's so creepy.

Ilyse ([22:37](#)):

It's things like the national prayer breakfast. So even when we invite "other" non Christian religious members to lead that national prayer or to be in the audience, the fact that we assume when we eat, we say a prayer already assumes a particular definition of nation that has religion cooked into its very identity and wait! There's more!

Ilyse ([23:05](#)):

Religious nationalism can also show up in the ways that a state rears up to defend its sovereignty, even when the threat is made up. So my go to example, here are the so called anti Sharia laws that have swept the U S in the years following, um, specifically 9/11, but also there was a bump of them after 2008 in 2009. These laws, um, these are the laws that folks are trying to pass barring, uh, like barring Sharia in state local, or federal like legal systems. So in theory, they're, they're barring Muslims--the idea of a Muslim from establishing their religious law as U S law, where the idea here is that the very presence of Islamic religious law is a threat to your local, state, or national municipalities.

Megan ([23:58](#)):

Okay. Wait. So we already talked about disestablishment. And it's already illegal for anybody to make laws in the U S based on religion. And like, all of this is sounding very familiar to me. Like we covered approximately 1 million of these things before. So why are we doing a whole new episode of nationalism? Did you just want to talk more? Are you not getting enough attention at home?

Ilyse ([24:22](#)):

I mean, I always want to talk more, but I think nationalism gets its own freestanding episode, dear nerds, because nationalism is a place where we can see the effects of religion and politics, politicized religion, religion in the floorboards all at once. And to be quite honest with you, it gets its own episode because we are living in an age of religious nationalism. So yeah, nerds, you should know about it, even if some of the examples dovetail, overlap, and sounds like things we've talked about before. And for example, one of my major, like "why do we care?" moments here is that religious nationalism is, is honestly nefarious, even when it rarely starts off that way. And here's where I think I'll, I'll do like a legit shock and awe, and I want to be as brief as possible, but I also want to sign-post places where religious nationalism is part of the story, uh, right now.

Ilyse ([25:19](#)):

And I'm going to do my best to ignore the U S and Europe, frankly. Um, so that, you know, Megan has something to say later. Since I'm filibustering! The places I see religious nationalism happening right now, like not in the 1930s or 40s, not in the post world war II moment of crumbling European dominion, but right, the F now include, but are not limited to: India's like vehement anti-Muslim government right now, which itself includes the bone-chilling lock down of Kashmir; China's ethnic cleansing. And, um, the concentration camps established for Uighyrs, which is an ethnic group of, uh, largely Muslims; the forced statelessness of the Rohingya, a religious ethnic group located in Myanmar or Burma, and, um, many, many more. I'm going to come back to you. I'm going to come back to France and Europe in a little bit, but I, I want to focus to get us through this next bit of our, what is religious nationalism and why do we care on a historic example that I think dovetails nicely with Zionism, but also sits right in my wheel house. You game.

Megan ([26:28](#)):

I'm so excited about this

Riot Grrls ([26:38](#)):

[inaudible]

Ilyse ([26:38](#)):

All right. So as a scholar of South Asia, I'm obviously predisposed to talking us through the politics of Partition or Independence in South Asia, where the British colonial Imperial project dissolved into first India and Pakistan, both East and West, and later, um, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, uh, and other places, if you expand out from where Britain removed its power and control across, uh, Africa--the Middle East, North Africa, Asia, Southeast Asia. And there's no way to do that history.--like, like right now, there's nobody to do that history like right now--but there is no way to do that history without religiously defined ideas about the state. Some of those were troubling. Some of those responses to the so-called secularity of the British Raj, British rule in India. Some of those were the responses to the inequitable ways that multi-religious identities were coming to be represented in the nascent moves for a, uh, a state in South Asia.

Ilyse ([27:42](#)):

Some of those were rooted in true anti-Muslim and anti-Hindu animosities. Regardless. We can't talk about, uh, religious nationalism in South Asia--we can't talk about how these nation States came to be in the India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh. These post British nation States all have religious nationalism into their histories. Where proper citizens were ethnically, religiously, and often linguistically defined against the others. So to oversimplify and tell the truth, it's one of the reasons that we today imagine Pakistan equals Muslim, India equals Hindu, Sri Lanka equals Buddhist, Kashmir equals unsolvable, even though each of these contemporary countries is anything but monolithic religiously. Well, like I argue in literally everything I write and Megan can vouch for it cause she reads almost every word I write--this isn't nothing. It's history of Partition, where the British literally drew lines on South Asia and said, all right, the majority of y'all live here, you get this state, the majority of y'all live there, you get this state, peace, have a good time sorting that out.

Ilyse ([28:54](#)):

This, this isn't nothing. Again, this is the same age as my dad. And one year older than, uh, the culmination of Zionist movements for a state, uh, in Palestine. This history isn't even history. It's not done! Modi, the current, um, prime minister of India and the party he represents have been ruthlessly clear that good Indian citizens are not Muslims. The idea that India is for Indians and Indians are inherently Hindu is a real one in contemporary Indian politics. And that history extends, yes, to Partition and Independence, but it's especially obvious in the histories of political movements and leading governmental parties like the RSS and the BJP. And I expect that that alphabet soup means very little to most of you. And that's okay. I'm going to give you links in the show notes.

Ilyse ([29:51](#)):

But my point in putting, uh, frankly, I'm putting Zionism and partition in the same episode is that I want you to hear what the postcolonial division of nations looked like, how that was religiously defined, and how, how being a good citizen is integral here, right? Religious nationalism casts some subjects as good in quotes, citizens, and some as literally so antithetical to the state as to be cast from it. And I want to say out loud, dear nerds, that this can and has been the language of genocide, persecution, discrimination, bigotry, especially, but not limited to legal definition. So I'm a stone cold bummer.

Goodwin, Can you tell us about another set of stone cold bummers like, I don't know, religious nationalism in the U S ?

Megan ([30:47](#)):

Can I? Amer-I-can. Right after the sip of my bubbly beverage, please hold.

Ilyse ([30:56](#)):

I like that you really went and got a bubbly beverage. I'm just drinking iced water. I was like playing a big game.

Megan ([31:03](#)):

Yeah. I'm in. We hit the 20 minute mark, and I'm like, what if my alcohol was in my face? Okay. So sure. Let's talk about American religious nationalism, listeners, because you know, it's summer. Um, I think the thing that I want to say, broadly speaking is that America is less forthcoming about its own religio-racial nationalism. I mean, yes. Groups like the Ku Klux Klan exist, and it's easy to say, Oh, they said only white Protestants were really Americans. That was religious nationalism. Done. Yes. Cool. Not cool. Terrible, but identifiable. But American religio-racial nationalism is so much more than the Klan or the Proud Boys or easily identifiable, extremist groups, groups that you can like go to the Southern Poverty Law Center and say, okay, this is a hate group. (Southern Poverty Law Center and its understanding of racism is a complicated conversation for another time.)

Megan ([32:02](#)):

Anyway. So we know that there are more white Christians elected to government positions than any other group. We know that we've never elected a non-Christian president, and the giant swaths of the country, including our current president, refuse to believe that the single black man elected president could be Christian. This shit is messy, y'all, like America's history is swimming in the receipts for it's white Christian nationalism, but also tons of Americans like to claim that we're better at religious freedom and freedom in general than anyone else. There is a hypocrisy to America's white nationalism and America's white Christian nationalism that I don't think we see in many other forms of nationalism. Like Modi is not hiding it from you. He maybe is not saying it specifically out loud now that he is PM, but he has said it previously while he was in charge of Gujarat and his ministers say all the time that good Indians are Hindus--it's out there.

Ilyse ([33:01](#)):

Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Megan ([33:02](#)):

Like, and whereas--

Ilyse ([33:03](#)):

That is citable!

Megan ([33:03](#)):

--right!--whereas you have a ton of doublespeak that happens in American political discourse where they say they want religious freedom, but what they mean is they want white conservative Christians to

be able to do whatever, whatever they want and everybody else should just fall in line. So that's what we're looking at. We're looking at American religio-racial nationalism.

Megan ([33:30](#)):

But it's also not as simple as nationalism, bad, mmkay? Black religious nationalism, like the Moorish Science Temple or the Nation of Islam, these groups have done some truly remarkable work in re-imagining a past and a future for Black people in what's now the United States outside legacies of slavery and oppression. I am of course, building on Judith Weisenfeld again here because I must. So clearly we could do an entire season on nationalism. But the short version here is like Ilyse said, nationalism is big topic, and the specifics vary from case to case, nationalism is hard to map out.

Riot Grrls ([34:12](#)):

[inaudible]

Ilyse ([34:13](#)):

All right, nerds. We've gone a little overboard. Nationalism is a really big topic, but before we move on, I want to add that religious nationalism can also look like hiding religion, making some religions neutral while others are antithetical to the state. So for example, the ban on face coverings in France, right? So like France has banned face coverings, which is a direct target against, um, some styles of Muslim, uh, modest fashion. But right now with COVID-19 rearing its ugly head globally, France has also mandated that you have to wear a mask. So it is possible to be a Muslim woman who is both violating and like in accordance with the law to cover her face. They have not repealed the law about Muslim face coverings. They have simply added one that says like you have to wear a medical face mask, right? So it's not the masking that's at play here. It's the idea that religious face coverings for Muslims is not acceptable, which means this is just another set of examples where France renders Christianity invisible in its statecraft, renders Muslims (and Jews to a lesser extent don't jump on me, historians of France) hyper-visible so that secularity isn't so much, it's a religious nationalism that takes at its core the idea that religion equals internal belief. And y'all can call that secularism or *laïcité*. That's fine, but it's also straight up incorrect to a degree because that idea of secularism rests on a very real, very old definition of religion that is very Christian and is not available to all French citizens on fucking purpose.

Megan ([36:04](#)):

Yup, yup, yup. Yes. Also a little disappointed in both of us that neither of us made a Goldie Hawn slash Kurt Russell joke. When you said overboard is this summer or not? Come on. Right! So the idea that some people, some groups are just not capable of being members of this state, members of the nation, uh, is a thing that both Ilyse and I have written books on now. But yeah, nationalism blends together some combination of race and ethnicity and religion and language and identity and practice and calls it real belonging and fights to keep out anyone who doesn't fit that narrow definition of real. And or denies folks who don't fit that narrow, narrow definition, full inclusion in the nation. This looks like, I don't know, claiming to be a country founded on principles of religious freedom and then having your law enforcement agencies and legal systems target nonwhite non-Christians as not real Americans. It looks like profiling and police brutality and telling women what they can and can't wear on their heads while they're driving, if they happen to be Muslim, for example, as I maybe just wrote about in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. Assuming real national belonging requires you to be a certain religion, or a certain race, to speak a certain language, or to move your body in public in certain

ways matters and shapes so much of the world around us. It truly is a life or death issue in so many places throughout the world right now. Again, as Ilyse said, the past is not past on this one.

Ilyse ([37:37](#)):

No, but you know what you've heard from us? It's time to hear about us. It's primary sources.

Megan ([37:44](#)):

Primary sources!

Megan ([37:47](#)):

I'm going to keep mine super short because we have already talked to you a bunch already. So the last time we had a presidential election--it was a while ago, y'all probably don't remember! Uh, I was teaching race, religion and politics at Syracuse. Like that was my job description. My students and I live tweeted all the candidate debates. So I did a lot of cussing in front of my students, especially when either presidential candidate talked about Islam or Muslims. The current president said a lot of dumb shit like "Islam hates us" because he is, listeners, a dumb shit, but the other candidate, or when we talked about Muslims, when she was talking about national security and as I cussed on Twitter, this reinforces the idea that Muslims aren't really Americans or that they have to prove that they're Americans by reinforcing the American surveillance state, even though there were Muslims in what's now the United States before there was a United States, American politicians are real dumb about religion nerds. Please send this podcast to your elected officials and fucking vote like lives depend on it because they do.

Ilyse ([38:48](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. All right. I think I'm going to poke the trolls in case they forgot that we led off with Zionism. And I'm going to tell the story where I guess I heckled someone trying to get me to sign up for a birthright trip. Now, for those of you who are unfamiliar, birthright is a program that sends Jews--I think college age and a little bit older--who have never been to Israel on a "free" trip, free is in quotes. Y'all because the trip costs someone money and it's a settler colonial state so it causes violence. And moreover, the goal is to change my politics. So it ain't free. But, uh, uh, so let me just say out loud, it is a straight up project of religious nationalism. Anyway, anyway, I want to remind you a few things. I: Jewish lady. Also: adopted. So you might imagine that the idea of a birthright, any birthright makes me, I'm going to say fucking livid, like livid. It makes me mad in books and songs and epic tales. I hate the idea because let's be real, my birthright is either nothing like, because I'm not in the family of my birth or it's this icky hallowed orphan tale that I like genuinely hate where my quote real family and quote real birthright is the family beyond the family that raised me. And yeah. So, okay. All of that's all, that's just prologue because apparently I can't shut up this episode. Anyway, this bubbly ass girl comes at me.

Ilyse ([40:21](#)):

I remember exactly where I was on, on my college campus with a signup clipboard because it's like 2002 and she's selling me on this birthright trip. And I don't know what possessed me, but I just dead pan ask easily like 400 questions she and the organization that trained her seemingly could not fathom. So I asked things like, is it my birthright if I'm adopted? How would you verify that I'm Jewish? If adoption is fraught in Jewish communities--like my mom needed special permission, my grandmother refused to acknowledge me as kin--so why is it my right to go to Israel when it was not my mom's right to adopt me based on certain understandings of Jewish law? Would it still be my right if another family adopted me,

how can my conditional maybe-not maybe-yes, Judaism. Right? Cause if I had been adopted by a nice Catholic family, I would not have had access to this birthright. So how can my conditional Judaism have a birthright, but Palestinians do not. I, I remember exactly where I was on campus. I remember what I was wearing. I remember when this lady was wearing, I don't know if I'm embarrassed by this story or not, but girlfriend fucking loses it with me, starts like yelling. She suggests that real Jews want to go to Israel and maybe my not-correct blood does in fact bar me from this trip, she kind of stormed off and took a bathroom break. And I guess dear nerds, the logic here is that a lack of support for a nation state in which I do not live and had not ever visited, uh, and had no right to based on the very bloodline argument that birthright purports was a problem. And that nerds is my personal religious nationalism story.

Ilyse ([42:06](#)):

That was primary sources?

Megan ([42:09](#)):

I fucking love you. Primary sources!

Ilyse ([42:09](#)):

I'm a problem from the--T--like head--T to B. I'm a TTB problem. I am here for all your problems because they are the best ones.

Megan ([42:22](#)):

[story-story-story-time], you know, it's like will Smith, summertime. I'm leaning into it. Not supposed to sing all the things, but I had a beverage. So do something,

Ilyse ([42:32](#)):

you know what? We're going to skip citing sources at you today nationalisms are specific. We don't need a quote to unpack the Dietz any more than we have in homework. We'll give you some stuff. It's summer. Let's have class outside. Skip a thing. Shall we?

Megan ([42:47](#)):

Yes, please. Yeah. Okay. So, uh, I guess before we head outside, don't forget nets. You still have homework.

Bikini Kill ([42:57](#)):

[This is Not a Test]

Megan ([43:03](#)):

I know, I know we know it's summer, but there's so much good work on religion and nationalism. We have barely scratched the surface and I think if nothing else we have conveyed to you that there is a lot to know and a lot that matters about this subject. So here is some fun and also maybe not some so fun work to keep you occupied. Here's some work to keep you occupied. I should not drink.

Ilyse ([43:30](#)):

No, no you--That went straight to ya.

Megan ([43:33](#)):

Yeah, it really did. That's why I like the bubbles. Don't forget that all of this and more will be in the show notes, Ilyse, what do you recommend?

Ilyse ([43:42](#)):

All right, gang, I'm going to keep my, um--I'm going to keep my recommendations Asia and India specific. I have loads and loads of lists of this, and I'm happy to post, um, some of my stuff, my seminars on, uh, empire and some of my classes that I do with this stuff. But first and foremost, Peter van der Veer's Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India is an oldie but goodie. It's really clear and really well laid out. Uh, but a real gem is Sumathi Ramaswamy's The Goddess and the Nation. For me, it's mandatory reading on gender nationalism, religion and India. I have to shout out my colleague, Tom Borchert, who's worked on Thai Buddhism, nationalism and identity is really compelling and really necessary. I think

Megan ([44:31](#)):

Thom is friend of the pod as well.

Ilyse ([44:32](#)):

So yeah, a friend of the pod.

Megan ([44:34](#)):

Hey Tom. Hey,

Ilyse ([44:36](#)):

uh, I'll link to news about, uh, as promised I'll link to news about Modi, the anti-Muslim pogroms that happened in Delhi, uh, in January and February and why religious nationalism is disenfranchising. I'm also gonna make sure, just in case you forgot, to include news pieces about Uighurs, Rohingya, and anything else I ended up shocking it on you with ah, it's kind of a blackout.

Megan ([44:57](#)):

Yeah, yeah. There's a lot. I want to say again that you and I both wrote books about religious nationalism. Remember when we did that? So yours has a very long title that ends with religion, rebels, and jihad. That is about the 1859 rebellion. Did I get the time right?

Ilyse ([45:17](#)):

1857, but you're, you're good at you're good. And I will, we can post links to our books.

Megan ([45:23](#)):

Okay, cool. Mine is called Abusing Religion and it is straight up how white Christian nationalism uses sex to police religious difference. I also have a couple of links to things that I use in my own classes. When we're talking about religious nationalism. I have a link about the state of Israel refusing to recognize Ugandan Jews as legitimately Jewish and deserving of the right of return. I--I really like, uh, what Hassan montage is doing about the BJP and Modi on Patriot Act streaming on Netflix, both very accessible and I think really smart. My religion and politics class is called "Election!" because, uh, both because we think about elections and because America thinks it's specially chosen by God to lead the

world. That is, it is an elect nation. This is a late entry for a keyword, listeners. So I'm going to share the syllabus with y'all lots of good stuff there.

Megan ([46:18](#)):

I must, I must shout out my girl, Kelly J. Baker and her book *_Gospel According to the Klan_* for helping me understand how fucking mainstream white supremacist Christian nationalism is. She also has some great op-eds on this too. So I will more links coming your way. Finally, because summer I'm going to recommend that y'all check out the birthright double episode on *_Broad City_*, which is streaming on Hulu. This episode asks some really interesting questions about Zionism and Jewish women's belonging, wellness, Tommy adorable, Seth Green matchmaking on the plane encouraging red-headed use to pair up and bring it on down to ginger town. Bless. I love Seth Green. I've always loved Seth Green. And speaking of gingers! You can find me on Twitter at @MPGPhD and Ilyse, who is not a ginger, at @ProfIRMF or the show at @keepingit_101. Find the website at keepingit101.com.

Ilyse ([47:13](#)):

Thanks for hanging in there. Go take a, go, take a swim somewhere, peace out nerds!

Megan ([47:18](#)):

And do your homework. It's not a syllabus, but go out first and definitely put some sunblock on if you're going to be in the sun.

Themesong ([47:39](#)):

[inaudible]

Speaker 6 ([47:41](#)):

Let's bring it on down to [inaudible].