2 *Theoretically Found, Conceptually Lost*
The Concept of Religion in International Relations

Sensitivity to alterity ends up freezing it in time.

Pasha, 'Islam and the Postsecular'

Ideological and cognitive biases continue to structure the scholarship on and the political practice of religious freedom, as well as the regulation and governance of religious minorities, the identification and evaluation of 'religious' conflict and conflict parties, and the initiatives for reworking the relationship between religion and politics within international practice and theory. This chapter thus deepens my argument that centring genealogical care and the conceptual analysis it entails is necessary, both to understand the endemic biases built into the dominant multiculturalist framework on religion in International Relations (IR) and to appreciate the importance of developing more effective alternatives. This form of conceptual analysis not only debunks the claims to inclusion and diversity sitting at the centre of the move to recognize religion beyond the limits of the state; it shows that efforts to recognize religion without conceptual care and attention to the processes by which religion becomes recognizable risk reproducing structures of power and hierarchy and lose their ability to challenge them.

In Chapter 1, I showed how recent scholarship critiqued and deconstructed the secular ontology of IR. Some scholars emphasized the value of religion and tried to show how 'positive' manifestations could coexist with and indeed enhance traditionally secular approaches, as well as how they could be integrated into existing frameworks of analysis.[1] I gathered this scholarship under

[1] Bettiza, *Finding Faith in Foreign Policy*; Mavelli and Petito, 'The Postsecular in International Relations', p. 935.

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the heading I refer to as the 'multicultural perspective'. Scholars from across theoretical and ideological camps argued for the discipline to start 'taking religion seriously' with Nukhet Sandal and Patrick James stating that such an accommodation is necessary 'if we want to make more sense of domestic and international politics as well as foreign policy decisions in a world that simply refuses to be purely secular'.[2] The claim to 'take religion seriously',[3] however, leads us to the question of what, exactly, should be taken seriously?[4] If we historically contextualize the concept that marks the exclusion, what is left to be recognized, engaged with, or included? What aspects of social and political life become funnelled into the conceptual apparatus of religion, and what are the political, social, and legal consequences of these conceptualizations?

As we will see throughout this chapter, scholars such as Daniel Philpott and Jürgen Habermas, whose work champions the recognition of religion, depend on a particular understanding of what religion is and how it relates to social and political order. While it is problematic that these run along the lines of a particular Protestant emphasis on individualized faith, the point that I want to make is, more specifically, that both need a recognizable religious subject prior to their argument for the recognition of it. Their political projects – for Philpott, lobbying for the importance of religious freedom rights, and for Habermas, the normative primacy of a post-secular society – would falter if it were unclear who was supposed to be the carrier of religious rights or who would be included in the realm of the post-secular order. This dependency on a recognizable religious subject leads them to misread alternative approaches that argue against these political projects as mere political critique. Indeed, they miss out on the core problem, which is the ontological assumption of the epistemic autonomy of religion. Here again, Iza Hussin's work provides an example of how critical genealogical care around the concept of religion can break the reproductive and reifying power of epistemic recognition.

[2] Sandal and James, *Religion and International Relations Theory*, p. 4.
[3] Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion*; Byrnes and Katzenstein, *Religion in an Expanding Europe*.
[4] Kubálková, 'Towards an International Political Theology'; Lynch, 'A Neo-Weberian Approach to Studying Religion and Violence'.

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Why Do Concepts Matter?

The main focus of this chapter is the conceptual politics of religion in IR scholarship. Through close analysis, we see the emergence, argumentative strategies, and shortcomings of the dominant multiculturalist perspectives on religion in IR, as well as the assumptions and inherent problems of the multicultural approach. The critical genealogical position, I argued in Chapter 1, not only helps illuminate these inherent problems; it functions as a foundation on which to build an alternative approach to religion in global politics that is more strongly rooted in the field of critical religious studies.[5] Notably, the deconstructive approach in critical religious studies overlaps heavily with this conceptually critical IR scholarship, both theoretically and methodologically. A synergy seems fruitful and, in terms of studying religion in IR, to some extent even inevitable. Yet the multiculturalist approach to religion remains dominant in IR even among conceptually critical scholars. Why?

In order to tend to this question, let us take a step back to outline how and why concepts matter in IR and critical religious studies. While the empirical focus and disciplinary impact may vary, the common assumption is that conceptual analysis is crucial in order to understand both the practices and the dynamics of national and international politics, as well as their conditions of possibility. Following an initial introduction to the role of concepts in these literatures, I will turn to the conceptual analysis of religion in the work of IR scholars, where I show how and why this conceptual sensibility was lost.

Conceptually critical scholarship is well established in the discipline of IR. It has studied the structures and life of language, concepts,

[5] Aydin, *The Idea of the Muslim World*; Li, *The Universal Enemy*; Adcock, *The Limits of Tolerance*; Agrama, 'Secularism, Sovereignty, Indeterminacy'; Batnitzky, *How Judaism Became a Religion*; Berger, *Law's Religion*; Braidotti, 'In Spite of the Times'; Dressler and Mandair, *Secularism and Religion-Making*; Fadil, 'Not-/Unveiling as an Ethical Practice'; Farman, *On Not Dying*; Fernando, 'Reconfiguring Freedom'; Mahmood, 'Religious Freedom, the Minority Question, and Geopolitics in the Middle East'; Marzouki, *Islam*; Salomon, *For Love of the Prophet*; Schonthal, *Buddhism, Politics and the Limits of Law*; Sevea, *Miracles and Material Life*; Sullivan, *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom*; Sullivan et al., *Politics of Religious Freedom*; Tafjord, 'Indigenous Religion(s) as an Analytical Category'.

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and linguistic formations for more than forty years.[6] It has not only analysed the genealogical lives of more conventional global political concepts such as power, sovereignty, and the state but drawn on and contributed to the study of central concepts in other disciplines.[7] International Relations scholars have engaged with critical sociology to study the concept of the social, anthropology to address for the concept of culture, history to reflect on the concept of time, and legal studies to study the concept of international law.[8]

Building on the work by Ludwig Wittgenstein, Michel Foucault, Reinhart Koselleck, and Quentin Skinner, IR scholars have shown, for example, that contemporary research practices would have a hard time making sense of sovereignty, nationalism, or power if they assumed that these theoretical vocabularies were more or less 'transparent mediums' for representing a ready-made reality outside themselves.[9] On the contrary, as an abstract heuristic devise, concepts help generate knowledge about the world by organizing, naming, and giving cognitive structure and meaning to its features, thereby making some features intelligible and others not.[10] Concepts do not, in this sense, simply represent the reality they claim to describe. The language of politics is, rather, an institutionalized structure of meaning that channels political thought and action in certain directions.

Instead of accepting the epistemic privilege of reified versions of concepts endowed with the power to constitute or impact international affairs, these scholars' approaches argued that both concepts and categories are political products, contingent in meaning and limiting in

[6] Berenskoetter, *Concepts in World Politics*; Neumann, *Concepts of International Relations*.

[7] Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*; Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*; Koselleck et al., *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*; Geuss, 'Genealogy as Critique'; Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*.

[8] Bartelson, *A Genealogy of Sovereignty*; Weber, *Queer International Relations*; Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality*; Jordheim and Wigen, 'Conceptual Synchronisation'.

[9] Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse*; Bartelson, *Becoming International*; Tickner, *Gender in International Relations*; Kratochwil, *Rules, Norms, and Decisions*; Neumann and Sending, '"The International" as Governmentality'; Hutchings, *Time and World Politics*; Campbell, *National Deconstruction*; Bleiker, 'The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory'.

[10] Berenskoetter, *Concepts in World Politics*.

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their scope of thought and action.[11] Troubling the naturalization of the concepts and the semantic field within which they exist, conceptually critical approaches study the practices and possibilities of defining and knowing in a more general sense. They search for the assumptions underpinning the processes that authorized and legitimated the knowledge that made a given concept intelligible. In this sense, theirs is a search not only for meaning but for function. Conceptually critical scholars investigate the ways in which the concept – of power, sovereignty, or freedom – 'informs and takes on meaning' within the empirical discourses of international political theory.[12]

While conceptual analysis and genealogical methods describe the relationship between concepts and knowledge, however, they need not resolve the ambiguity or opacity of a concept. Rather, they aim at showing how knowledge about the concept emerges, is maintained, or changes, and how it functions in political discourse.[13] Reconstructing these processes of conceptual reification reveals their constructed character and questions their epistemic privilege. It is a mode designed to expose the motives, institutional pressures, and human anxieties which give these entities the appearance of rationality or necessity.

The study of concepts and their constitutive relationship to dynamics of power and politics was and remains relevant because concepts are endowed with normative power rather than just being descriptive. They prioritize questions such as: what are the conditions of intelligibility and knowability, and how do assumptions about, for example, autonomy, rationality, and subjectivity contribute to structuring the analysis of global politics?[14] And how do concepts and the broader discourses in which they are embedded – the epistemes – become institutionalized? Importantly, the focus here is not just on the conditions and outcomes of discourse but on their constitutive function and productive power. In this sense, concepts do not merely guide thought and practice; they constitute identities and subjectivities, guide action, and alter material realities.[15]

[11] Berenskoetter, *Concepts in World Politics*.
[12] Bartelson, *A Genealogy of Sovereignty*, p. 12.
[13] Kratochwil, 'On Legitimacy'.
[14] Bartelson, *A Genealogy of Sovereignty*, pp. 70–71.
[15] Berenskoetter, *Concepts in World Politics*.

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How Critical IR Reifies Religion

None of this is new. But what is surprising is that when conceptually critical IR scholars such as Friedrich Kratochwil, Iver Neumann, and Karin Fierke turn their focus to religion, the genealogical care with which they treat concepts of power, culture, or even 'the human' all but disappears. Kratochwil and Neumann both take religion as an example of issues in social and political thought that exceeds the restrictive bondage of positivist rationality. In this sense, dealing with religion serves the secondary purpose for these authors of illustrating how to pluralize IR's theory and methodology. They use it thus by conceptualizing religion as experience, notably the experience of ambivalence. It is within this move that they slip into the reifying assumptions underlying the phenomenology of religion. Kratochwil writes, 'Such ambivalence … is not accidental, but intrinsic to the experience of the sacred. It cannot be eliminated or parceled out in order to make for a clearer, unambiguous, more "scientific" causal imputation of the factor of religion in social life.'[16] He continues, 'On the most basic level, religion is the result of the encounter with the sacred'.[17] From this experience follows the ambivalent effect of religion on politics and social life: 'Strangely, it is the secularism of the environment that furthers the escalation of ethnoreligious conflict. In the absence of spiritual guidance by a respected and effective clergy, and the face of a weakened "living tradition" of religion in cult and practice, radical leaders are able to tap directly into the destructive part of the ambivalent sacred experience.'[18]

Kratochwil builds his phenomenological approach to religion on the work by the early twentieth-century German Protestant theologian Rudolf Otto.[19] The problem with Otto, however, is that his

[16] Kratochwil, 'Religion and (Inter-)National Politics', p. 114.
[17] Kratochwil, 'Religion and (Inter-)National Politics', p. 119.
[18] Kratochwil, 'Religion and (Inter-)National Politics', p. 129.
[19] 'As the philosopher of religion Rudolf Otto suggested, this experience of awe transcends all conceptualizations and asserts itself as the ultimate reality and source of all being. It is the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* that precedes all categorization by asserting itself in a strange harmony of contrasts between the daunting and the fascinating. In Otto's terms, "it has wild and demonic forms and can sink to an almost horror and shuddering. It has its crude barbaric antecedents … and again it may be developed into something beautiful and pure"' (Kratochwil, 'Religion and (Inter-)National Politics', p. 119). Otto, *Das Heilige*.

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understanding of a universal phenomenon of religion – as an experience of the sacred, stripped of parochial, cultural, and historical particularities – is a teleological one, one where only that or those which are recognizable as religious fit within an internal and, against Kratochwil's own claims, rational and Protestant understanding of religion.[20] Building IR theory around a teleological version of religion, where the experience of the 'sacred' – itself a concept fraught with Christian genealogy – conditions its recognizability as religion, remains a conundrum. The politics of defining religion is part of a long and often violent historiography, some of which I will return to in Chapters 4 and 5. Ignoring these histories and the genealogies they serve would be a mistake not only academically but also politically. What remains is an investment in a version of religion that hardly lives up to any of the standards of conceptual critique or genealogical analysis. It does, however, align with what I have defined as the multicultural approach to religion.[21]

So, what was different with religion? As we will see throughout this chapter, we could assume that these IR scholars were simply ignorant of their reifying approach to religion. However, as we saw in Chapter 1, there is a wealth of scholarship in the fields of anthropology, sociology, history, law, and religious studies that does little else than study the processes and assumptions on which knowledge about religion relies: how 'it became legible and intelligible as a separate but constitutive foundation for politics, law, and history'.[22] Instead of

[20] This is not seamlessly traceable to a Kantian or Enlightenment genealogy but a much messier Central European historiography. Neumann also centers around experience and uses a wild mix of sources such as the anthropologist of religion Clifford Geertz's definition of religion together with Malinowski's differentiation of religion and magic and Eliade's phenomenological argument that religion, in and of itself, is experienced, not rationally argued or proven (Neumann, 'Religion in Sort of a Global Sense'; Neumann, 'Pop Goes Religion').

[21] Kratochwil, 'Politics, Law, and the Sacred'; Kratochwil, 'Religion and (Inter-) National Politics'; Neumann, 'Religion in Sort of a Global Sense'; Neumann, 'Pop Goes Religion'; Fierke, *Political Self-Sacrifice*; see also Lynch, 'Friedrich Kratochwil: Prophet of Doubt?'.

[22] Jonathan Z. Smith formulated a standard account of this as he wrote that 'religion is not a native term; it is a term created by scholars … It is a second-order, generic concept that plays the same role in establishing a disciplinary horizon that a concept such as "language" plays in linguistics, or "culture," plays in anthropology. There can be no disciplined study of religion without such a horizon' (Smith, 'Religion, Religions, Religious', p. 281).

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conceptualizing religion as unique and sociopolitically autonomous, religion emerges in this scholarship as a discursive object, illuminating the discursive practices and rules that make the representation of a sociopolitically autonomous religion possible and normative.[23] In literature that engages religion as a concept, in other words, we have long seen the ways in which discursive practices and rules have sanctioned and sustained sociopolitical and material structures and hierarchies.[24] Significantly, the conceptually critical approaches in IR overlap methodologically, theoretically, and at times even empirically with these scholars of religion. So the question remains: why have IR scholars continued to treat religion differently than other concepts to which they have rigorously applied conceptual analysis, discursive, and even performative understanding?[25] Multiculturalist IR scholarship on religion relies on an understanding of religion that carries value – either epistemically or ontologically – and, as such, buys into a version of religion that needs to remain sociopolitically distinct and intelligible. This conceptual limitation stands in the way of integrating

[23] An, *The Coloniality of the Secular*; Crosson, *Experiments with Power*; Hartikainen, 'Candomblé and the Academic's Tools'; Hallward, 'Situating the "Secular"'; Barras, *Faith in Rights*.

[24] McCutcheon demonstrates why 'religion is what it is for scholars, what is at stake for keeping religion and its study that way, and what might be gained by changing it' (McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion*, p. 3). In the context of colonial and imperial history, David Chidester shows how the categories of 'religion' and 'religions' emerged, were authenticated, and circulated as instruments of knowledge and power in both imperial ambitions and indigenous innovation during the nineteenth century in southern Africa (Chidester, *Empire of Religion*). Tomoko Masuzawa advanced an alternative narrative of the study of and knowledge about religion through a close reading of the history of the idea of 'world religions', exploring how Christian universalism and European hegemony were both displaced and retained by discourses of religious pluralism. See Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*. See also Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*; McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion*; Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*; Orsi, *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*.

[25] Notable exceptions include Aydin, *The Idea of the Muslim World*; Bosco, 'Persistent Orientalisms'; Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist*; Crosson, *Experiments with Power*; Hallward, 'Situating the "Secular"'; Hurd, 'The International Politics of Secularism'; Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations*; Hurd, 'International Politics after Secularism'; Hurd, *Beyond Religious Freedom*; Hussin, *The Politics of Islamic Law*; Mavelli, 'Postsecular Resistance, the Body, and the 2011 Egyptian Revolution'.

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the wealth of insights from critical scholarship on religion into IR and better understanding international dynamics of political order, conflict, war, violence, and peace.

This particular conceptualization sticks, I argue, because there is a particular function in keeping a conceptual rigidity around religion in political projects embarking in its name, such as the protection of religious freedom, governance of religious minorities, and engagement with religious actors, their ideas, and institutions. Without that kind of stability, there would be no way of knowing whom to protect, govern, or engage with. One would further not know when the political or moral recognition informing the projects had been successfully met. By ignoring the processes by which religion, religions, and the religious become recognizable as such, 'religion' remains an epistemically autonomous concept assumed to be effective in explaining and understanding global political dynamics. However, autonomous concepts do not necessarily improve explanatory efficiency. Rather, they lock potential explanations into a predetermined range of epistemic possibilities. Leaving the concept of religion untouched due to a perception that it is necessary for the protection of individuals and the promotions of specific groups' rights conditions the access of that protection and empowerment to those who fit the category. We thus remain stuck in the loop of legibility, recognizing only the recognizable.

Having detailed the ways that IR scholarship often fails at conceptualizing religion with the same analytical rigour it applies to other concepts, I now turn to address the work of several authors central to debates on the politics of religious freedom and the prospects for a post-secular social order. Through a close conceptual reading, I show how scholars embodying the multicultural arguments reproduce the political and epistemic hierarchies connected to religion by ignoring the history and politics of the concept and the ways in which it emerged as a recognizable subject and object in IR. Instead, they rely on a conventional – and epistemically autonomous – concept of religion that is recognizable to its proponents. They thereby narrow their work down to the inclusion of those able to capture the concept and those represented by it, thus problematically reproducing social and political hierarchies while purporting to further a more genuinely diverse international society.

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Religion and Rights: Protection of Vulnerable Populations or Global Governmentality?

The debate on religious freedom in IR followed a longer intervention from critical scholars arguing against what they saw as a reductive approach to religion in the social sciences and humanities as well as in political practice, particularly US-American foreign policy investing in the promotion of religious freedom abroad and an increasing number of states, supranational, and international organizations following suit.[26] In 2015, multiple publications paved the way for a renewed conversation about the role of rights and, more distinctively, human rights in relation to religion.[27] The predominantly critical position embodied by an interdisciplinary group of scholars – Winnifred Sullivan, Saba Mahmood, and Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, among others – became the main target of counterarguments from a group of scholars dissatisfied with what they saw as an attempt to undermine the effort to recover religion as an asset for politics.[28] Here, proponents of a substantial – what I identified as multicultural – outlook on religion and the rights connected to it stood across from those who argued for a much more critical – genealogical – approach to the concept itself. The latter also represented the problematic consequences of tying individual and group rights to such a volatile term.

The main arguments of this debate circled around the role and consequences of specific rights – in this case, the right to religious freedom. The proponents of a substantial outlook on religion argued that religious freedom constituted a fundamental human right that could

[26] See Chapter 1 for Elizabeth Shakman Hurd's discussion on the 'religion industrial complex'. See also Hurd, 'International Politics after Secularism'.

[27] The volume on the *Politics of Religious Freedom* edited by Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, Saba Mahmood, and Peter G. Danchin traced the contested historical genealogy of the concept and the kind of work that advocacy for religious freedom does and the kinds of political and legal worlds it has created. Hurd continued her own study in *Beyond Religious Freedom* narrowing in on the 'New Global Politics of Religion' and the implications of global governance 'construing religion as an isolable entity and causal powerhouse in international relations' (Hurd, *Beyond Religious Freedom*, p. 2).

[28] Philpott and Shah, 'In Defense of Religious Freedom'; Philpott, *Religious Freedom in Islam*.

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and should be part of global political efforts to enforce and protect.[29] Their critics pointed out that rights in and of themselves are performative, meaning that they are constitutive of the subject they aim to protect. Rights of religious minorities are therefore not only enforcing the legal right to the protection of religious minorities but also producing what it means to be religious and a minority. In the same manner, the protection of religious freedom constitutes what it means to be both religious and free.[30] Rights, in this case, never exist apart from the context that bore them or the power that enforces them. Assuming that rights are neutral disallows for a critical reflection on their problematic and possibly even dangerous side effects. Building on a Foucauldian reading of rights, then, the critics of the religious freedom rights discourse argued that rights, as such, are never neutral and never passive.[31] They are part and parcel of a regime of power and political technology that enforces and regulates according to its own normative standards. Continuing to use the claim of religious freedom as a universal right to enforce political decisions globally and locally would be, in their view, a continuation of the power that set and defined the meaning and scope of those rights. And that power is never neutral.

What we are seeing here is a tension between two opposing understandings of the subject of religious freedom and, more generally, the subject of religion. On the one hand, proponents for the enforcement of religious freedom see it as something that would enable the subjectivity of those whose freedom is protected – for example, a religious minority. On the other hand, critics point to the subjectifying aspect of the right. One might become a subject in terms of becoming recognized as a carrier of the right to religious freedom, but one is and remains subjected to the particular power regime in place that defines the terms of who and what is recognizable as a subject – for example, who is recognizable as religious and as a minority. I will return to this in Chapter 3, as it embodies what I call the 'two faces' of recognition. For now, it suffices to point out that this tension remains at the heart of the scholarship on religion and politics.

[29] Bhuta, 'Two Concepts of Religious Freedom in the European Court of Human Rights'; Philpott and Shah, 'In Defense of Religious Freedom'; Philpott, *Religious Freedom in Islam*.
[30] Sullivan et al., *Politics of Religious Freedom*.
[31] Brown, *Regulating Aversion*; Foucault, *Geschichte der Gouvernementalität*.

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The critical position regarding the global promotion of religious freedom spurred a strong reaction by those who saw religious freedom as a fundamental human right. Daniel Philpott emerged as a spokesperson for the argument that freedom of religion is a universal and an essentially 'negative' freedom in that it is only limited by other basic human rights and, at times, public welfare. It functions, like other human rights, to protect individuals' exercise of practices, expressions of values, and worldviews. While Philpott remains one example among a broad and diverse scholarship on the right to religious freedom, his arguments for the centrality and value of religion to IR scholarship and practice are exemplary in the way they both assume and reproduce an epistemically autonomous concept of religion. By looking at Philpott's argument as an example of multiculturalist reasoning, we see how and why the concept of religion is reified and the ways in which this position limits both future scholarship and political practice.

In Philpott's view religion 'names a genuine … phenomenon' that 'can be singled out for analysis'.[32] He makes clear that while it is an imperfect category and 'difficult to pin down … religion is a universal human phenomenon and a good that merits protection by the law … It is a universal human right, not a parochial Western value.'[33] In *Religious Freedom in Islam: The Fate of a Universal Human Right in the Muslim World Today* (2019), Philpott aims to 'guide Western countries in their engagement with the Muslim world and contribute to an expansion of religious freedom around the globe'.[34] As such, he writes 'religious freedom is a matter of intrinsic justice'.[35] There is no doubt for Daniel Philpott that religion is central to human life and that it is universal by definition. Thus, Philpott rejects what he calls the critics' 'Foucauldian deconstructionist' position. 'Religion', he states, 'cannot be reduced to a single construct with a single, politically driven genealogy'.[36] He therefore rejects what he sees as the critics' unfounded claims that religious freedom policy worsens religious divisions, violence, and inequality in sites where Western powers apply it.[37] Indeed, Philpott sees the critique

[32] Philpott and Shah, 'In Defense of Religious Freedom'.
[33] Philpott, *Religious Freedom in Islam*.
[34] Philpott, *Religious Freedom in Islam*.
[35] Philpott, *Religious Freedom in Islam*, p. 3.
[36] Philpott and Shah, 'In Defense of Religious Freedom', p. 385.
[37] Philpott, *Religious Freedom in Islam*; Philpott and Shah, 'In Defense of Religious Freedom', p. 393.

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of religious freedom policies, particularly critiques of US-American foreign policy in the name of religious freedom, as a weak veil for the cultivation of anti-imperialist sentiments. The championing of religious freedom is necessary, he states, simply due to the 'sober fact that religious repression is real and widespread'.[38]

On the face of it, Philpott's position may seem like a sound argument for the protection of basic human rights against critics trying to argue for the cultural specificity of those rights. But the reason he is concerned about losing the concept of religion to its critics is that if religion is judged 'to be incoherent, shifting, and parochial', so is the moral basis of religious freedom.[39] Philpott thus cannot do without a stable concept of religion. To him, the deconstruction of the concept undermines the moral and political strength of the human rights project. But, in order to fully grapple with the assumptions underlying such arguments, I ask: what is the concept of religion that this kind of scholarship refers to? If we step back from the arguments regarding the need for or performative function of the rights to religious freedom, what aspects of social and political life does Philpott see as worthy of protection?

Philpott offers two ways to distinguish religion from other parts of social and political life. First, he offers a definition, mainly in order to differentiate religion from 'Marxism, Nazism, nationalism and witchcraft'.[40] Religion, he originally suggested, is 'a set of beliefs about the ultimate ground of existence, that which is unconditioned, not itself created or caused'.[41] Later, he modified this core definition, preferring to use the term 'political theology', which he sees as a less closed and more open-ended term than religion. However, even if 'political theology' differs from 'religion' so as to be more sensitive to social and political contexts, it is still constituted by the tenets, beliefs, and doctrines of religion.[42] Second, he suggests that religion can be differentiated from non-religion by looking at the practices the two categories bring

[38] Philpott and Shah, 'In Defense of Religious Freedom', p. 394.
[39] Philpott and Shah, 'In Defense of Religious Freedom', p. 383.
[40] Philpott, 'The Challenge of September 11 to Secularism in International Relations', p. 68.
[41] Philpott, 'The Challenge of September 11 to Secularism in International Relations'.
[42] Philpott, *Revolutions in Sovereignty*; Philpott, 'The Religious Roots of Modern International Relations'.

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about. For Philpott, religion is religious ideas, and these are 'powerful, autonomous, and not simply the by-product of nonreligious factors'.[43] In fact, in 'any particular context, political theology translates basic theological claims, beliefs and doctrines into political ideals and programs.'[44] In other words, Philpott sees ideas as the basis for practices and religious ideas as the origin of religious practices. Religious ideas are, in this sense, autonomous. This is important to note as we proceed, because it gives Philpott a core identifier of difference, even if it is tautological: religion is differentiable from non-religion because it has religious ideas.

Moreover, ideas are mirrored in the practices of those who believe in them, that is, their 'converts' on the ground. Evidence of the impact of ideas and the 'evidence of conversion, of identity formation' that follow from the adoption of the ideas, he suggests, 'lies in the new religious practices of those who adopted [them]'.[45] Notably, this is a basic tautology: ideas are supposedly made evident through practices. And, more importantly, ideas are not simply mirrored in practices but are also constituted by them. That is, ideas can represent rationalizations for already ongoing practices, and practices can be productive of the ideas they later claim to embody. By ignoring this constructive power, Philpott lacks any genealogical concern regarding the productive power in the performance of 'religious' practices for religious ideas, and thus for 'religion' itself. Neither the power of using the word 'religion' itself nor the power of the practices that produce religious ideas are taken into consideration in his work.

To be clear, Philpott does not state that ideas are autonomous of context, noting that they arise in circumstances and contexts that nourish them. Further, he observes that there is not generally one single idea that constitutes 'religion' but a conglomerate of different ideas gravitating around one basic background idea. However, as sensitive as Philpott may be towards the complexity of ideas, he ignores how these emergent ideas are dependent, or rather, how they are constituted by the way in which they are subsequently performed or used. And ignoring the productive power in the performance of 'religious'

[43] Philpott et al., *God's Century*, p. 29.
[44] Philpott et al., *God's Century*, p. 27. See also Philpott, 'The Challenge of September 11 to Secularism in International Relations', pp. 66–67, 93; Philpott, 'The Religious Roots of Modern International Relations', p. 244.
[45] Philpott, *Revolutions in Sovereignty*, p. 124.

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practices is inherently problematic. Philpott himself states that 'a complete genealogical account of the origin of an idea is impossible … such an account is not my aim here.'[46] However, he mistakes the meaning and limiting effects of genealogy. What he lacks is a measure of critical sensitivity to different productive powers in the performances of 'religious' practices and a modicum of perspective concerning how the use of religious references is constitutive of the ideas that can be argued in reference to it. In the end, because he sees a genealogical approach to religion as pulling out the rug of conceptual stability from under his religious rights project, he reaffirms a very particular understanding of what religion is, empowers those who can claim this version of religion, and sidelines the debates and struggles on how this present state of affairs came to be. In so doing, he provides a perfect example of how multiculturalist reasoning reifies the concept of religion in a distinct and, ultimately, limiting way.

Post-secular Politics

While Philpott relied on the conceptual stability of religion to lobby for the importance of religious freedom as a human right, this is not the only kind of project reflecting the multiculturalist perspective that benefits from maintaining a stable, identifiable concept of religion. When the deconstruction of IR's secular ontology opened up space for a renewed engagement with religion,[47] it also begged the question: what are the alternatives to a secular liberal order? While some scholars tried to come to terms with – and to a certain extent also cater to – a 'return' or 'resilience' of religion in modern life, others suggested different forms of arrangements fostering an 'ethos of generous engagement' with a 'deep pluralism'.[48] To address the former first, I turn to Jürgen Habermas's post-secular society, the normative

[46] Philpott, *Revolutions in Sovereignty*, p. 258.

[47] See argument in Chapter 1 regarding common assumptions in the secularism critique – that religion and politics are co-constituted and that it is therefore futile to separate them, both practically and theoretically; the critique of the assumption that religion is private, amodern, and irrational; and the definition of secularism as a particular and historically contingent mode of thought, a mode of governance, and a regime of knowledge rather than a neutral and natural necessity for liberal government.

[48] Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*. For a critical account, see Birnbaum, 'Exclusive Pluralism'; Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*; Asad,

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primacy of which would, like Philpott's religious freedom, falter without a clear understanding of who is included in it.

While Habermas might not seem like a natural candidate for a study of post-secular politics in IR, he is unique in moving beyond the 'formal public sphere'– that is, the national institutional levels of parliament, court, and public administration – to formulate an account applicable to an international realm. His body of work also presents the most compelling litmus test for liberal post-secular politics as he proposes a post-secular theoretical groundwork rather than limiting himself to analysing post-secular politics in practice.[49] While various scholars have applied his account of a post-secular society to IR theory – such as Barbato, discussed in Chapter 1 – I maintain that a study of Habermas's own writings allow us better access to his underlying argumentative rationales and assumptions. My critique of the ways in which Habermas depends on and reproduces his own version of a 'Judaic-Christian' liberal religion through the narratives of exclusion and arguments for recognition applies equally to the IR scholarship building on his work. Similar to my analysis of the conceptual politics in Philpott's debate on religious freedom, I will allow myself to dig deeply into Habermas's scholarship in order to display its argumentative strategies and consequential limitations. This level of detail is important, as it effectively illustrates the return of multicultural arguments regarding religion despite the deconstructive methodologies embedded in the secularism critique and critical theory, of which Habermas embodies the second generation following the Frankfurter School.

Jürgen Habermas's vision for the post-secular society (and religion's place within in) first became publicly visible through the German Book Trade's Peace Prize in the fall of 2001, where his speech on Faith and Knowledge (*Glauben und Wissen*) followed immediately after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon earlier that September. Four years later, he published a collection of essays building on the foundation laid in that speech, titled *Between Naturalism and Religion* (*Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion*). Here, he laid out his vision of a post-secular society in more detail and continued to

Formations of the Secular; Calhoun et al., *Rethinking Secularism*; Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

[49] Mavelli and Petito, 'The Postsecular in International Relations'; Camilleri, 'Postsecularist Discourse in an "Age of Transition"'.

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develop his latest thinking in *Also a History of Philosophy* (*Auch eine Geschichte der Philosophie*).[50] Habermas's post-secular society goes beyond the critique of the secular order. It is a constructive account of how to proceed after secularism. It is particularly interesting because it speaks to the common denominator in the scholarship on religion and politics, namely the critique of exclusion. Habermas develops a detailed critique of the liberal secular position, marginalizing religion and criticizing, among others, his own earlier position on the necessity of a secular public sphere. He follows this critique of exclusion by outlining an arguably more diverse post-secular order.

My argument, however, is that the claim to diversity is misleading. The Habermasian post-secular order is not more diverse, as his account is inclusive for the traditions which are already a part of the genealogy of liberal reason: those in which 'egalitarian individualism' and 'universal morality' are not only embedded but out of which they have grown. Habermas gives shape to the particular form of religion he seeks recognition for, a 'Judaic-Christian' value liberalism, through his narrative of exclusion and arguments for recognition. He challenges secular thinking to reflect upon its own limits and to review its claim to neutrality.[51] This, he suggests, 'presupposes an epistemic mindset that is the result of a self-critical assessment of the limits of secular reason'.[52] Part of the exclusion of religion from the public sphere and its arenas of deliberation builds on the assumption that the secular is equivalent with the neutral and that religion necessarily partisan.[53] However, Habermas argues that secular philosophy and political theory, rooted in Hellenic traditions, have to better understand the shared 'Judeo-Christian legacy' and the ways they mutually

[50] Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*; Habermas, *Auch Eine Geschichte Der Philosophie*.

[51] In his critique of the 'secularist' exclusion of religion in informal public deliberation, he argues for a deepening of what he sees to be at the very heart of liberal modernity, namely the capacity for self-reflection and self-criticism. His post-secular account prescribes a 'self-reflexive overcoming of a rigid and exclusivist secular self-understanding of modernity' (Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, p. 138).

[52] Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, pp. 139–40.

[53] Habermas states, 'The neutrality of state power vis-à-vis different worldviews, which guarantees equal individual liberties for all citizens, is incompatible with the political generalization of a secularized worldview' (Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, p. 113).

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shaped, and were shaped by, early Christian thought.[54] Secularist arguments for the exclusion of religion must therefore understand their own dependence on the traditions they are trying to silence, he argues.[55] By excluding religion from the rooms of public deliberation, the 'secular society would … cut itself off from key resources for the creation of meaning and identity'.[56]

In the normative argument outlined in this section, Habermas claims that the exclusion of religion from public deliberating forums furthers the polity's disintegration and undermines social solidarity. It is, however, not only due to grounds of inclusion that religion ought to be acknowledged but because 'philosophy … has good reasons to be open to learning from religious traditions'.[57] Habermas doesn't only challenge secular thinking to engage in deeper self-reflection; he emphasizes that religions could contribute substantially and positively to secular thought. Therefore, he argues, religion should be acknowledged not only due to the value of more perspectives on truth but on epistemic grounds.

Throughout his writings, we see Habermas making two points regarding the need to enrich secular reason. First, he points to the 'motivational weakness of rational morality [which] does not foster any impulses towards solidarity, that is, towards morally guided, collective action'.[58] Second, he points out the inability of pure practical reason to answer up to 'a modernization spinning out of control armed solely with the insights of a theory of justice'.[59] As he puts it, 'The latter lacks the creativity of linguistic world-disclosure that a normative consciousness afflicted with accelerating decline requires in order to regenerate itself'.[60] Secular reason is, in other words, not enough to

[54] Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, pp. 110–11.
[55] As the 'major world religions belong to the history of reason itself … (p)ost-metaphysical thinking misunderstands itself if it fails to include the religious traditions alongside metaphysics in its own genealogy' (Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, p. 6).
[56] Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, p. 131.
[57] Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, p. 109.
[58] Habermas, *An Awareness of What Is Missing*, pp. 74–75. This does not mean that liberal democracies do not develop their own, rational, forms of solidarity or morality, both evolving out of the deliberative process, but somehow this does not seem to be enough.
[59] Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, p. 211.
[60] Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, p. 211.

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answer up to the spread of the imperatives of the market, 'out of control' modernization, and the disintegration that inevitably follows.

Habermas centres his epistemological argument about religion in the realm of public discourse. Accordingly, he suggests that religious traditions carry a 'semantic potential' and 'a special power to articulate moral intuitions'.[61] These make 'religious speech into a serious vehicle for possible truth contents'.[62] But, we must ask, in which way does religion carry these semantic potentials that qualifies it to a recognition different than that of other sources of knowledge? What makes religion different? Here, it is useful quote Habermas in length:

> Holy scriptures and religious traditions … have articulated intuitions concerning transgression and salvation and the redemption of lives experienced as hopeless, keeping them hermeneutically vibrant by skilfully working out their implications over centuries. This is why religious communities, provided that they eschew dogmatism and respect freedom of conscience, can preserve intact something that has been lost elsewhere and cannot be recovered through the professional knowledge of experts alone. I have in mind sufficiently differentiated expressions of and sensitivity to squandered lives, social pathologies, failed existences, and deformed and distorted social relations. A willingness on the part of philosophy to learn from religion can be justified on the basis of the asymmetry of epistemic claims, not just for functional but … also for *substantive* reasons.[63]

In other words, religion carries a semantic potential for secular thought because it has kept something 'hermeneutically vibrant' and 'intact' that would 'otherwise have been lost'. It should therefore, on 'substantive' grounds, not be excluded from public discourse.[64]

But what does this claim about the contribution of religion to secular discourse presuppose? According to Habermas, religion carries

[61] Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, p. 131.
[62] Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, p. 131.
[63] Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, p. 110, my italics.
[64] The possibilities and problems of the translation of this religious knowledge into secular language in order to be understood by those outside of the religious community have been discussed at length by others: Barbato, 'Conceptions of the Self for Post-Secular Emancipation'; Barbato, 'Postsecular Revolution'; Cooke, 'Salvaging and Secularizing the Semantic Contents of Religion'; Lafont, 'Religion in the Public Sphere', Lafont, 'Remarks of a Young Habermasian'. Before the possibility or impossibility of translation can be discussed, however – how can religion contribute – we need to discuss what this contribution presupposes.

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a semantic potential and could enrich secular thought epistemically. This is possible because religious knowledge has been kept 'hermeneutically vibrant' – or 'awake' as it were in the German original – that would have been lost elsewhere. Philosophy and political theory ought to stay open to this kind of knowledge, according to Habermas, not only due to functional reasons or for reasons of just representation in public discourse but for substantive reasons. But when he states that 'a philosophy which relates to religion as a contemporary intellectual formation enters into a dialogue with it instead of talking about it', what – or who – does Habermas see embodying this 'it'?[65] Who is Habermas in dialogue with, exactly? How do we know what religion is and when it is not? What and who ought to be respected, acknowledged, and included in a Habermasian post-secular society? By which criteria?

This post-secular argument for the epistemic value of religion – and the reason for its acknowledgement and respect – builds on a vision of conserved religious knowledge and sentiments. Habermas does not specify what he means by religion. He uses it interchangeably with religious communities,[66] individual believers,[67] religious consciousness,[68] and religious language.[69] The closest he gets to a definition is when he speaks of the 'unexhausted semantic potential [that] can be found only in traditions which … have not yet completely dissolved in the relentless acceleration of modern conditions of life'.[70] These traditions are the 'world religions which are the only surviving element of the now alien cultures of the Ancient Empires'.[71] They are rooted – like antique philosophy – in the 'middle of the first millennium before Christ, i.e. to what Jaspers called the "Axial Age"'.[72] Although Habermas suggests

[65] Habermas, *An Awareness of What Is Missing*, p. 77.
[66] Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, p. 110.
[67] Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, p. 131.
[68] Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, p. 231.
[69] Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, p. 130.
[70] Habermas, *An Awareness of What Is Missing*, pp. 77–78.
[71] Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, p. 142.
[72] Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, p. 141. In contrast to normative-political convictions, 'every religion is originally a "worldview", or "comprehensive doctrine" also in the sense that it claims the authority to structure form of life as a whole' (Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, p. 111). 'As it happens, this special status prohibits a normative-political assimilation of religious convictions to ethical convictions, as practiced by Forst … when he accords the principled priority of procedural

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that religious, as well as non-religious, mentalities and forms are shaped by the processing of 'cognitive dissonances',[73] and that the '"modernization of public consciousness" affects and reflexively transforms religious and secular mentalities',[74] he still argues that there is something in the religious communities that has been kept 'hermeneutically vibrant [and] preserve[d] intact' – and that it is a source of 'unexhausted semantic potential'.[75] In short, religion, to Habermas, carries value in and of itself.

Notably, Habermas post-secular society is in no way more inclusive to formerly excluded perspectives. Rather, it is selectively inclusive to those perspectives that correspond with his pre-existing model of a liberal deliberative democracy. Apart from being of ancient origin and able to deliver 'intact' knowledge from these historical roots, Habermas conditions the forms that are permitted entrance into public discourse to those religious citizens who 'embed egalitarian individualism of modern natural law and universal morality in the context of their comprehensive doctrine'.[76] In other words, beyond the criteria of it having 'eschew[ed] dogmatism and respect[ing] freedom of conscience',[77] the form of religion that Habermas grants entry into the informal public sphere goes through the Kantian conditions of egalitarian individualism and universalistic morality. Here, I agree with Partha Chatterjee: the claim that religions may have a legitimate place in modern politics 'if they agree to confine themselves to rational debate and persuasion, and not resort to intolerance and violent methods' is only a plea for a particular kind of religion.[78]

With this close reading of Habermas's post-secular account, I want to point out two things. First, I want to emphasize that Habermas's epistemic recognition of religion relates to a conservative vision of

over substantive criteria of justification precedence over the distinction between religion and secular reasons' (Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, p. 129, n. 35).

[73] Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, p. 136.

[74] Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, p. 111.

[75] Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, p. 110.

[76] 'Das gelingt nur in dem Masse, wie sie (die religiöse Bürger) den egalitären Individualismus von Vernunftsrecht und universalistischer Moral auf einsichtige Weise in den Kontext ihrer umfassenden Doktrinen einbetten' (Habermas, *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion*, p. 143).

[77] Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, p. 110.

[78] Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed*, p. 59.

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social knowledge as something that has been protected from 'erosion'. Something kept 'intact' or 'pure'.[79] This view assumes a purity of religion and a distinct demarcation between the religious and the non-religious,[80] a kind of boundary-drawing which, as Günter Kehrer has stated, is a theological question, not one of political or social theory.[81] Secondly, and more importantly, I want to point to the productive process that is taking place below the surface of Habermas's argumentation. Here, we see the constructive nature of recognition arguments and their ontologically closing effects. While not clarifying what he means by religion, he still implicitly shapes and draws its boundaries throughout his work. Religion in this form of acceptable to public discourse has ancient roots. It can deliver intact knowledge from these roots and subscribes to the imperatives of egalitarian individuality and universal morality.

Habermas's post-secular society is one in which religious arguments, reasons, and justifications are no longer simply and categorically disregarded as irrational or as lacking any form of truth but must be acknowledged as original sources of knowledge. However, when religion becomes a marker for that which needs to be acknowledged in public discourse, we need to ask what belongs in the category and who makes those decisions. In more general terms, it must be clarified who is given a voice in public discourse under the label of religion and

[79] For a different critique regarding Habermas's protection of religion from erosion, see Lafont, 'Religion in the Public Sphere', pp. 251–52; Lafont, 'Remarks of a Young Habermasian'.

[80] 'Religious certainties are in fact exposed to increasing reflective pressure in the differentiated architecture of modern societies. Religiously rooted existential convictions, by dint of their if necessary, rationally justified reference to the dogmatic authority of an inviolable core of infallible revealed truths, evade that kind of unreserved discursive examination to which other ethical orientations and worldviews, i.e. secular "conceptions of the good," are exposed. This discursive extraterritoriality of a core of existential certainties can lend religious convictions (on certain readings) an integral character' (Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, pp. 129–130). A few pages onwards an ambivalent view emerges: 'As long as secular citizens are convinced that religious traditions and religious communities are, as it were, archaic relics of premodern societies persisting into the present, they can understand freedom of religion only as the cultural equivalent of the conservation of species threatened with extinction' (Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, p. 138).

[81] See also Charles Taylor's critique of this 'epistemic break' in Butler et al., *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, pp. 49–50.

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who is denied the same. Reflecting the same conceptual rigidity we see in many scholars who engage religion through the multicultural perspective, Habermas draws a distinct line around the legitimate speaker. He states that the 'egalitarian individualism of modern natural law and universalistic morality' must be embedded in the context of religions' comprehensive doctrines in order for them to be given access to public discourse and in order for them to be able to claim recognition for their arguments and justifications.[82] But what about those who do not meet the criteria put up by Habermas – those not fulfilling the requirements of individualism and universalism?

My critique is about the fact that Habermas's post-secular alternative to a hardened secularism is one where the traditions moulding the idea of secular reason are given more space whereas those that are fundamentally differing are excluded, just as they had been in the previous secular settings, if not more so.[83] Habermas's post-secular account is inclusive for the traditions that are already a part of the genealogy of (liberal) reason – those in which 'egalitarian individualism' and 'universal morality' are not only embedded but out of which they have grown. And the tilt towards a particular type of the so-called world religions is difficult to miss. He writes:

> For the normative self-understanding of modernity, Christianity has functioned as more than just a precursor or a catalyst. Universalistic egalitarianism, from which sprang the ideals of freedom and a collective life in solidarity, the autonomous conduct of life and emancipation, the individual morality of conscience, human rights and democracy, is the direct legacy of the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love. This legacy, *substantially unchanged*, has been the object of a continual critical re-appropriation and reinterpretation. Up to this very day, there is no alternative to it. And in light of the current challenges of a post-national constellation, we must draw sustenance now, as in the past, from this substance. Everything else is idle postmodern talk.[84]

[82] Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, p. 137.

[83] 'One might say that in its will to "include the other", Habermas's thinking about religion has a paradoxical tendency to perform the thing it most seeks to avoid, namely, to exclude the "Other" or to exclude otherness. Its problem is that precisely in its will to universal accommodation, it may only end by immunizing itself against a challenge from something more profoundly outside of itself' (Harrington, 'Habermas's Theological Turn?', p. 59).

[84] Habermas, *Religion and Rationality*, pp. 148–49, my italics.

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Emphasizing the importance of the Judeo-Christian heritage of secular reason and the liberal values of egalitarian individualism and universal morality, what does Habermas's post-secular society look like outside of the cultural realm of Christianity? What should be done with traditions that claim themselves religious but have neither Axial Age roots nor an ancient doctrine to show for it? Why should they carry less 'semantic potential' for secular thinking?

Jürgen Habermas's arguments for a post-secular society can be read through a normative and an epistemic lens. The normative arguments, on the one hand, refer to the critique of a secular self-understanding of modernity that categorically excludes religion from the public sphere and argues for a self-critical assessment of the limits of secular reason and its claim to neutrality. The epistemic arguments, on the other hand, amount to the positive recognition of religion on epistemological grounds, as sources of 'unexhausted semantic potential'. According to Habermas, religion carries this semantic potential due to its quality of keeping 'hermeneutically vibrant [and] preserve[ing] intact something that has been lost elsewhere'.[85] And underlying Habermas's epistemological arguments for the recognition of religion in informal public discourse is a key constitutive move: Habermas's arguments for the recognition of religion have a productive power of that which is recognizable as religion. There are two implications therein: first, that the recognition of religion constitutes the category of religion; and, directly connected, it constitutes a speaker's position and the legitimization and amplification of particular voices in public discourse under the banner of religion.

These two implications are problematic, as Habermas's post-secular vision sets out to broaden the scope of eligible speakers in public discourse but ends up limiting it to those who are recognizably religious – that is, recognizably religious according to the implicit standards set by Habermas himself. It marginalizes those who do not play on the register of the recognizably religious and writes out of the picture a whole range of possibilities, as those who remain unrecognized try to achieve a place on the public register of recognition.[86] It sediments

[85] Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, p. 110.
[86] See also Judith Butler's discussion of Althusser's argument for the constitutive power of 'naming': Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*; Butler, *Excitable Speech*, pp. 5–7, 28–30.

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the strength of the voice of conventional and established religion and further grounds the boundary between those who are included and those who are not. These problems surface in the second part of Habermas's account, which focuses on the epistemic value of including religion in informal public discourse. But the critique of a hardened secular self-understanding of modernity does not need to amount in the positive recognition of religion per se.

Alternatives to Recognition: Conceptual Care

Similar to the debate on religious freedom, a tension emerges in post-secular accounts between arguments for the recognition of religion and the more conceptually critical position – or, as I put it earlier, a tension between multiculturalist and genealogical arguments. Notably, while it would be hard to depict Jürgen Habermas as a multiculturalist scholar, I remain insistent that the categorization fits in the case of religion, as his is a revaluation of religion and an argument for its recognition. This becomes additionally clear when the Habermasian position is contrasted with the US-American political theorist William Connolly's approach to post-secular society.

Notably, both scholars agree on the common assumptions regarding the critique against liberal secularism discussed in Chapter 1, and, similar to Habermas, Connolly develops a critique against the exclusionary aspects of liberal secularism.[87] Moreover, as Habermas seeks to address what he sees as a deepening social disintegration, Connolly argues for the need to 'rework the pluralist imagination' in order to think about 'what might be done to renegotiate and disperse these divisions'.[88] Both scholars also build their accounts on the condition of a self-critical subject. Whereas the Habermasian discourse participants enter into deliberation with the option to alter their original position,[89] Connolly points to the importance of 'acknowledg[ing] that your philosophical stance is grounded in a complete mixture of contested faith and porous argument'[90] involving the 'difficult work

[87] Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist*.
[88] Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, p. xii.
[89] Habermas, *Vorstudien und Ergänzungen*.
[90] Connolly, *Pluralism*, p. 82.

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of desanctifying some elements in the identity of each'.[91] Both scholars question the connection between the neutral and the secular while arguing for a more reflective position on the nature of secular reason.

However, Habermas and Connolly differ substantively in their response to the critique of a hardened secular self-understanding of modernity. While Habermas would come to argue for an inclusion of liberal religion, Connolly proposed an alternative approach that focuses on creating the conditions for a different kind of plurality that is less focused on recognizing religion because of any assumed epistemic value. This critical divergence expressed by Connolly is where we begin to see a genealogical approach to religion along the lines of the Asadian scholarship outlined in Chapter 1. Searching beyond the limits of the secular, William Connolly looks for an arrangement that transcends the absolutist mode of secularist thinking and the strict boundaries that establish the secular as 'inside' and the religious as 'outside'. In order to foster a 'deep plurality' and the social and political relations that come with it, Connolly does not seek to eliminate secularism but rather to decentre it and convert it into one perspective alongside many others. For Connolly, these boundaries and their gatekeepers punish those who transgress them by seeking other alliances and new forms of being. In his view, these boundaries and gatekeepers are hindering a true plural society from developing. In his efforts to rethink common ideas of plurality, Connolly thus proposes an 'ethos of generous engagement', which aims to rework and cultivate the reactions of individuals and societies to that which it considers alien and acknowledge the profound contestability of their most highly held metaphysical suppositions and moral sources.[92]

The ethos of pluralism is one which sees plurality as enabled by contestation and genealogical sensitivity. As Connolly puts it, 'It is when a genealogical sensibility is mapped onto the pluralist imagination that both perspectives achieve their highest level of attainment'.[93] In this sense, the answer to Habermas's critique of the exclusion of religion from the public sphere is not the inclusion of religion into the public sphere. It is a contestation of the term 'religion' itself, particularly the idea of its epistemic autonomy. It is a refocus from preserving an

[91] Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p. 144.
[92] Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p. 185.
[93] Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, p. 32.

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inclusive form as advocated by Habermas – in a peculiar contrast to his procedural, deliberative account – to preserving the conditions of plurality. The conditions for plurality, in the Connollian version, is the ethos of genealogical sensitivity, or a contestation of terms and the orders, states, and subjectivities they describe and construct. It is an ethos that enables an analysis of the constructive and productive processes of religion as well as the performative power of it.

Here, Iza Hussin's work once again provides an example of how genealogical care of the concepts of religion breaks the reproductive and reifying power of epistemic recognition. Throughout her scholarship, Hussin analysed globally circulating practices and ideas of legal and political order.[94] In her book on the politics of Islamic law, she shows us how 'Muslim law' became intelligible as a separate segment of legal and political life under British imperial rule. The colonial state privileged the protection of 'matters of religion and culture' in realms of personal law, while at the same time suppressing the presence of religion and culture in areas of revenue and trade.[95] Relegated to regulating the lives of Muslims on matters of inheritance or marriage meant that 'Muslim law' in British India was both recognized as a legitimate form of law while simultaneously constructed as part of the Muslim population's private lives, divested of public political power.

The strategy of colonial administration in India was driven by the 'need to replace people – elite interpreters of juristic tradition and local usage – with texts'.[96] It included efforts by both British and local Muslim elites to compare, translate, and 'make commensurable categories of British and Muslim law'.[97] Hussin shows that in Islamic institutions closely associated with the colonial state, the pressure to 'rationalize and unify Islamic law' was strong, as local elites helped translate and mediate, making scriptualist Islam fully legible in Anglo-Christian terms.[98] British-trained Muslim judges functioned as 'knowledge arbiters' of Islamic legal issues in the courts of British India and generated a large amount of authoritative law in multiple

[94] Hussin, *The Politics of Islamic Law*; Hussin, 'The New Global Politics of Religion'; Hussin, 'Translating Public Order'.
[95] Hussin, *The Politics of Islamic Law*, p. 232; see also: Devji, *Muslim Zion*.
[96] Hussin, *The Politics of Islamic Law*, p. 216.
[97] Hussin, *The Politics of Islamic Law*, p. 18.
[98] Hussin, *The Politics of Islamic Law*, pp. 191, 187–88.

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arenas, including who should be considered a Muslim.[99] Muslim law, in other words, was not simply a colonial project aimed at securing governmental control but much more so a collective effort of colonial administrators, judges, clerics, and other local elites. 'Muslim law' was thereby made recognizable not as an instrument of power but as a response to a perceived need for common legal language.

Colonial administrators relied on ancient texts and written rules, which reduced the adaptability of formerly oral Islamic legal practices to rigid formalism. This formalism then 'served as proof of the unchangeability of Islamic law and its unsuitability for a modern legal system'.[100] To this extent, colonial administrators may never have changed Islamic legal arrangements quite so profoundly as when they were trying to preserve them.[101] Hussin writes:

> The imperatives of colonial rule and the interests of certain local elite groups combined to define what Islamic law was, and which its authoritative sources and institutions; what the domains of religion, state, and society could be, and who their legitimate interlocutors; who Muslim subjects were, what recourse was available to them in the new state structure, and how those avenues could be used.[102]

In this way, the state, mediated through local elites, became the final arbiter of 'Islam' and Muslim identity, and Muslim elites became state elites.[103] This became the foundation of the modern Muslim state. Meanwhile, the colonial state opened itself up for struggles over power, legitimacy, and resources in these areas of authority while at the same time defining the realms and the language in which those struggles could be conducted. Both the categories of 'Islamic law' and 'Muslim state' revolve around understandings of authority, legitimacy, and jurisdiction, as well as the power to define the meaning of the terms.[104] These representations projected 'images of sovereign rules recognizable in a Western and regional idiom and continued to

[99] Hussin, *The Politics of Islamic Law*, p. 185; see also Bayly, *Empire and Information*.
[100] Hussin, *The Politics of Islamic Law*, p. 221; see also Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed*.
[101] Hussin, *The Politics of Islamic Law*, p. 221.
[102] Hussin, *The Politics of Islamic Law*, p. 37; see also Ingram, *Revival from Below*.
[103] Hussin, *The Politics of Islamic Law*, p. 10.
[104] Hussin, *The Politics of Islamic Law*, p. 15; see also Devji, *Muslim Zion*.

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articulate Muslim practice and shari'a texts in the language of British law'.[105] At the same time, however, they created alternative bases for authority within Muslim societies. To the emerging national resistance and independence movements, they offered the idea of unity in identity and interests, as well as a reified legal language and concepts of law.

Throughout Chapter 3, I return in detail to this dynamic. It is what I call the 'two faces of recognition', by which I mean the ways in which processes of recognition simultaneously come with specific costs. In this case, the acknowledgement given to the British Indian Muslims by the colonial administrators came in terms of the inclusion of 'Muhammadan' jurisdiction, 'Muslim' representation in local parliaments, and giving 'Islamic law' the authority over family law. However, this recognition came alongside the loss of adaptability through the textualization of Islamic law, the reification of the definition of the Islamic or Muslim community, the selective authorization of 'translating' Muslim elites in the making of a Muslim legal subject who is intelligible to Anglo-Christian institutions, and the effective creation of a Muslim state centred around a version of Islamic law that is defined by its rigidity and protected accordingly. By applying genealogical care, we see a critical alternative to the idea that recognition is the answer to the historical exclusion of religion from IR. Rather than reifying that which we recognize through the loop of legibility, we instead see the complex epistemological politics at play.

Conclusion

The politics of Islamic law has offered an important example of genealogical care because it helps us refocus the study of the processes by which religion and cognate concepts become intelligible, both in the international and domestic politics of independence struggles and as analytical categories by which policymakers and intellectuals, contemporary and current, try to make sense of them. It also gives us the chance to understand what costs came with recognition, both the unification of minority identity, the marginalization of authoritative law, and the reification of the social and political relations and hierarchies

[105] Hussin, *The Politics of Islamic Law*, p. 152; see also Bayly, *Empire and Information*.

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that order them. In Chapter 3, I turn to the ambiguous nature of recognition and argue that we must pay closer attention to the negative consequences. While the 'costs of recognition' may imply a neoliberal analogy for the impact of social and political structures and regimes of knowledge, the point I want to make clear in this chapter is that the unequivocal focus on recognition as a source of empowerment and emancipation and, particularly in IR theorizing, as being constitutive of the very existence of international subjects often leaves questions open regarding the condition of possibility for recognition. I am interested in these conditions, especially as they apply to religion in global, international, and colonial contexts.

To make this initial point, this chapter looked at several illustrative veins of scholarship exploring the role of religion in post-secular politics. My critique on the multicultural positions of Philpott and Habermas resonates with the inherent critique that multicultural accounts have faced previously, namely that they reify the cultures which were supposed to make up the newly acknowledged and valued diverse order. But I want to suggest that the challenges in these post-secular accounts are of a different kind and in many ways greater. Religion challenges the liberal understanding of reason to a much greater extent than does the idea of multiculturalism and therefore can be argued to be a greater accomplishment in terms of overcoming the limits of liberal exclusion. But I argue that the Habermasian post-secular has actually overcome very little in this regard. Rather, in many of the post-secular accounts, including Habermas's, the critique of secularism is embedded in an argument for the recognition of religion that maintains a circumscribed understanding of what constitutes religion. As I continue to argue in Chapter 3, arguments for recognition are not only productive of that which they seek to recognize; they assume that it can be known and differentiated from that which it is not. Thus, they reproduce the very social and political hierarchies that enable them.

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