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The postsecular in International Relations: an overview

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Over the last few years the notion of postsecularity has gained increasing relevance in the social sciences. This term has been employed in two interconnected but different ways. First, in a more descriptive fashion, it has been used to explain the return or resilience of religious traditions in modern life. This has resulted, on the one hand, in the attempt to develop conceptual frameworks that could account for this unexpected feature of modernity beyond the paradigmatic assumptions of the secularisation theory; and, on the other hand, in a plea for new models of politics able to include religious views. In a second and possibly more innovative meaning, the postsecular has emerged as a form of radical theorising and critique prompted by the idea that values such as democracy, freedom, equality, inclusion, and justice may not necessarily be best pursued within an exclusively immanent secular framework. Quite the opposite, the secular may well be a potential site of isolation, domination, violence, and exclusion.

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In this last strand of research, albeit without necessarily employing the term 'postsecular', figure prominently scholars as diverse as Talal Asad, Charles Taylor, Ashis Nandy, John Milbank, José Casanova, William Connolly, Jürgen Habermas, Judith Butler, Fred Dallmayr, and Craig Calhoun.[1] Their analyses have contributed to shed light on the centrality of the secular as a modern epistemic category; on secularism as a tool of power of the modern state; on the Eurocentric matrix of secularism and its powerful working in the postcolonial world; on how the secular is often constructed and reproduced against the ultimate 'Other' of Islam; on the limits of secular instrumental reason and the necessity of recovering the moral intuitions of faith as a necessary component of modernity; and on the articulation of the secular in non-Western political traditions and as part of a global civilisational dialogue. Moving from different sensibilities and concerns, these perspectives articulate sketches of postsecular visions that encourage us to think beyond current secular frameworks.

As these accounts suggest, questions linked to the postsecular have received attention in anthropology, political and social theory, philosophy, and religious studies, but not specifically in International Relations (IR) where, save for a few exceptions,[2] they have been mostly overlooked. IR's neglect of the postsecular looks even more striking considering the broad intellectual debate sparked by the creation in 2007 of what has become one of the most widely read collective academic blogs, *The Immanent Frame* {http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/}, published by the US-based Social Science Research Council (SSRC), which explores interdisciplinary perspectives on secularism, religion, and the public sphere, and whose inquiries often fall within the remit of IR. As one of its contributors recently pointed out:

[1] Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2007); Ashis Nandy, *The Return of the Sacred: The Language of Religion and Fear of Democracy in a Post-Secular World* (Kathmandu: The Mahesh Chandra Regmi Lecture, 2007); John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006); José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); William E. Connolly, *Why I Am Not A Secularist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007); Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008); Jürgen Habermas and et al., *An Awareness of What is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-secular Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011); David Scott and Charles Hirschkind (eds), *Powers of the Secular Modern: Talal Asad and his Interlocutors* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2006); Talal Asad, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, and Sara Mahmood, *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Fred R. Dallmayr, *Dialogue Among Civilizations: Some Exemplary Voices* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Judith Butler, Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor, Cornel West, *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, edited by Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, afterword by Craig Calhoun (New York, Columbia University Press, 2011); Judith Butler, 'Sexual Politics, Torture, and Secular Time', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 59:1 (2008), pp. 1–23; Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (eds), *Rethinking Secularism* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011); Philip Gorski, David Kyuman Kim, John Torpey, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (eds), *The Post-Secular in Question: Religion in Contemporary Society* (New York: New York University Press, 2012). See also Hent de Vries and Lawrence E. Sullivan (eds), *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006); Ananda Abeysekara, *The Politics of Postsecular Religion: Mourning Secular Futures* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2008).

[2] See Luca Mavelli, *Europe's Encounter with Islam: The Secular and the Postsecular* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012); Mariano Barbato, 'Conceptions of the Self for Post-secular Emancipation: Towards a Pilgrim's Guide to Global Justice', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 39:2 (2010), pp. 547–64; Mariano Barbato and Friedrich Kratochwil, 'Towards a post-secular political order?', *European Political Science Review*, 1:3 (2009), pp. 317–40.

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> The concept [of the postsecular] is not just all over The Immanent Frame. It has also appeared in the titles of about forty books, most in English and German, the majority of which were published within the past five years. Additionally, the concept features prominently in seventeen dissertations indexed by ProQuest, which largely reflects dissertations completed at North American universities. More than half of these dissertations were deposited after 2007. And that is to say nothing of the dozens of articles in scholarly journals that are an important part of the discussion of the postsecular, or the approximately half-dozen academic conferences held on both sides of the Atlantic in the last three years. These numbers indicate that both established and emerging scholars are staking their work on the concept of the postsecular. Finally, illustrating a broader trend in intellectual debate, significant interventions in the discussion have also appeared online, especially at Eurozine, ResetDOC, and on this very blog … The concept [of the postsecular] has been used in cultural and literary studies, theology, philosophy, sociological theory and the sociology of religion, political theory, postcolonial thought, feminist thought, and even in urban studies.[3]

To some extent, IR's limited engagement with the postsecular can be explained by the very narrative that surrounds the discipline, with its mythical origin dating back to the peace of Westphalia. In most accounts of IR, the Westphalian system of secular nation-states is portrayed as the attempt to overcome the 'intolerance, war, devastation, [and] political upheaval' engendered by conflicting religious worldviews.[4] IR thus considers secularisation (the privatisation and marginalisation of religious belief) as essential for the possibility of modern international politics.[5] This is what Scott Thomas has called the 'Westphalian presumption', namely the idea that cultural and religious pluralism cannot have a public dimension, as this would clash with the very possibility of international order. Hence religion needs either to be privatised through the institutionalisation of what Charles Taylor calls a 'secular independent ethics'[6] or replaced in the public sphere by an 'ethics of cosmopolitanism'.[7] The Westphalian presumption has inscribed secularism 'in the genetic code of the discipline of International Relations',[8] turning secularism into a condition of possibility for IR, rather than an object of its inquiry.

This inscription, however, rests on premises which if not objectionable, are at least in need of further scrutiny. The image of an emerging international system of secular nation-states which brought order where there was religious disorder glosses over two main questions. First, the state that emerged at Westphalia was not secular but more precisely *confessional*. It rested on a process of 'migration of the holy'[9] which established the sovereign state as the 'mortal God to which the *new modern man* owes his peace and security'.[10] Second, although the conflict between

[3] John D. Boy, 'What we talk about when we talk about the postsecular', *The Immanent Frame: Secularism, Religion, and the Public Sphere* (3 March 2011), available at: {http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2011/03/15/what-we-talk-about-when-we-talk-about-the-postsecular/} accessed 20 February 2012.

[4] Scott M. Thomas, 'Taking Religious and Cultural Pluralism Seriously: The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Society', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 29:3 (2000), pp. 815–41, p. 819.

[5] Luca Mavelli, 'Security and Secularization in International Relations', *European Journal of International Relations*, 18:1 (2012), pp. 177–99, p. 178.

[6] Charles Taylor, 'Modes of Secularism', in Rajeev Bhargava (ed.), *Secularism and its Critics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 34.

[7] Thomas, 'Taking Religious and Cultural Pluralism Seriously', p. 815.

[8] Pavlos Hatzopoulos and Fabio Petito, 'The Return from Exile: An Introduction', in Fabio Petito and Pavlos Hatzopoulos (eds), *Religion in International Relations: The Return from Exile* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 1.

[9] John Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400–1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

[10] Hatzopoulos and Petito, 'The Return from Exile', p. 1.

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faiths in Europe was the expression of genuine theological disagreements, it was also 'part of a strategy of state-building pursued by the ruling elites' which used the capacity of religious traditions to engender social cohesion and mobilise allegiances in order to harden the boundaries between religious communities and 'make them coextensive with the boundaries of the state'.[11] This perspective reverses the traditional narrative on which IR rests by suggesting the possibility that the wars of religion 'were not the events which necessitated the birth of the modern State', but were the means through which the state and an international system revolving around nation-states was established.[12] As William Cavanaugh has perceptively argued, the traditional narrative of the international system has been instrumental in purporting the 'myth of religious violence'.[13] This is 'one of the foundational legitimating myths of the liberal nation-state' and is itself part of 'a broader Enlightenment narrative that has invented a dichotomy between the religious and secular and constructed the former as an irrational and dangerous impulse that must give way in public to rational, secular forms of power'.[14]

While the implications and limits of this argument for IR have yet to be fully explored, the last ten years have nonetheless witnessed a flourishing of publications on the political resurgence of religion. Favoured by the 1990s post-positivist turn,[15] which opened to scrutiny seemingly 'unobservable values and practices like religion',[16] this literature has began to question some of the secularist presumptions which undergird the discipline.[17] In particular, scholars have increasingly looked at the positive contribution that politicised religion could play in processes of modernisation, democratisation and peace-building, both in the so-called Western and non-Western world, as well as at the deeper theoretical implications that the global resurgence of religion raises for thinking about future world orders.[18]

This research agenda, however, had to confront almost immediately a context overwhelmingly dominated by the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and their unfolding developments. The '9/11 context' reinforced the secularist view that politicised religion is always about political instability, a disordered state of international affairs, fundamentalist politics, and terrorism. Mainstream public and academic discourses reflected more and more the idea that the return of religion in international

[11] Mavelli, 'Security and Secularization', p. 182.

[12] William T. Cavanaugh, '"A Fire Strong Enought to Consume the House": The Wars of Religion and the Rise of the State', *Modern Theology*, 11:4 (1995), pp. 397–420, p. 398; William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 162.

[13] Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, p. 4.

[14] Ibid.

[15] See, for instance, Yosef Lapid, 'The Third Debate: On the Prospects of International Theory in a Post-Positivist Era', *International Studies Quarterly*, 33:3 (1989), pp. 235–54; Steve Smith, Ken Booth, and Marysia Zalewski (eds), *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[16] Adrian Pabst, 'The Secularism of Post-Secularity: Religion, Realism and the Revival of Grand Theory in IR', in this Special Issue.

[17] In this regard, a significant development for the discipline was the publication of the 2000 *Millennium* Special Issue on 'Religion and IR' (29:3).

[18] See Petito and Hatzopoulos (eds), *Religion in International Relations*; Scott Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations: The Struggle for the Soul of the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Michael Michalis and Fabio Petito (eds), *Civilizational Dialogue and World Order: The Other Politics of Cultures, Religions and Civilizations in International Relations* (New York: Palgrave, 2009); R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).

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politics had primarily come in the form of a militant and violence-prone form of politics and the eruption of irrationality in the otherwise rationally-working international system; it was metaphorically (and paradoxically!) almost as a God-sent plague or punishment on earth, 'the revenge of God', as the title of one of the first books that focused on this resurgence seemed to evoke.[19] As Adrian Pabst observes in this Special Issue, this view has resulted in the emergence of 'new paradigms' such as the 'clash of civilisations', 'the rise of religious fundamentalism or the conflict that opposes faith to secular reason'.[20] At the same time, as a critical reaction to this development, some scholars have increasingly strived to show how 'positive' manifestations of religion could coexist with and indeed enhance traditionally secular approaches and how they could be integrated into existing framework of analysis.[21]

This trend has by no means been confined to IR scholarship, but has involved also policymakers, state officials, and practitioners. As Elizabeth Shakman Hurd discusses in her contribution to this Special Issue, the basic assumption of this 'restorative narrative' is that once 'religious actors and practices are incorporated into theory and practice in the right way … problems associated with religion will be resolved and the potential for religion to contribute to the betterment of the world more fully realized'.[22] However, this 'problem-solving approach'[23] often fails to grasp, indeed conceals, how 'the attempt to restore religion to international public life and the forms of knowledge that underwrite it'[24] are the product of an intricate web of forces, including states, markets, institutionalised religions, and international organisations, which compete to define the spaces of acceptable meanings and tolerable practices for religion. In this perspective, Hurd alerts us, 'secularism is not the absence of religion', but the power to 'defining, shaping and even transforming it'; that is, the power 'to harden and reify discrete religious identities and communities, sanctify established authorities, and put pressure on (or close down) spaces in which non-established, unorthodox, and emergent ways of being religious (or not) have room to flourish'.[25]

As Robert Cox famously argues, '[t]he strength of the problem-solving approach lies in its ability to fix limits or parameters to a problem area and to reduce the statement of a particular problem to a limited number of variables which are amenable to relatively close and precise examination'.[26] It is easy to see the allure of an approach which solves the 'problem' of religion in IR by drawing a line between 'good' and 'bad religion', integrating the former and marginalising the latter. The main paradox

[19] Gilles Kepel, *The Revenge of God: The Resurgence of Islam, Christianity and Judaism in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994).
[20] Pabst, 'The Secularism of Post-Secularity'.
[21] See Jeffrey Haynes, *Religion, Politics and International Relations: Selected Essays* (London: Routledge, 2011); Monica Duffy Toft, Daniel Philpott, and Timothy Samuel Shah (eds), *God's Century: Resurgent Religion and Global Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2011); Jack Snyder (ed.), *Religion and International Relations Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); Nukhet A. Sandal and Patrick James, 'Religion and International Relations Theory: Towards a Mutual Understanding', *European Journal of International Relations*, 17:3 (2011), pp. 3–25; Mona Kanwal Sheikh, 'How does Religion Matter? Pathways to Religion in International Relations', *Review of International Studies*, 38:2 (2012), pp. 365–92.
[22] Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, 'International Politics After Secularism'.
[23] Robert W. Cox, 'Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 10:2 (1981), pp. 126–55.
[24] Hurd, 'International Politics After Secularism'.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Cox, 'Social Forces', p. 129.

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of this problem-solving approach to religion in International Relations, however, is not so much that it continues to reproduce, rather than challenge, the secular hegemony of existing power relations and understandings of rationality, but that it has an important root in the critical theory of one of its most revered representatives who has been 'influential in the post-positivist turn in international relations theory',[27] namely Jürgen Habermas.

Habermas is the thinker who, probably more than anyone else, has contributed to ignite the current debate on postsecularity. Since the middle of the last decade, Habermas has progressively elaborated an understanding of the postsecular as a normative ideal of inclusion of the moral intuitions of faith as a means to address two main problems: the growing pluralism of modern societies and the crisis of a secular consciousness increasingly unable to resist the power of markets and bureaucracies and to address important ethical and political questions. As Habermas puts it, '[p]ure practical reason can no longer be so confident in its ability to counteract a modernization spinning out of control armed solely with the insights of a theory of justice'.[28] Hence, the challenge is 'how one can assimilate the semantic legacy of religious traditions without effacing the boundary between the universes of faith and knowledge'.[29] For Habermas the solution lies in a mechanism of translation of the moral intuitions of faith into secular language which allows the former to be accessible also to non-believers through the universal language of reason, and at the same time keeps the boundaries of knowledge and faith firmly in place, thus preventing that reason may succumb to the 'irrational effusion' of religious motives.[30]

The secularist bias of Habermas's perspective is thoroughly analysed in the contributions to this Special Issue of Fred Dallmayr, Antonio Cerella, Adrian Pabst, and Luca Mavelli. For Dallmayr, the Habermasian idea that 'there is a standard [secular] public discourse whose language is readily accessible' is 'a myth of the Enlightenment'. He asks: Are not modern rationalist texts, from Kant to Rawls, 'exceedingly difficult texts constantly in need of interpretation and re-interpretation, and hence of translation into more accessible language?... Do the judgments of courts not always involve the interpretation, application, and thus practical translation of earlier legal texts, precedents, and judicial opinions? And do members of parliament not always claim to interpret, apply and hence translate the will of the ''people''?'[31] In a similar vein, Cerella points out how, in order to preserve a secular procedural logic of equality, Habermas 'ends up removing the substantial identity and the concrete plurality of religions and cultures from which our democracies are now inevitably composed'.[32] This view is for Pabst a product of a secularist outlook which oscillates 'between a more philosophical (essentialist) conception of faith as a source of moral intuition or meaning, on the one hand, and a more sociological

[27] Neta C. Crawford, 'Jurgën Habermas', in Jenny Edkins and Nick Vaughan-Williams (eds), in *Critical Theorists and International Relations* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), p. 196. See also Thomas Diez and Jill Steans, 'A Useful Dialogue? Habermas and International Relations', *Review of International Studies*, 31:1 (2005), pp. 127–40.

[28] Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, p. 211.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Jürgen Habermas, 'Religion in the Public Sphere', *European Journal of Philosophy*, 14:1 (2006), pp. 1–25; Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, p. 243.

[31] Fred Dallmayr, 'Post-Secularity and (Global) Politics: A Need For Radical Redefinition'.

[32] Antonio Cerella, 'Religion and Political Form: Carl Schmitt's Genealogy of Politics as Critique of Habermas's Post-secular Discourse'.

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(epiphenomenal) idea of religion as an archaic mode of political unity or social control, on the other'.[33] Habermas's approach, Mavelli contends, is part of a tradition of European secularity which conceives of religion as a purely disembodied and cognitive exercise which provides the moral norms for a modern secular domain which is ultimately not self-sustaining.[34]

The main goal of these critiques is not to question Habermas's account *per se*, but to shed light on the secular limits of a tradition of critical thinking which is indicative of a broader European-Western understanding of secularity, and which has had an important role in informing IR's post-positivist and critical turn. As Hurd's contribution suggests and Pabst explicitly states, this is a turn which may have been 'critical of positivism but [is] no less secularist in outlook'.[35] This argument, however, should not obscure the emergence in the last few years of a less mainstream research agenda which has investigated the question of religion in international relations by problematising the notion of the secular. This research has focused on the constructed nature of the secular/religious categories; on the notion of the secular as a power/knowledge regime; on how secular frameworks inform foreign policy, security practices, and civilisational encounters; and on the implications of the idea that all significant concepts of the modern theory of IR are secularised theological concepts.[36]

The aim of this Special Issue is to contribute to this emerging literature and possibly broaden the terms of the debate by beginning a reflection on the postsecular in international relations and the challenges it poses to the discipline of IR. This is a challenge that transcends integration and accommodation into consolidated frameworks of inquiry. The postsecular, in fact, is not just a new 'variable'. As Mustapha Kamal Pasha observes in his contribution, 'the postsecular is linked to the exhaustion of secular modernity marked by recognition of its failures to order social, cultural or political life drawn principally from rationalities ensconced in frames of immanence'.[37] The postsecular thus stands at the edges of a modernity that, as Joseph Camilleri explores in this Special Issue, has probably reached 'the limits of its intellectual coherence and organizational efficacy'.[38] If the limits of Habermas's account rest on a modernist reading of postsecularity which employs religion instrumentally in order to rescue the faltering project of modernity, a postmodern reading of postsecularity may seem to offer a more promising, albeit not necessarily less contentious, avenue of research.

[33] Pabst, 'The Secularism of Post-Secularity'.
[34] Luca Mavelli, 'Postsecular Resistance, the Body, and the 2011 Egyptian Revolution'.
[35] Pabst, 'The Secularism of Post-Secularity'.
[36] See Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Erin K. Wilson, *After Secularism: Rethinking Religion in Global Politics* (New York: Palgrave, 2011); Mavelli, *Europe's Encounter with Islam*; Mavelli 'Security and Secularization'; Barbato, 'Conceptions of the Self'; Barbato and Kratochwil, 'Towards a Post-secular Political Order?'; Pinar Bilgin, 'The Securityness of Secularism? The Case of Turkey', *Security Dialogue*, 39:6 (2008), pp. 593–614; Maia Carter Hallward, 'Situating the "Secular": Negotiating the Boundary between Religion and Politics', *International Political Sociology*, 2:1 (2008), pp 1–16; Timothy A. Byrnes and Peter. J. Katzenstein (eds), *Religion in an Expanding Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Louiza Odysseos and Fabio Petito (eds), *The International Political Thought of Carl Schmitt: Terror, Liberal War and The Crisis of Global Order* (London: Routledge, 2007); Mika Luoma-aho, 'Political Theology, Anthropomorphism, and Person-hood of the State: The Religion of IR', *International Political Sociology*, 3:3 (2009), pp. 293–309; Mika Luoma-aho, *God and International Relations*: *Christian Theology and World Politics* (London: Continuum, 2012).
[37] Mustapha Kamal Pasha, 'Islam and the Postsecular' in this Special Issue.
[38] Joseph A. Camilleri, 'Postsecularist Discourse in an "Age of Transition"'.

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There is a widespread consensus among philosophers of religion and social theorists that there is a strong connection between postmodernity and postsecularity.[39] For instance, Aleksandr Kyrlezhev contends that postsecularity and postmodernity are 'two different dimensions of one and the same turning point'.[40] Similarly, John Caputo equates the postsecular with the postmodern.[41] However, the nature of this connection is far from uncontroversial. Postmodernism rejects 'the monologue of the Enlightenment', including its 'excesses of antireligiosity' which are perceived as an unduly constraint to individual freedoms.[42] At the same time, postmodernism values religious practices, experiences, and meanings as part of a celebration of difference and pluralism, thus without granting them a special place above other practices, experiences, and meanings.[43] Hence, it is unclear whether postmodern understandings of postsecularity undermine the hegemonic logic of secularism by placing secularism and religion on the same level – thus making them almost indistinguishable – or whether postmodern postsecularity pushes secularism even further – according to Pabst, through the 'sacralisation of difference' and its elevation 'into the sole transcendental term, which overrides any notion of normative unity or substantive shared ends that embed the legislating reason of citizens and states'.[44]

This remark points at the heart of a tension between unity and difference which, in different guises, is the underlying narrative of the contributions to this Special Issue. The question can be stated as follows: If there (ever) was 'a unity of modernity, above and beyond the manifest imbalances, tensions and conflicts,' which was 'co-extensive and consubstantial with the unity of reason' grounded in secular frames of reference,[45] what now that these frames appear increasingly unable to account for the complexity, ambiguity, and plurivocity of emergent postsecular formations? What can the postsecular tell us about the transformations, 'ruptures and displacements under conditions of late modernity'[46] of those political forms, structures, and imaginaries – such as subjectivity, sovereign states, international society, global governance, civilisations, Europe, Islam – endowed with the impossible task of capturing the constantly overflowing tension between unity and difference?

The need for a radical definition of our ontological understanding of subjectivity is the focus of Dallmayr's contribution. Against Habermas's illusory universality of reason which requires a translation of religious idioms into secular language, Dallmayr argues that '[g]iven its concrete ''existential'' appeal, the language commonly used in religious texts is an ordinary language readily accessible to people in all walks of life and at all times.' Hence, if a translation is needed, 'it is not so much a linguistic as rather a practical translation, that is, the transfer of teachings into human and social

[39] Henk-Jan Prosman, *The Postmodern Condition and the Meaning of Secularity* (Utrecht: Ars Disputandi, 2011), pp. 14–18, available at: {http://adss.library.uu.nl/index.html}.
[40] Aleksandr Kyrlezhev, 'The Postsecular Age: Religion and Culture Today', *Religion, State and Society*, 36:1 (2008), pp. 21–31, p. 24.
[41] John D. Caputo, *On Religion* (London: Routledge, 2001).
[42] Kyrlezhev, 'The Postsecular Age', p. 25.
[43] Ibid., p. 26.
[44] Pabst, 'The Secularism of Post-Secularity'. On the idea that postmodern postsecularism further advances secularisation see Luca Mavelli, 'Beyond Secularism: Immanence and Transcendence in the Political Thought of William E. Connolly', in Alan Finlayson (ed.), *Democracy and Pluralism: The Political Thought of William E. Connolly* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010).
[45] Johann P. Arnason, 'The Imaginary Constitution of Modernity', *Revue Européenne des Sciences Sociales* 27:86, 'Pour une Philosophie Militante de la Démocratie (1989), pp. 323–37, p. 326.
[46] Pasha, 'Islam and the Postsecular'.

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life'. For Dallmayr what is missing in secular modernity 'is an awareness of the primacy of lived experience over cognition ... of doing or practice over knowing'. From this perspective, postsecularity is a 'pedagogy of the heart', a perspective which may overcome the positivist fiction of the rational self by speaking to 'the whole human being, rather than the knowing "subject"'. A perspective that, by bridging the difference between 'mind' and 'heart', may offer the basis for a relational, non-oppositional reconceptualisation of the sacred (transcendent) and secular (immanent) realms. The resulting postsecular view is a 'cosmopolis' in which 'the differences between cultures, creeds, and customs would not be erased but subordinated to a shared striving for justice and well-being'.[47]

How the secular tension between immanence and transcendence has contributed to shape our understanding of political space is the object of Cerella's article. For Cerella, the question of the postsecular 'brings back to the fore, in a new form, the old problem of political unity and of its internal cohesion and legitimacy', namely: '[W]hat unity is possible in the plurality of cultures and religions' in a context increasingly marked by globalisation and the porousness of national borders? Drawing on Carl Schmitt, Cerella identifies the crisis of modernity in the 'decline of transcendence as a unifying principle' and looks at the implications of this argument for modernity's most important political form: the nation-state. The latter lacks foundational substance and, with the decline of a transcendent idea of the good grounded in Christian universalism, is progressively unable to control those rational forces (individualism, technology, and the economy) that it has contributed to unleash. Habermas's modernist account of postsecularity, Cerella contends, is unable to offer a solution as it rests on the very instrumental rationality it would want to oppose and ultimately conceals a 'homogenizing and universalist logic'. A truly postsecular public sphere, on the contrary, 'should open up to new concrete pluralities and not treat them anymore as mere differences'.[48]

The possibility of a new political order capable of reconciling unity and difference is further pursued by Pabst, for whom 'postsecularity marks an intensification of secularism rather than a new mode of theorising religion in international affairs'. Accordingly, he advances the possibility of 'an international theory that develops the Christian realism of the English School in the direction of a metaphysical-political realism' based on a vision of 'perfectible unity'. Following Pope Benedict XVI, Pabst rejects the primacy of secular reason by considering reason and faith as 'mutually corrective and augmenting', and by endowing faith with a 'pre-rational trust in the reasonableness of the world', thus turning faith into a resource which can unite members of different political communities in the search for a shared common good. This view 'rejects the primacy of national states and transnational markets' in favour of an international society based on the '"corporate" association of peoples and nations in which religiously framed ideas and practices are central'.[49]

Joe Camilleri offers a more positive assessment of the postsecular. The postsecular, he contends, raises 'intriguing questions' about current national and international 'uncertainties, anxieties and tensions'. In particular, it invites us to investigate: the transformation of political authority/space in the light of a problematisation of the

[47] Dallmayr, 'Post-Secularity and (Global) Politics'.
[48] Cerella, 'Religion and Political Form'.
[49] Pabst, 'The Secularism of Post-Secularity'.

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secular/religious divide; the 'cognitive and normative underpinnings of distrust, verging on rupture, between Islam and the West'; and a new idea of political pluralism. However, Camilleri contends, '[i]f the aim is to achieve a new reconciliation of unity and difference', more attention needs to be placed on 'the political setting within which such reconciliation is to occur'. This means embedding the study of the postsecular in a broader reflection on the evolution of the global governance framework by looking at the transnational character of religious discourses and practices and their relevance as part of the 'wider phenomenon of identity politics', and at the crisis of 'the Westphalian conception of the state' in conjunction with the difficulty that Western secularity has had in relating to Islam. This latter task requires advancing postsecular theorising beyond an exclusive focus on the West.[50]

This task is taken up by Pasha, who interprets contemporary debates on the postsecular as symptomatic 'of a deepening crisis of liberal modernity marked by its historical failures to speak *for* religious contexts of alterity'. Postsecularity thus seems to offer a novel way to engage the complex relation between religion and politics in IR. However, Pasha warns, it must not go unnoticed that the discursive field of postsecularity remains principally Euro-American, that is, a particular instantiation of the *Western* crisis of modernity. Hence, while extremely attentive to 'Western' or 'European' Islam, postsecular thinking has largely discounted the range or content of Islamic political discourse. To avert the risk that it may reproduce 'the confining perspective of Orientalism', postsecularity needs to probe deeply into the substance of Islamic political discourses, with an awareness that 'Islamic political, social or cultural desires … materialise ruptures and displacements within translocal social and life-worlds'. This approach would entail 'de-Christianizing postsecularity, while profiting from the cosmopolitan aspects of Christianity'; hence, advancing a postsecularity which may speak to both statist and non-statist variations of Islam, thus embracing Islamic difference outside Europe and problematising the supposed unit of Islamic political-religious formations.[51]

Taking up Pasha's challenge, Mavelli analyses the implied and largely undertheorised idea of resistance at the heart of the notion of the postsecular in order to explore some of the events leading to the 2011 Egyptian revolution. For Mavelli, contemporary understandings of postsecular resistance rely too heavily on a Kantian-Habermasian cognitive idea of religion, to the effect that they overlook more *embodied* forms of resistance and thus curtail our capacity to conceptualise postsecular resistance in international relations. Mavelli thus develops a Foucauldian reading of the body as a locus of resistance and uses this framework to analyse how, in the four or five years preceding the revolution, the publication of images and videos of police abuses by Egyptian bloggers and independent media became a practice of resistance to the widespread and systematic use of torture. The emotional response to these images, he contends, contributed to unite Egyptians despite longstanding fractures, most notably that between secularists and Islamists, thus turning the body from an 'inscribed surface of events' into a postsecular locus of resistance. This analysis highlights the importance of the concept of postsecularity for the non-Western world, as well as the need to move beyond the limits of a cognitive understanding of religion and postsecularity

[50] Camilleri, 'Postsecularist Discourse'.
[51] Pasha, 'Islam and the Postsecular'.

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and to rethink our ontological understanding of subjectivity beyond the mind/body dichotomy.[52]

Whereas Mavelli identifies the postsecular as a challenge to the secularist-Islamist polarisation, for Mariano Barbato the Egyptian revolution and more generally the 'Arab Spring' revolutions 'can be understood as postsecular insofar as religious forces participated in an overthrow of secular regimes without establishing a religious autocracy'. In this perspective, Barbato draws similarities with the 1989 revolutions in Eastern Europe and differences with the 1979 Iranian Revolution. 'Postsecular revolutions', he contends, 'aim to end autocratic regimes or regimes with autocratic aspects in their rigid secularism in order to create a society in which citizens with different world views are prepared to accept religious traditions as a guideline without seeking to establish a dominant religious rule.' In advancing this argument, Barbato draws on a more sympathetic reading of Habermas's 'postsecular turn' compared to that of other contributors to this Special Issue. Accordingly, he draws on an understanding of religion as 'a source of public reasoning to cure the pathologies of modernization', including the crisis of an individualistic system of relations which prevents the construction of 'real and strong communities'. On the contrary, religious discourses have a 'cosmopolitan potential' and 'can offer a transcendent reference point beyond class and nation'. For Barbato, 'the integration of strong religion into liberal democracy' opens the possibility for a politics of becoming which has in postsecular democracy the imagination 'of a better world'.[53]

The concluding article by Pinar Bilgin explores another dimension of the tension between unity and difference at the heart of contemporary secular theorising through a discussion of the notion of Dialogue of Civilisations. In her account, the project of Dialogue of Civilisations is characterised by a postsecular ethos as it strives to overcome the limitations of those forms of dialogic engagement grounded in secular rationality. This project, however, suffers from three main shortcomings: it tends to reproduce rather than challenge 'assumptions of ontological difference at the civilisational level'; it neglects 'already existing historical dialogue between civilisations', thereby failing to tap into the potential for dialogue that is likely to follow such recognition; and, finally, by understanding 'security narrowly as the absence of war between states belonging to different civilisations', it reinforces a state-centric notion of security which is insensitive to other referent objects. According to Bilgin, a notion of postsecularity which may respond to the crisis of state-centric forms of security needs to be based on an understanding of civilisations which is 'relationist (as opposed to essentialist) and dialogically constituted (as opposed to autochthonous) . . . , while paying due attention to non-state referents and their myriad insecurities (as opposed to relying on a statist and military-focused conception of security)'.[54]

As this overview suggests, the articles that comprise this Special Issue do not share the same methodological framework, nor the same understanding of what the postsecular stands for or should stand for. They nonetheless share a similar point of departure in a sense of crisis of current secular political forms and modes of subjectivity and their growing incapacity to provide a sustainable mediation between unity and difference under conditions of late modernity. This crisis of authority and

[52] Mavelli, 'Postsecular Resistance'.
[53] Mariano Barbato, 'Postsecular Revolution. Religion after the End of History'.
[54] Pinar Bilgin, 'Civilisation, Dialogue, Security: The Challenge of Post-Secularism and the Limits of Civilisational Dialogue'.

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identity/solidarity is also a crisis of secular forms of knowledge which have long privileged, at least as far as IR is concerned, a cognitive-instrumental understanding of religion.[55] This approach has framed secularity as a defining and constitutive feature of the discipline, rather than a dimension which could be interrogated and questioned. The articles in this collection challenge this approach and aim to 're-examine evidence and assumptions' and 'dissipate conventional familiarities'.[56] Possibly more ambitiously, they aim to provide some initial frameworks to explore the question of the postsecular *in* and *for* International Relations: What might a postsecular International Relations look like?[57] Can a postsecular approach offer new insights on some of the momentous transformations of the international system, including the crisis of the secular state, the problem of modernity and the limits of secular reason, the recent revolt in Arab and Middle-Eastern countries, the attempt to establish new forms of dialogue between the 'West' and 'Islam', and the return of civilisational discourse? These and other questions will be taken up in the following pages, together with the endeavour to show that a postsecular outlook to International Relations may not just be a possibility, but an opportunity to discover otherwise neglected forms of being, becoming, and knowing.

[55] For an exploration of the crisis of secularity as one of authority, identity/solidarity, and knowledge see Mavelli, *Europe's Encounter with Islam*.

[56] Michel Foucault, 'The Concern for Truth', in Sylvère Lotringer (ed.), *Foucault Live (Interviews 1981–1984)* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1989), p. 462.

[57] This formulation is indebted to Talal Asad, who in the opening page of his landmarking *Formations of the Secular* asks: 'What might an anthropology of the secular look like?'

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