Before Recognition

Recognizing religion in global politics is neither neutral nor benign. This book reveals how recognition operates to reinforce hierarchies, reify religious difference, and deepen political divisions. Maria Birnbaum reframes religion as a historically contingent category of knowledge and governance. She shifts the question from whether religion should be recognized to how it becomes recognizable. Through the entangled imperial histories of British India and Mandate Palestine, the book traces how colonial and anti-colonial governmental logics shaped the politics of religious minorities, representation, and border-making – dynamics that continue to shape postcolonial states like Pakistan and Israel. Offering a timely critique of the epistemic assumptions underpinning global discourses on religion, sovereignty, and political order, *Before Recognition* challenges conventional understandings of religion in international relations. This title is also available as Open Access on Cambridge Core.

MARIA BIRNBAUM is Lecturer at the University of Basel and Senior Researcher of swisspeace. Her most recent publications include the articles 'The Costs of Recognition' (*International Theory*) and 'Entangled Empire' (*Millennium*) and the chapter 'Recognizing Diversity' in the edited volume *Culture and Order in World Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), which won the International Studies Association Theory Section Prize for Best Edited Book.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 00:58:29, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009606875

LSE INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

SERIES EDITORS

Stephen Humphreys (Lead Editor)
Department of Law, London School of Economics
Kirsten Ainley
Department of International Relations, Australian National University
Ayça Çubukçu
Department of Sociology, London School of Economics
George Lawson
Department of International Relations, Australian National University
Imaobong Umoren
Department of International History, London School of Economics

This series, published in association with the Centre for International Studies at the London School of Economics, is centred on three main themes. First, the series is oriented around work that is transdisciplinary, which challenges disciplinary conventions and develops arguments that cannot be grasped within existing disciplines. It will include work combining a wide range of fields, including international relations, international law, political theory, history, sociology and ethics. Second, it comprises books that contain an overtly international or transnational dimension, but not necessarily focused simply within the discipline of International Relations. Finally, the series will publish books that use scholarly inquiry as a means of addressing pressing political concerns. Books in the series may be predominantly theoretical, or predominantly empirical, but all will say something of significance about political issues that exceed national boundaries.

Previous books in the series:

Culture and Order in World Politics Andrew Phillips and Christian Reus-Smit (eds.)
On Cultural Diversity: International Theory in a World of Difference Christian Reus-Smit
Socioeconomic Justice: International Intervention and Transition in Post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina Daniela Lai
The World Imagined: Collective Beliefs and Political Order in the Sinocentric, Islamic and Southeast Asian International Societies Hendrik Spruyt
How the East Was Won: Barbarian Conquerors, Universal Conquest and the Making of Modern Asia Andrew Phillips
Before the West: The Rise and Fall of Eastern World Orders Ayşe Zarakol
Capitalism, Jacobinism and International Relations: Revisiting Turkish Modernity Eren Duzgun
The Counterinsurgent Imagination: A New Intellectual History Joseph MacKay

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 00:58:29, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009606875

Dying Abroad: The Political Afterlives of Migration in Europe Osman Balkan
Resisting Racial Capitalism: An Antipolitical Theory of Refusal Ida Danewid
Regional Politics in Oceania: From Colonialism and Cold War to the Pacific Century Stephanie Lawson
Fueling Sovereignty Naosuke Mukoyama
Representants and International Orders: The Staging of Political Authority Alena Drieschova
Ways of Seeing International Organisations: New Perspectives for International Institutional Law Negar Mansouri and Daniel R. Quiroga-Villamarín
From Frontiers to Borders: How Colonial Technicians Created Modern Territoriality Kerry Goettlich
Anticolonialism and Social Thought Anaheed Al-Hardan and Julian Go
Global Decolonisation and Non-Sovereignty: Small Island States in the Caribbean Grace Carrington
Türkiye, Iran, and the Politics of Comparison: America's Wife, America's Concubine Perin E. Gürel

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 00:58:29, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009606875

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 00:58:29, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009606875

Before Recognition

How the Politics of Religion shaped the International Order

MARIA BIRNBAUM
University of Basel

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 00:58:29, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009606875

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi – 110025, India

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment, a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781009606844
DOI: 10.1017/9781009606875

© Maria Birnbaum 2026

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, with the exception of the Creative Commons version the link for which is provided below, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

An online version of this work is published at doi.org/10.1017/9781009606875 under a Creative Commons Open Access license CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0 which permits re-use, distribution and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial purposes providing appropriate credit to the original work is given. You may not distribute derivative works without permission. To view a copy of this license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0

When citing this work, please include a reference to the DOI 10.1017/9781009606875

First published 2026

Published with the support of the Swiss National Science Foundation

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

A Cataloging-in-Publication data record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

ISBN 978-1-009-60684-4 Hardback
ISBN 978-1-009-60688-2 Paperback

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

For EU product safety concerns, contact us at Calle de José Abascal, 56, 1°, 28003 Madrid, Spain, or email eugpsr@cambridge.org.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 00:58:29, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009606875