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Monks, Guns, and Peace: Theravāda Buddhism and Political Violence

Charles F. Keyes

In the wake of September 11th, the intensification of the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis, the war in Afghanistan, and the war in Iraq, we have all become acutely aware of the role of Abrahamic religions—Judaism, Christianity, Islam—in justifying political violence and war and responding to these justifications and in questioning social injustice and responding to such questioning. But little is heard of the other major world religion—Buddhism—regarding these matters.

Buddhism, in contrast to the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, is often understood by Westerners as being a religion of radical world-rejection. The image of Buddhism is that it is a religion centered on meditation, a discipline that aims at achieving detachment from the world and, ultimately, transcendence of worldliness. A religion of radical world-rejection would seem unlikely to generate moral discourses regarding political violence and social injustice comparable to those found in the Abrahamic religions. Buddhism as practiced in countries where Buddhism is dominant has, however, contrary to Western images of the religion, in fact always been situated in and embroiled in the politics of the countries in which it is found and has even, on occasion, been the source of violence as well as the target of violence. This has been the case even as leading Buddhists have also sometimes generated radical questioning of power and its use. In this chapter I discuss how the transformation of the Theravādin world by forces of modernity led to the rise of Buddhist modernism and its derivatives, Buddhist nationalism and Buddhist fundamentalism. As with the rise of religious nationalisms and fundamentalisms elsewhere, this transformation has

been associated with violence in the name of religion as well as violence against religion.

First, I need to say briefly what I understand by *modernity.* The "modern" subsumes the radical political transformations that have occurred because of colonialism and the rise of nation-states; it subsumes the increasing integration of local economies into a global economy; it has entailed the confrontation between different religious traditions and between religion and secular worldviews; and it has been associated with the spread of scientific technologies and medical therapies. While there are similarities between Theravāda Buddhism and other religions in the response to modernity, there also have been significant differences that I stress in this chapter.[1]

Although the theories of Marx, Freud, and Durkheim that provided the foundations for twentieth-century social science made a compelling case for religion declining in significance as societies became modern, by the late twentieth century it was inescapably evident that religion had not only not declined, but that a large proportion of the world's population was turning to new and revitalized religions in their search for means to accommodate to the modern world. Many scholars who seek to understand the dynamic role of religion in presumed modern as well as modernizing societies have turned to Max Weber, the other major theorist of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although Weber's ideas about "rationalization" have sometimes also been interpreted as supportive of the thesis that "evolution" toward modern society leads to a decline in religion (see, for example, Bellah 1965), the dominant position among Weberian scholars over the past two decades is that "charisma," as well as rationalization, contribute the "developmental" transformation of society (see, for example, Schluchter 1981 and the essays in Lash and Whimster 1987; also see Keyes 2002). That is, even in societies in which much sociopolitical and socioeconomic action can be traced to the rational choices people make in the pursuit of their own interests, people still often act in accordance with values that are compelling because they are asserted or exemplified by those who are deemed to have direct links to a transcendental power. The evocation of charismatic authority can, even in the twenty-first century, redirect the course of historical processes. It is critical, thus, to understand how religious practices and beliefs remain relevant to social action in modern societies, rather than assuming that these practices and beliefs are vestiges of a premodern past.

Notable among the efforts to retheorize the relationship between religion and modernity has been the one that subsumes many diverse religious movements under the rubric of "fundamentalism." The monumental project headed by Martin Marty at the University of Chicago in the late 1980s and early 1990s brought together scholars working on all of the

world religions (see Marty 1988; Marty and Appleby 1991, 1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1995; Marty, Appleby, Ammerman, Heilman, Piscatori, and Frykenberg 1994). These scholars agreed that there is commonality among practitioners of diverse religions who when faced with the conditions of modernity emphasize in a self-conscious way what are taken as "fundamental" truths and seek to reshape the world with reference to these truths. These truths have been derived, however, from very distinct and contrasting religious traditions, and very different social, political, and economic implications are based on them. Like many other scholars, I do not see all self-conscious turning toward the "fundamentals" of a religious tradition as "fundamentalism."[2] For the Theravādin tradition, I prefer to use the term *modernist* Buddhism to subsume all types of such self-conscious affirmation of religious fundamentals and, following other scholars, to use the term *Buddhist fundamentalism* to refer specifically to those sects and movements that take a constricted approach in asserting that only their understanding of these fundamentals is true.[3]

Each of the diverse Buddhist modernist movements has been shaped by the particular historical legacy recognized by its followers. To understand Buddhist modernism it is necessary first to understand the roots of the relationship between Buddhism and authority because it was a crisis of authority, in modern times, that led to the rise of Buddhist modernism. The roots for the societies in which Theravāda Buddhism became dominant—today subsumed within the nation-states of Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos—lie in the symbiotic relationship between monarchy and Buddhist monkhood (the Sangha) that is traceable to the third century BCE.

TRADITIONAL THERAVĀDA RELIGIO-POLITICAL ORDER

Although Buddhism has often been characterized in Western writings as a religion of radical world-rejection, the Way, the Dhamma, discovered by the Buddha sometime between the sixth and fourth centuries BCE, has never been separate from the social world in which Buddhists live.[4] The members of the Sangha, those who both exemplify the Dhamma in their practice and teach the Dhamma to others, have always needed the economic support of the laity and the protection offered by rulers. In the third century BCE, the first great ruler of India, Aśoka (r. 268–232 BCE), became an adherent of Buddhism. Aśoka was first and foremost a great military leader who used force to unite the people of India under his rule, but he was also the exemplary patron of the Buddhist religion. He convened a council of members of the Buddhist clergy, the Sangha, and oversaw their ensuring the accuracy of the Buddha's teachings. He also

promoted disseminating relics of the Buddha, who had been cremated after death, to new followers.[5]

The followers of Theravāda Buddhism credit Aśoka not only with the spread of Buddhism to Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia where this tradition of Buddhism became dominant, but also with the establishment of a model of Buddhist sociopolitical order. This model, known as the "Two Wheels of the Dhamma," makes the laity, and especially a lay ruler, as equally responsible for the perpetuation and dissemination of the teachings of the Buddha as the Sangha (see Reynolds 1972; Smith 1972; Reynolds and Clifford 1987).

The Aśokan legacy was emulated in all Theravādin societies, although it only became fully realized in the period between the thirteenth and nineteenth centuries (Sirisena 1978; Gombrich 1988; Tambiah 1976). During this period, rulers of Buddhist kingdoms provided an example for all laypersons in their monetary support for the Sangha. The monarch also intervened from time to time to ensure that the Sangha adhered properly to the discipline and to prevent schisms within it. In turn, the Sangha, by participating in royally sponsored rites, conferred legitimacy on the monarch.

The societies ruled by Buddhist monarchs between the thirteenth and nineteenth centuries were hardly without conflict. The island of Sri Lanka was beset by almost perpetual wars throughout this period, and on at least two occasions the political turmoil led to the nearly total disappearance of the Sangha (see Gombrich 1988; Kiribamune 1978; Malalgoda 1976; Paranavitana 1932; Seneviratne 1978). In mainland Southeast Asia, following the collapse of the empires centered on Pagan and Angkor in the thirteenth century, there was almost constant warfare between the Burman and Siamese empires and between these empires and the smaller principalities that surrounded them (Prince Damrong Rajanubhab 1955, 1957, and 1958; 2001; U Kyaw Win 1997; Sunait Chutintharanond 1997; Lieberman 1993).[6] These conflicts in Sri Lanka and the wars in Southeast Asia came to an end only in the nineteenth century with the British conquest of Sri Lanka and Burma and the incorporation of Laos and Cambodia into French Indochina. The colonial era proved to be the crucible for forging new relationships between Buddhism and power.

BUDDHIST REFORMATION IN RESPONSE TO COLONIAL DOMINATION AND WESTERN INFLUENCE

Beginning in Sri Lanka in the eighteenth century, lower Burma in the early nineteenth century, and the remainder of the region throughout the nineteenth century, Theravādin traditions began to be challenged by new po-

litical and economic influences associated with the expansion of Western colonialism and capitalism and by new cultural influences associated with Christianity and Western science. Taken together, these influences constituted a crisis of authority and the responses to this crisis resulted in the resituating of Theravāda Buddhism within a modern world.

In Sri Lanka and Burma, the traditional sociopolitical order subsumed under the "Two Wheels of the Dhamma" was radically devalued when British colonial governments in both countries abolished the indigenous monarchies and ended government patronage of the Sangha. In both Cambodia and Laos the French colonial government retained indigenous monarchies under nominal protectorates, but in both countries, the reality of rule by non-Buddhist Frenchmen reduced the relationship between monarchy and Sangha to empty rituals.[7] In Siam the crisis of authority began not with colonial domination by an outside power, but through a radical redefining of monarchy to meet the colonial threat. Siam also undertook its own "internal colonialism" by extending the authority of Bangkok over what had been previously autonomous Buddhist polities. Rulers of these polities were replaced by officials under a new bureaucracy modeled on that of nearby colonial domains. Moreover, in the early part of the twentieth century the Bangkok monarchy issued an edict that placed all monks throughout Siam under a single institution.

In their reaction to the crises of authority of the colonial period, many people in the Theravādin countries turned to charismatic religious and political leaders whom they believed could restore the traditional sociopolitical order. In many cases they followed their leaders in violent reactions against the new orders. In Sri Lanka, and even more in Burma, supporters of the traditional monarchies fought strongly against the British forces sent to "pacify" the countries. Violence did not end with pacification, however. In the first decades of the twentieth century in Siam, French Laos, and British Burma, thousands of people died or were injured after having joined Buddhist millenarian movements to resist—unsuccessfully—the extension of new types of authority over them.[8]

By the 1920s Buddhist millennialism had begun to be replaced by nationalisms that were also shaped by Buddhism. Buddhist nationalism, in contrast to Buddhist millenarianism, was predicated not on traditional Buddhist ideas about sociopolitical order but on ones that derived from Buddhist reform movements in each of the countries.

The first charismatic leaders of Buddhist reform movements in Sri Lanka, Burma, and Siam were Buddhist monks who found themselves confronted with challenges to their religious commitments posed by Protestant missionaries. These missionaries brought with them ideas that were very different from those of the Catholic missionaries that had preceded them in the sixteenth to early nineteenth centuries. The Protestant

missionaries laid great emphasis on establishing schools that offered instruction not only in religion but also in secular subjects. The Protestant-run schools and the Catholic ones that soon emulated them became the primary institutions whereby some indigenous peoples could enter into the colonial civil service in Sri Lanka and Burma. Protestant missions also sponsored hospitals and clinics. Through both these institutions and their schools, the Protestant missionaries made some of the local elites aware that they drew a clear distinction between religious knowledge and secular knowledge. This was not a distinction known in traditional Buddhist societies.

In Siam the man who would establish a reformist Buddhism was a princely monk who would later leave the monkhood and become King Mongkut (r. 1851–1868). During his twenty-seven years as a monk Mongkut acquired a critical perspective on Buddhism as currently practiced, in part because of his own intensive study of the Pāli texts and in part because of his extended conversations and study sessions with the few Westerners in the country, most of whom were Protestant missionaries.[9] From the missionaries Mongkut learned of the distinction made in the West between natural and divine law. He also acquired some knowledge, especially from those missionaries who had also been trained in medicine, of Western science as well as of Christian theology. If Buddhism, he came to think, was to be maintained in a world where powerful Westerners justified their actions with reference both to Christianity and to science, then it was necessary to focus on the essential teachings of Buddhism and to ignore or even discard many traditional practices.

Because he was a high-ranking prince and would subsequently become king, he was able to establish a new order of monks, one that followed his reformist understandings. This order, subsequently named the Dhammayuti-nikāya (Thai, Thammayut-nikāi), the order which adheres strictly to the Dhamma, mirrored Protestantism in the eschewing of ritual and accentuating ethical practice in everyday life. The Dhammayuti-nikāya would become in the reign of Mongkut's son, King Chulalongkorn (1868–1910), a primarv vehicle for the creation of Buddhist nationalism in Thailand.[10]

Mongkut's reforms also contributed, although probably not seminally, to the reformist movement in Sri Lanka as he corresponded in Pāli with several Sinhalese monks. In Sri Lanka, Buddhist monks also encountered Protestant missionaries. In their efforts to counter the proselytizing efforts of the missionaries, some leading monks had begun to accentuate what they considered to be the essential teachings of the Buddha and to deemphasize many traditional practices (Malalgoda 1976, 220ff). These monks laid the groundwork for what has been termed "Protestant Buddhism" in Sri Lanka (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988).

This modernist Buddhism came subsequently to be epitomized by Angārika Dharmapāla (1864–1933). Don David Hewavitarana, as Angārika Dharmapāla was originally known, had been influenced in his teen years by two of the leading monks of the Buddhist reform movement in Sri Lanka. At sixteen he met the two leaders of the Theosophist movement, Colonel Henry Steele Olcott and Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, and under their guidance he underwent a spiritual transformation. His commitment to a Theosophically inflected Buddhism led him to adopt a new role, one which was neither monk nor layperson, that of Angārika, "the homeless one." He also adopted a new name, Dharmapāla, the "upholder of the Dhamma." Gananath Obeyesekere has characterized Dharmapāla as being responsible for infusing Sinhalese Buddhism "with the puritan values of Protestantism" (Obeyesekere 1975, 250; also see Obeyesekere 1995, and Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988, chapter 6, and Roberts 1997).[11]

In Burma King Mindon (r. 1853–1878), a contemporary of Mongkut, had also contributed to the development of a reform movement in his country through convening a council of monks in 1871 to ensure, in the Aśokan tradition, that the scriptures were being transmitted without corruption. Given that the British controlled Lower Burma at the time and would, shortly after Mindon's death, conquer Upper Burma, some leading monks who attended the council recognized that if Buddhism were to survive, monks must also confront the challenge of the West. During the latter part of the nineteenth century, the most prominent monk to promote a reformist Buddhism was the Ledi Sayadaw (1846–1923)—the revered master of Ledi.[12] Like Mongkut, Ledi Sayadaw made meditation central to Buddhist practice; he also disdained many traditional practices, and emphasized the importance of the study of the Buddhist scriptures, although he gave greater emphasis to the *Abhidhamma*, Buddhist metaphysics, than did Mongkut. Although the Ledi Sayadaw was at the forefront of the first nationalist confrontation with British rule, a confrontation that arose over the refusal of soldiers in the British army to take off their boots when entering a Buddhist monastery, the leadership of Burmese Buddhist nationalism was assumed by another monk in the early twentieth century.

U Ottama (1879–1939), a contemporary and very comparable figure to Angārika Dharmapāla, shaped Buddhist reformist ideas into an ideology that was at once nationalist and fundamentalist.[13] He was well educated, first in an Anglo-Burmese school, then in the Sangha as a novice where he acquired a good knowledge of Pāli and Sanskrit, and finally in Western schools in India. He drew on this education and on his experiences while traveling in India and Japan to formulate a Buddhist fundamentalism that was both opposed to the colonial order, which was seen as evil, and also

critical of traditional religious practice. U Ottama in many ways established the paradigm of an activist monk who provides legitimation for violence in defense of the religion.

MODERNIST BUDDHISM

Although each of the Buddhist reformed movements had their own distinctive characteristics, they all perpetuated certain fundamental Buddhist doctrines while situating understandings of these in ways that reoriented Buddhism toward the modern world.[14] Modernist Buddhism retains the fundamental doctrine of Buddhism that all born into the realm of sentient existence (*saṃsāra*) will experience *dukkha*. Although *dukkha* is usually translated as "suffering," it also is understood today, as it was in earliest Buddhism, to be the cessation of pleasurable experience. Again, modernist Buddhism has retained unchanged the original Buddhist doctrine that *dukkha* is the consequence of *kamma*, morally significant action. Buddhism contrasts with the Abrahamic religions in making an impersonal "law" rather than a volitional being—God or Yahweh or Allah—the basis for moral or religiously efficacious action. The Law of Kamma posits that human action produces consequences in accord with the moral intention with which it was undertaken. Morally positive actions produce "merit" (*puñña*) that will be manifest as reduced suffering, while morally negative acts produce "demerit" (*pāppa*), which entails increased suffering.

The major difference between reformist and traditional Theravāda Buddhism relates to the fundamental Buddhist doctrine of *kamma*.[15] In traditional or "cosmological" Buddhism one was understood not only to have disabilities and beauty that were products of kamma from previous existences, but one was also thought to be relatively fixed in social status by virtue of previous kamma. One could, nonetheless, improve one's likelihood of being born to a higher status with less suffering if one used one's wealth to "make merit" through offerings (*dāna*) to support the Sangha and build image halls and stupas. Males could also improve their kammic heritage by serving as members of the Sangha for at least temporary periods of time. Reformist Buddhism has reinterpreted the legacy of kamma from previous existences as being far less determinative of one's conditions in the present life. One's kammic heritage, as I was told by a modernist Buddhist monk in Thailand, is fundamentally the same as one's genetic heritage. Reformist Buddhism also offers a different interpretation of kammically significant acts during one's lifetime. While ritualized merit-making remains important, reformist Buddhism also emphasizes that merit is also acquired from positive acts of generosity to needy laypersons, as well as to members of the Sangha.

Moreover, modernist Buddhism gives much attention to the importance of controlling the desires (*tanhā*) that if acted on generate demerit. Although in traditional Buddhism the "taking of the precepts"—which entail refraining from actions that lead to taking of life, stealing, deceit, and sexual impropriety—was an element of nearly every ritual, modernist Buddhism has given much more emphasis to making these the ethical basis of everyday life.

To control such desires, modernist Buddhism has accorded much more emphasis than traditional Buddhism to meditation. Hundreds of centers have been established by monks throughout the Theravādin world and far more monks than in the premodern world live in forest retreats where they follow very strict regimens centered on long periods in meditation. As a number of studies have shown, forest monasticism seems to have been particularly significant in the period following major sociopolitical and socioeconomic transformations in the Theravādin world in the first three-quarters of the twentieth century.[16] The rise of what can only be termed meditation movements in Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand reflects, as Taylor (1993, 316) has concluded, the fact that such monks are acutely aware that "wider social, political and economic changes—as *kammic* consequences—were inevitable" in the modernizing societies in which they live. While some meditation monks have sought to withdraw from the world to pursue their religious goals, many more have become teachers of meditation to lay people who reside in forest retreats or meditation centers for short periods of time. For these lay practitioners, and for many monks, meditation is not seen as a means to achieve enlightenment; rather, it is seen as a means to effect detachment from desire so that one can act effectively in the world without being driven by desire.

While some monks in modern Theravāda Buddhist societies attempt to withdraw from the world to forest retreats to devote themselves to meditation, most modernist monks teach that the quest for ultimate transcendence of suffering—that is, the quest for *Nibbāna*—can be, even should be, pursued while remaining in the world. In the words of Buddhadāsa *Bhikkhu* (1970), the most famous theologian of twentieth-century Thailand, "Nibbāna is in *saṃsāra*"—that is, one can realize ultimate transcendence—even if only momentarily—while remaining in the experiential world.[17]

Although some monks and laypersons—particularly in Burma where outside influences have been much more limited than elsewhere in the Theravādin world—continue to practice Buddhism following premodern understandings of religious doctrines, in all Theravādin countries—including Cambodia and Laos—there has been a significant reconstrual of Buddhism with reference to modern conditions. Foremost among these are the nation- and state-building projects undertaken by the postcolonial

rulers of these countries. In pursuit of these projects states have often used violence as an instrument of power, or reactions to these projects have prompted violent resistance. In the modern Theravādin world, Buddhism has sometimes been evoked in support of violence and has sometimes been the target of violence. And while most Buddhist monks have denounced violence, others have offered religious justifications for its use. In all Theravādin countries, the use of violence and the consequences of violence have been subjects for religious reflection, ethical debate, and action advocacy.

MODERNIST BUDDHISM AND VIOLENCE IN SRI LANKA, CAMBODIA, AND THAILAND

The crises of authority first begun during the colonial period did not disappear in the postcolonial period. Nationalisms predicated on modernist Buddhism have continued to shape visions of authority that result in conflict and violence. I here focus on postcolonial crises that have entailed significant violence in Sri Lanka, Cambodia, and Thailand.[18]

The origins of a militant form of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism can be traced to Angārika Dharmapāla. In particular he used the story of a Sri Lankan king—Dutugemunu/Duthagāmani, who reigned in the second century BCE—as the justification for a religious war with the Tamils. King Dutugemunu, the story goes, led his forces against non-Buddhists, brandishing a spear with a relic of the Buddha embedded in it. He was accompanied by Buddhist monks and after the battle was consoled by Buddhist saints who told him that since those who were killed "were unbelievers and men of evil life . . . not more to be esteemed than beasts," he had committed no sin in taking their lives (Obeyesekere 1975, 236[19]). This myth, in Dharmapāla's retelling of it in many forums, has provided a justification for a holy war against non-Buddhists in Sri Lanka.[20] By equating the unbelievers who were attacked by King Dutugemunu with the Tamils of today, the myth becomes a charter for holy war. As Tambiah has written: "Here then we have the transmission over time of an *ideology* that was enshrined and objectified as historical memory in the monkish chronicles, and which periodically, from the first centuries CE right up to our own time, was available for invocation, resurrection, and manipulation by zealots and political activists of different centuries, caught in differing circumstances, and following objectives relevant to their times" (Tambiah 1986, 94).

When Ceylon became independent in 1948, it was a plural society with marked diversity. While nearly 70 percent of the populace were speakers of Sinhala and most of these were followers of Buddhism, the other 30

percent consisted of Tamil Hindus and Tamil Muslims, other Muslims, and a small but politically very significant Eurasian segment. In the first years of independence, the government, led by an English-educated elite of diverse backgrounds, promoted a civil order in which diversity was recognized. However, in 1956 S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, the leader of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), became prime minister after his party won a majority in Parliament. Bandaranaike, who had been educated at Oxford, was a convert to Buddhism and, like Angārika Dharmapāla, became zealous in his linking of religion and politics. He introduced a number of new policies that were to accord a privileged position to the Buddhist Sinhalese: (1) Sinhala was recognized as the only national language to the exclusion of English and Tamil; (2) the national history as taught in government schools accentuated the history of Buddhism in the country; and (3) the state undertook to support Buddhism beginning with the celebration of 2,500 years of Buddhism in 1955–1956. Bandaranaike had the strong support of many Buddhist monks for these policies (see Bechert 1978).

Bandaranaike's connection to Buddhism proved, however, to be a double-edged sword; in 1959 he was assassinated by a monk. Although the monk proved to be insane, the assassination was, nonetheless, the beginning of an increased association between Buddhism and political violence in Sri Lanka.

Although Sri Lanka had long been an ethnically complex society, the primary conflict that has its roots in the linking of Sinhalese nationalism and Buddhism has been that between Tamils and the Sri Lankan state. The relegation of non-Buddhists to second-class citizenship in Sri Lanka led to growing tensions within the country and finally to open conflict beginning in the 1980s. In 1983, the Sri Lankan government either backed or tolerated a pogrom-like attack by security forces and many ordinary Sinhalese on Tamils living in the capital of Colombo as well as in the highlands. Tamils subsequently turned in increasing numbers to a movement led by the radical and militant Tamil Tigers ("Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam"). Because the Tigers were pioneers in the use of suicide bombings and have killed many more noncombatants than Sri Lankan soldiers, they have been branded as a "terrorist" organization by India, the United States, and other countries as well as by the Sri Lankan government. The Sri Lankan government has been at war with the Tamil Tigers for over twenty years, with over 65,000 people on both sides having died.[21]

In 2002 the Tigers declared a cease-fire and entered into negotiations with the Sri Lankan government headed by President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, the granddaughter of S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike. However, the negotiations collapsed, in part because of controversy over the distribution of aid in Tamil areas following the tsunami in late 2004

and then the assassination of the country's foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar by a sniper in August 2005. President Kumaratunga has been pressed by the National Buddhist Front, an organization of many monks, to continue the war and even ban non-Buddhist NGOs from working in the country.[22] Buddhist nationalism has been a major factor for the tragedy of Sri Lanka, a tragedy that as yet does not seem to have an end.

The tragedy of Cambodia has been even more horrendous than that of Sri Lanka. On the surface it would seem as though Cambodia's ordeal was the product not of Buddhist nationalism but of a radical secularist ideology, that of the Khmer Rouge led by Pol Pot. However, as I discovered when I sought to understand the origins of the Khmer Rouge, the ideology of the Khmer Rouge has unequivocal roots in a version of reformist Buddhism (Keyes 1994).

The first imagining of a Khmer nation was spurred by the founding of the Buddhist Institute in 1930. The French had founded the institute "to lessen the influence of Thai Buddhism (and Thai politics) on the Cambodian Sangha and to substitute more Indo-Chinese loyalties between the Lao Sangha and their Cambodian counterparts" (Chandler 1991, 18). Suzanne Karpelès, a French Buddhist scholar who was placed in charge of the institute, recruited as her chief associates a number of ex-monks, several of whom subsequently founded the Khmer Communist Party. Pol Pot, the nom de guerre of Saloth Sar, who had also been a novice for a period of time, was one of the recruits to the Party.

Pol Pot and his close associates conceived of the Party, which they called Angkar, "the organization," in ways that were very similar to the Sangha. Those who became members subjected themselves to a discipline to subordinate themselves to the organization. Hinton has shown how the Khmer Rouge concept of "revolutionary consciousness" is linked to the Buddhist conception of "mindfulness" (Hinton 2005, 195ff). Even more perversely the Khmer Rouge took the conception of "cutting off one's heart" (*dach chett*), which in Buddhist practice meant cultivating detachment from worldly desires, and utilized it to promote among cadres a detachment from emotion when taking the lives of those deemed to be "enemies" (Hinton 2005, 262–63). But while the Angkar promised a future to Khmer that was an earthly Nibbāna, its actions actually led to a marked increase in suffering.

One of the first actions of Angkar after the Khmer Rouge took control of Cambodia in April 1975 was a move to eliminate the Buddhist Sangha. Monks and novices, even those in the base areas which the Khmer Rouge had controlled before April 1975, were compelled to disrobe. Being sent for re-education often meant being sent to be killed. In 1980, it was estimated that five out of every eight monks were executed during the Pol Pot regime. Major temple-monasteries were destroyed and lesser ones

were converted into storage centers, prisons, or extermination camps. The only monks who survived were those who fled to southern Vietnam.

The Khmer Rouge reign of terror resulted in at least two million deaths out of a population of about nine million. Every survivor of the Khmer Rouge is haunted by the ghosts of those who died. In the late 1980s, the regime that came to power after the Vietnamese forced the Khmer Rouge to flee to the peripheries of the country erected monuments at sites of some of the worst killing—Tuol Sleng in Phnom Penh and Choeng Ek on the outskirts of the city.

The government under Hun Sen, himself a former Khmer Rouge, has supported the restoration of Buddhism and since the early 1990s Buddhism has become once again the religion of the state. The memories of the Khmer Rouge, however, raise for many Khmer fundamental questions about how a Buddhist society could have spawned such violence. Because these questions have been very difficult to answer, some have turned away from Buddhism and embraced Christianity. Even more Khmer have been attracted to millenarian and magical Buddhist sects that have sprung up in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (see Marston and Guthrie 2004). The most respected senior monk, Maha Ghosananda, and many of his followers, some belonging to Buddhist nongovernmental organizations, have promoted active efforts to ensure that a Buddhist message of peace is clearly articulated.

Thailand has escaped the great tragedies that have beset both Cambodia and Sri Lanka, but there was a period when a militant Buddhist nationalism came close to contributing to the justification of violence that threatened to split apart Thai society. In the mid-1970s, after the military dictators, Field Marshals Thanom Kittikachorn and Prapas Charusathien, had been forced by a student-led movement to go into exile and King Bhumipol Adulyadej had overseen the establishment of a new constitution and parliament, a marked division in the Thai political system developed. Right-wing forces supported by elements of the military and police began to use intimidation and death squads to regain control of power. Many in the student movement, on the other hand, began to see the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) as the best vehicle for ensuring a more just distribution of wealth in the society. The divisions were exacerbated by Thai reactions to the takeover in 1975 of the governments of South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos by Communist parties.[23]

In this context, a very prominent Buddhist monk, Kittivuddho Bhikkhu, began to preach that Communists were less than human and, thus, to kill them would not be a "sin"—that is, would not lead to "demerit"—in Buddhist terms.[24] Although many Buddhist monks and laypersons strongly denounced Kittivuddho for this position, the Ecclesiastical Council made up of the most senior monks in the Thai Sangha refused to reprimand him.

When the patriarch of the Buddhist Sangha agreed to preside at the ordination of Thanom Kittikachorn, the former military dictator, thereby enabling him to return to the country, it seemed clear that the established Sangha had sided with the right wing.

On October 6, 1976, right-wing paramilitary groups backed by units of the police staged a vicious attack on student protestors at one of the main universities in Bangkok. Many students were brutally killed and their bodies mutilated. In the wake of this event, the military once again took control of the government, while hundreds of students who escaped went to the forests up-country to join a Communist-led insurgency.

For nearly three years, Thais were at civil war with each other. The CPT—which had a close relationship with the Khmer Rouge—did not come to power, however. In part this was a consequence of the disenchantment of many of the students who had joined the insurgency with the rigidity of the Party leadership. It was even more the consequence of a decision taken by senior members of the Thai army who had taken control of the government to offer unconditional amnesty to those who had joined the CPT. This decision implied a rejection by these men of both militancy and militant Buddhism in the pursuit of their political objectives. No members of the Sangha, including Kittivuddho himself, provided renewed justification of a militant Buddhism.[25]

In the wake of this decision, the CPT collapsed and Thai society has become one of the most open in Asia. At the same time, many Thai, including many in the elite, have turned away from Buddhist nationalism. There are today a number of competing and quite distinctive Buddhist movements in Thailand. Even more striking is the emergence of a large sector of the populace that I call "post-Buddhists" (see Keyes 1999b). That is, there are many—mainly in the urban middle class—who still think of themselves as in some way connected to Buddhism, but who participate in rituals only rarely and who have limited contact with monks. Such people live very secular lives.

In the 1980s and 1990s there was strong popular support for moves by the government and King Bhumipol to expand Thailand's civil society to be inclusive of minorities, including religious ones. This inclusiveness was legitimated in a new constitution promulgated in 1997. This constitution redefined the term *sātsanā*, previously used primarily to designate Buddhism, to mean "religion" in a broader sense so that those following Islam and Christianity could also be considered to be full citizens of a nation based on the three pillars of monarchy, *sātsanā*, and Thai-ness (defined primarily as having competence in the national language). The promotion of inclusivist policies led to greater integration of Muslims, including the large Malay-speaking Muslim population of southern Thai-

land, into Thai society (see Chaiwat Satha-Anand and Suwanna Satha-Anand 1987; Chaiwat Satha-Anand 1988; and Bonura 2003).

This process was radically reversed in the early twenty-first century. Thaksin Shinawatra became prime minister in early 2001, when his Thai Rak Thai (Thai love Thai) was elected on a populist platform. Thaksin began promoting a more constricted nationalist approach after the World Trade Center Bombing in September 2001 and agreed to send a small contingent of Thai troops to participate in the war in Iraq. This move was strongly protested by Thai Muslims. In early 2004 violent confrontations erupted in the Malay-speaking provinces of Thailand's far south. Since then, violence has escalated with Thai government troops killing a large number of Muslim youth in a mosque, causing the deaths of many more who suffocated after having being piled on trucks by security forces, and insurgents assassinating many local officials, teachers, and even Buddhist monks and novices. Religious violence has become a painful reality in Thailand. After a coup led by the military headed by a Muslim general in September 2006, a new government was appointed with a clear mandate to implement the recommendations of a National Reconciliation Commission, which had been ignored by Thaksin. Although the violence continued, there was now hope that efforts to promote dialogue rather than confrontation (see Chaiwat Satha-Anand 2003) would prevail.

CONCLUSION

As I show in this chapter, despite the image so prevalent in the West of Buddhism as exceptional among world religions in being regarded as a religion of peace, violence undertaken in the name of Buddhism and against Buddhism has also been evident in those countries belonging to the Theravāda Buddhist world. As with other world religions, Theravāda Buddhists have turned to what are taken as the fundamentals of their religion in response to the political-economic and sociocultural transformations associated with the rise of modern nation-states. While a few of these responses have sometimes provided the legitimation or justification for extreme violence, most modernist Buddhists, even while stressing the need for religious renewal, have not embraced the type of militant fundamentalism associated with the Abrahamic religions.

There remains an inherent difference between societies in which Theravāda Buddhism is the dominant religion and those associated with Abrahamic religions. Whereas for followers of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam the fundamental religious responsibility is to seek to know and act on the

will of God or Allah, for Buddhists the essential religious responsibility is to seek to control in oneself the "desires" that if acted on will increase *dukkha* ("suffering"). There is no equivalent in Buddhism of a vengeful Allah or a God of wrath. Fundamental Buddhist doctrine, as expressed in the first of the precepts taken by lay Buddhists and the first of the rules of training to which a member of the Sangha submits himself, stresses that the taking of life leads to suffering. This doctrine has not prevented some monks and laypersons from justifying violence as a means to protect the religion from unbelievers. Moreover, it did not prevent the leaders of the Khmer Rouge, who had themselves once been Buddhist novices or monks, from turning this premise on its head. Nonetheless, the more convincing religious voices in Theravāda Buddhism are those that advocate the cultivation of mindfulness, often through the practice of meditation, to enable the follower of the Buddha to reduce and eventually eliminate the anger in him or her that conduces to violence.

The most revered monk in Thailand in the second half of the twentieth century was Buddhadāsa *Bhikkhu* (1906–1993). Through his sermons, his published work, and his "spiritual theater" at his residence at Suan Mokh in Chaiya in southern Thailand, Buddhadāsa sought to make the Dhamma relevant to those confronting the temptations and the conditions of the modern world. He went even further—in his advocacy of "Dhammic Socialism"—in maintaining that a Buddhist should not only seek to act in ways that will ensure a reduction in *dukkha* in future lives, but should also act to help reduce suffering for all with whom one shares a social world in this life (see Buddhadāsa *Bhikkhu* 1986; Swearer 1973).

Those who follow Buddhadāsa see themselves as part of an international movement of socially engaged Buddhists, a movement that strongly advocates nonviolence. This movement has coalesced around such loose organizations as the Buddhist Peace Fellowship and the International Network of Engaged Buddhists. INEB is under the patronage of the Dalai Lama and Thích Nhất Hạnh, a famous Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk who resides in France.[26] In many ways the monk who most epitomizes this movement today is the Cambodian monk Maha Ghosananda,[27] a ranking monk who was outside of Cambodia when the Khmer Rouge took over. Maha Ghosananda has devoted himself through leading marches through Cambodia to restoring Buddhism as a refuge for peace. While there remain in Sri Lanka some monks committed to militant Buddhist nationalism, the role of socially engaged Buddhists appears to be gaining ground throughout the Buddhist world. Socially engaged Buddhists have also joined with members of other religions who emphasize the nonviolent implications of their religious heritages in offering quiet ripostes to the shrill voices of those who justify violence in the name of or against religion.

NOTES

1. This chapter is one element of a long-term project on how those adhering to Theravāda Buddhism, especially in Thailand, have adapted to the transformations brought about by the influences of "modernity" on the societies in which they live. See Keyes (1971, 1975, 1977, 1978, 1983a, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1999b).

2. Marty and his colleagues sought to find more commonalities among "fundamentalisms" than what I describe here, but scholars involved in the project, including myself, who work in East and Southeast Asia are skeptical of more expansive definitions of fundamentalism.

3. I am grateful to Frank Reynolds (personal communication, February 3, 2005) for pushing me to rethink my use of "Buddhist fundamentalism." See also my discussion in Keyes (1993) and Swearer's (1991) key article.

4. The Theravādin tradition places the death of the Buddha at 543–544 BCE. Recent scholarship strongly indicates that the Buddha's life was confined to the fourth century BCE (see Bechert 1991–97). On the way in which Buddhism as understood in Western countries was a construction of Western scholars of Buddhism, see Welbon (1968) and Lopez (1995). Schopen (1997, 2004) has been at the forefront of scholars who have used actual historical evidence as distinct from interpretations of the *Tripiṭaka*, the collection of texts that long have been considered to constitute the Buddhist canon, to show how Buddhism became an established religion only through a symbiotic relationship between laity and members of the Sangha.

5. The role of Aśoka in the establishment of Buddhism as a religion with the patronage of a monarch has been the subject of considerable study. The main sources for understanding his role are his "edicts" that were inscribed on stele throughout India (see Nikam and McKeon 1959). On the history of his patronage of Buddhism during his reign, see Basham (1987) and Gokhale (1948). And on the transmission of the Aśokan legend among Buddhists, see Strong (1984). On dissemination of relics of the Buddha, see Strong (2004).

6. The Siamese wars with the Burmese have recently re-entered Thai social memory in influential ways with the release in the early twenty-first century of the immensely popular films *Bang Ra-chan* and *Suriyothai*. These films, like many other Thai historical films, depict very bloody battle scenes, including ones involving Buddhist monks.

7. Archaimbault's (1971) description of the role played by the prince of the small Lao principality of Champasak in the New Year ritual is particularly revealing of the emptiness of royal rituals in the wake of the crisis of authority generated by colonial rule.

8. On the related movements in Siam and Laos, see Ishii (1975), Keyes (1977), Murdoch (1974), Gunn (1990), and Wilson (1997). On those in Burma, see Solomon (1969), Maung Maung (1980), and Herbert (1982).

9. Two studies by Lingat (1926, 1958) and a still unpublished dissertation by Craig Reynolds (1973) remain the best accounts of Mongkut's religious reforms. Also see Wilson (1971); Craig Reynolds (1976); Butt (1978); and Kirsch (1973).

10. The Thammayut order also would subsequently gain followers in both Laos and Cambodia. In the early part of the twentieth century, the French rulers of

these two countries sought to counter the influence to the Thammayut monks by creating a Buddhist Institute that also promoted a type of reformist Buddhism.

11. I am grateful to Professor Obeyesekere who heard my presentation at Harvard for some clarification on the early religious life of Angārika Dharmapāla.

12. *Sayadaw*, from *saya*, "teacher," is a term of respect accorded to a monk who has become a senior elder by virtue of spending ten years in the monkhood and who has achieved a reputation for knowledge or practice of religion. The term typically is used in association with the name of the monastery or community where the monk resides (Mendelson 1975, 374). The Ledi Sayadaw, or Pandita U Maung Gyi, was a highly respected monk who resided at the Ledi-tawya monastery in upper Burma. See "A Life Sketch of the Venerable Ledi Sayadaw," in Ledi Sayadaw (1961, 86). Although some of the Ledi Sayadaw's writings on Buddhist meditation (Ledi Sayadaw 1961, 1971) have been translated into English, his life is only sketchily recorded in a number of scattered sources in English.

13. All English accounts of U Ottama cite as their source *Sayadaw U Ottama: Lutlatye Seikdat Myozicha thu* (Sayadaw U Ottama: He Who Sowed the Seeds of Independence) by Bama Khit U Ba Yin (Rangoon: Thamamitta, Djambatam, n.d.). The most extended account in English is to be found in Mendelson (1975, 200–206). I have discussed U Ottama at greater length elsewhere (Keyes 1993).

14. The best study of the reforms and their social consequences in Sri Lanka is that by Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988); also see Seneviratne (1999). For Burma see Mendelson (1975), Sarkisyanz (1965), and Spiro (1970). For Thailand see Reynolds (1973), Tambiah (1976), Jackson (1989), and Keyes (1971, 1992). For comparative perspectives see Swearer (1991, 1995) and Keyes (1993).

15. I draw here, in part, on my introduction to *Karma: An Anthropological Inquiry* (Keyes 1983b).

16. In Sri Lanka, forest monasticism that had become very significant in the post–World War II period (Carrithers 1983) appears to have markedly declined since the mid-1980s when the country was plunged into intense conflict over the status of Tamils. In Thailand, forest monasticism expanded rapidly in the post–World War II period, led primarily by the followers of the Ajarn Man Phurithat (Bhūridatto Thera) (1870–1949), a monk thought by many to have been a "saint" (Taylor 1993; Tambiah 1984; Kamala Tiyavanich 1997). By the late twentieth century forest monks had, however, become as much known for their social activism, especially in promoting forest conservation, as for their religious accomplishments (*Phra* Phaisan Visalo 1990; Taylor 1991, 1996; *Bhikkhu* Sumedho 1999). In Burma, although meditation centers have less often been located in the forests than in either Thailand or Sri Lanka, they have had a profound influence (Byles 1962; King 1964; Houtman 1996, 1999). Also see Kornfield (1977) for biographical sketches of a number of meditation masters in the Theravādin world.

17. In Burma some modernist monks also proposed a comparable reevaluation of *saṃsāra* (King 1965).

18. I had intended to also include Burma in my comparison, but space limitations preclude my doing so. I would observe, in lieu of a fuller discussion, that Buddhist nationalism has contributed to the long-standing conflicts between the Burmese state and ethnic minorities (Taylor 1986, 1988; Gravers 1993; and Matthews 1993). More recently the military junta that has ruled Burma since 1988

has justified its rule by evoking Buddhist nationalism, while the supporters of the opposition to the junta, led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, have drawn inspiration from other interpretations of modernist Buddhism (see Aung San Suu Kyi 1991, Schober 1997, and Houtman 1999).

19. Obeyesekere updated and revised this article as Obeyesekere (1995).

20. On Dharmapāla's vision of an exclusivist Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism, also see Roberts (1997).

21. For some examination of the role of Buddhist nationalism in the Tamil-Sri Lankan conflict, see Manor (1985), Tambiah (1993), Roberts (1995), and Bartholomeusz and De Silva (1998).

22. On the direct involvement of monks in the election of 2004 as well as the advocacy of some monks for the violent suppression of Tamil ethnonationalism, see the article "Powerful Buddhist Monks Enter Sri Lanka's Election Race" issued by Dow Jones news service on March 2, 2004 (http://framehosting.dowjonesnews.com/sample/samplestory.asp?StoryID=2004030207260015&Take=1).

23. There is a large literature on the political crisis in Thailand in the 1970s. Among the most relevant sources for understanding the emergence of militant Buddhism in the period are the following: Girling (1981); Morell and Chai-anan Samudavanija (1981); Anderson (1977); and Thongchai Winichakul (2002).

24. I have discussed Kittivuddho's advocacy of militant Buddhism at some length elsewhere (Keyes 1978). His most extended justification of militant Buddhism is found in Kittivuddho (1976). Also see Somboon Suksamran (1982) for further details.

25. Although Kittivuddho escaped any censure from the Thai Sangha hierarchy, he later became involved in scandals concerning the illegal import of Volvo automobiles and promoting projects that entailed questionable fund-raising. He never renounced his militant interpretation of Buddhism, but he also never repeated it. He died in January 2005 at the age of sixty-nine (*Bangkok Post*, January 22, 2005).

26. See the following websites for information on this international network of socially engaged Buddhists: Buddhist Peace Fellowship (http://www.bpf.org/html/home.html); International Network of Engaged Buddhists (http://www.bpf.org/html/resources_and_links/think_sangha/ineb/ineb.html). For analyses of this movement, see Bobilin (1988); Gosling (1984); Kraft (1992); Nhat Hanh (1993); Sulak Sivaraksa (1990); Swearer (1992); Thai Inter-Religious Commission for Development and International Network of Engaged Buddhists (1990).

27. On Maha Ghosananda, see the following websites: http://www.buddhanetz.org/engaged/engaged3.htm and http://www.buddhanet.net/s_img052.htm. Also see Harris (1999, 2005), and Skidmore (1996).