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Narratives of de-secularization in international relations

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ABSTRACT

This article explores how a particular narrative of de-secularisation, the ‘restorative narrative,’ is shaping US foreign religious policy and practice. It develops two arguments about efforts to stabilize religion as an object of governance and restore it to international politics and public life. First, this narrative re-instantiates and energizes particular secular-religious and religious-religious divides in ways that echo the narratives of secularisation that it claims to challenge and transcend. Second, it contributes to the emergence of new forms of both politics and religion that are not only subservient to the interests of those in power but marginalize a range of dissenting and nonconforming ways of life. This has far-ranging implications for the politics of social difference and efforts to realize deep and multidimensional forms of democratization and pluralization. The argument is illustrated through discussions of recent developments at the US State Department, the evolving practices of US military chaplains, and the politics of foreign religious engagement in the context of the rise of Turkish Islamist conscientious objectors.

KEYWORDS

Secularisation;
de-secularisation; US foreign
policy; secularism; religion;
religious engagement;
restorative narrative

Our theoretical understanding of political societies would be the better for an understanding of whether, why, when and how they generate and discuss histories of themselves, and of what are the consequences for such societies of narrating and debating such histories.¹

I was surprised, at first, to receive an invitation to contribute to this special issue. My work on the politics of religion in international relations (IR) seemed only tangentially related to this issue’s deep interrogation of theological and philosophical debates in the history of secularization. Yet if the object of this issue is the ‘identification of some of the major genres of the history of secularization, and the clarification of their historical contexts and tendential purposes,’ then the discipline and practice of IR surely could be considered as such a genre. Secularization narratives and unspoken normative assumptions about secularization have shaped and continue to inform IR in profound ways.² It is also the case, as Peter Harrison observes and my recent work suggests, that ‘major genres in the history of secularization themselves play activist roles within particular cultural-political programs aimed at advancing secularization, or else opposing it in favor of some kind of “desecularization” or resacralization.’

This paper argues that in recent years the narrative of the de-secularization of international relations has become inseparable from, and is partially constitutive of, a series

of loosely inter-related and mutually indebted global cultural-political projects. These are distinguished by a shared claim to be compensating for and, in some cases, overcoming altogether an overzealous, misguided, nefarious or naïve subscription to secularization theory in the academy and beyond by ‘bringing religion back in’ to the theory and practice of IR. It is beyond the scope of the paper to map these restorative narratives and networks; my recent book *Beyond Religious Freedom* discusses their socio-legal and political productivity in shaping politics, foreign policy, and religious sensibilities and possibilities around the world.³ Here I explore in more detail and in conversation with other contributors to this issue several aspects of this narrative of de-secularization that remain just offstage in that book. I then discuss some examples of how this narrative is shaping new forms of both politics and religion globally, while occluding others.

1. Narratives of de-secularization

The narrative of the de-secularization of IR and the political projects that it sustains appears innocent, even laudable, at first glance. In prescribing the recovery and inclusion of religion and religious actors from the sidelines to which they had allegedly been relegated by discriminatory secularist presumption, the narrative has a compelling compensatory, inclusionary and comforting aspect. Religion is to be reintegrated into IR. Those who were left out will be invited in. Proponents of this narrative, both inside and outside of government, predominantly but not exclusively in Europe and North America, have joined forces with sympathetic scholars to oppose what they see as the advance of secularism or secularization in favor of what they depict as the de-secularization or, for some, the re-sacralization of public international life, law and collective governance. While *Beyond Religious Freedom* is a broader study of this political moment and movement, and its implications for both politics and religion globally, this paper builds out and amplifies several specific aspects of that argument related to the politics of (de)-secularization. I suggest that the stabilization of ‘religion’ as an object of global legal and political governance is not a departure from secularist presumption, as many advocates of the restorative narrative would have it. Rather, it re-instantiates and energizes – firming up, if you will – particular religious-religious and religious-secular divides as taken-for-granted organizing principles of public international life. Rather than simply re-accommodating religion, then, the restorative narrative reforms and retrenches *specific* religious-secular oppositional binaries while also rendering illegible a range of dissenting and nonconforming forms of both politics and religion.

It is helpful to begin by establishing some analytical distance from the restorative narrative’s powerful self-representation: that proponents must work feverishly, uphill, and against the odds to recover and reincorporate religion into a cold and desiccated secularist field of global theory and practice from which religion had been unjustly excluded. Following Pocock’s insight cited in the epigraph to this paper, we need to better understand why, when and how political societies generate and discuss histories of themselves, and the consequences of narrating and debating these histories. This leads to two arguments about the restorative narrative. First, as mentioned above, it serves to re-instantiate particular secular-religious and religious-religious divides in ways that echo the very narratives of secularization that it claims to challenge and ultimately transcend. Second, it contributes to the emergence of new forms of both politics and religion that are not only subservient to

the interests of those in power but also marginalize and/or render invisible a range of dissenting and nonconforming ways of life. This has far-ranging implications for the politics of social difference and for efforts to realize deep and multidimensional forms of democratization and pluralization.

Notwithstanding its own self-representation as a definitive break from the past, the restorative narrative riffs on earlier secularization narratives that both presuppose and produce particular notions of religion. In both the earlier and the more recent versions of these narratives, religion is identified and then either swiftly evacuated or heroically recuperated into public life, law and other institutions. Both moves rely on unfounded assumptions about the stability of the category of religion and its relation to politics, law and public life. It is not possible to evacuate, restore or recuperate religion because there is no stable and transcultural entity that stands apart from or prior to history and politics that is primed to be recovered or recuperated. Claims to have located a pristine and untouched secular field that is said to require such de-secularizing treatment depend for their coherence on the faulty assumption that religion had been successfully cleansed from public life under secularization. That is not the case. Religion neither left politics and public life, nor has it ever been pure, unadulterated, untouched or unshaped by politics, history and law. This is not a new insight. As Ian Hunter put it trenchantly in a recent post on *The Immanent Frame*, ‘if there was no “unfinished” project of secularization, then it cannot be completed in the present. Equally, if religion never went away then it cannot come back.’⁴ Religion cannot be conceived as an autonomous domain that is ontologically distinct from other aspects of the human experience nor can it be construed as normative, singular and prior to other human affiliations and forms of sociality. It is rather immersed in, entangled with, and shaped and produced by specific histories, societies, and legal and political formations and practices. To study religion requires deep and learned immersion into those contexts, and not abstraction from them. We need to remind ourselves with Benjamin L. Berger that, ‘the project of historicizing and politicizing “secularism” was not aimed at clearing space for “religion,” but rather to trouble and question the distinctions that generate the sensation of solidity (for it is only a sensation) around both concepts.’⁵

The restorative narrative also helps to sustain a cultural-political program in contemporary international politics. It shares important family resemblances with what Hunter, in this special issue, calls a ‘large-scale mythopoeic narrative’ which he describes as follows:

The big philosophical histories of secularisation are not in fact histories in the empirical sense at all, but are a kind of writing that draws on historical narratives while transposing them into a fundamentally ‘theosophical’ register. They are thus probably better viewed as large-scale mythopoeic narratives that serve the pedagogical and psychagogical purposes of deeply embedded cultural institutions: the major confessional religions, and the overlapping philosophical subcultures rooted in Western universities.

Of particular significance to scholars of religion and IR is Hunter’s suggestion that we ‘turn the histories themselves into objects of the history of historiography; show that they are not falsifiable histories at all – but something like instruments of spiritual edification, self-cultivation, and social pedagogy.’ The writing and reception of these philosophical historical narratives, that is, need to be treated as historical phenomena in and of

themselves. Rather than falsifying or confirming the veracity of such histories the challenge for the historian and social theorist is, per Hunter,

to investigate them with regards to the forms of writing and arts of thinking they employ, the purposes served by such ethical-literate practices, the institutional contexts supporting these purposes, and the larger cultural and political struggles disposing over these institutions.⁶

Approaching the political salience of the narrative of de-secularization in IR from this perspective yields important insights. It appears as an historical phenomenon. It directs our attention to the purposes it serves, the institutional contexts supporting those purposes, and the larger political struggles disposing over these institutions. It provides a unique vantage point on its relation to the secularist narrative that it claims to displace, and on the forms of politics and religion that it authorizes.

Matthew Scherer's book *Beyond Church and State* is helpful here. As Scherer has shown so clearly, the transformative processes that produced the modern notion of secularism as separation did not merely separate religion and politics along a clear line of distinction, but rather re-determined the nature of both politics and religion simultaneously. Modern secularism, then, should be understood as 'not simply to have emerged from a religious past with which it has broken but instead as both divided from a religious past and yet also locked in continuous and shifting patterns of interrelation with religion in the present.'⁷ We know this now. And yet despite the complexities of this field and the well-known instabilities of the secular-religion binary, the restorative narrative and the governmental efforts that it sustains cling resolutely to a stable rendering of the religious and the secular to resolve policy challenges. These challenges tend to be associated with so-called religious sources of violence, and with the need for the alleged irenic qualities of religion to serve as a source of cohesion, morality and freedom.

The restorative narrative, rendered in policy terms, tells a story of good religion and bad religion, or what Tony Blair calls 'the two faces of faith.' This narrative has partially displaced the secularization-as-privatization and/or decline of religion narrative, though the latter retains its appeal in some quarters. As documented in this issue, the more conventional and now partially displaced (in the discipline of IR but also beyond) secularization narrative comes in many varieties, ranging from the emancipatory and celebratory story criticized by Brad Gregory to a more chastened version acknowledging with different degrees of approval the transition from some form of divine dependence to rational autonomy as described by Ian Hunter. The de-secularization narrative discussed here is both produced by and also enacts a shift in public and academic discourse away from protestant secularist understandings of religion as private, internal, and irrelevant to global governance, and toward a new model, and new forms of both politics and religion, in which religion is seen as a public good, an agent of transformation, and an unwieldy source of both freedom and violence.⁸

Notwithstanding its self-representation as an abrupt departure from secularist presumption and practice, the recuperative narrative riffs on earlier secularization narratives that are distinguished by untiring efforts to delineate and differentiate the secular from the religious, politically, legally and epistemologically. Hussein Agrama has written eloquently on this preoccupation with where to draw the line between religion and politics. He calls this the problem-space of secularism:

The approach I take therefore sees secularism as a set of processes and structures of power wherein the *question* of where to draw a line between religion and politics continually arises and acquires a *distinctive salience*. I say a distinctive salience because under a secularist framework this question never arises as a simply technical or merely academic one. On the contrary, it is ineluctably invested with high stakes, having to do with the definition and distribution of the fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens and subjects. The answers to it are thus seen to have inescapable consequences for how essential freedoms are identified, selves and their motives are defined, and ways of life can be lived. And so it is a question always suffused with affects, sensibilities, and anxieties that mobilize and are mobilized by power.⁹

Religion is identified, and then evacuated, ignored, recuperated, celebrated, condemned or reformed, depending on which ‘kind’ of religion (dangerous or salutary) prevails in any particular political, institutional or ideological context. The point is that the separationist and restorative narratives share more in common than is suggested by their self-authorized mutual juxtaposition. The claim to have located a pristine and untouched secular field that allegedly requires *de*-secularization re-instantiates the assumptions of earlier narratives of secularization in which religion was said to have diminished of its own accord or to have been successfully quarantined. Historical and contemporary lived realities around the world, however, including in countries that are often described as secular, suggest a rather different story. Religion neither ‘left’ politics and public life, nor has it ever stood apart from politics, society and history. The state, alongside other forms of collective governance, constantly interferes with and shapes religious fields as it does other aspects of collective life. All states, as Nandini Chatterjee has shown, including secular states, regulate religious affairs. As Chatterjee explains, ‘state secularism does not imply the withdrawal of the state from religious matters, but on the contrary it consists of the state assuming the role of the ultimate regulator of religious affiliations and arbiter of religious claims.’¹⁰ Both separationist and restorative narratives, then, conceive of religion as an autonomous domain that can be approached as distinct from other aspects of human social life and can either be segregated or reintegrated into law, society and politics. Both narratives merit a degree of skepticism. If religion cannot be construed as normative, singular, and prior to other human affiliations and forms of sociality but rather is deeply immersed in and shaped by history and politics then both narratives begin to crumble beneath our feet. There simply is no singular, stable, transcultural entity called ‘religion’ that stands apart from history and politics, waiting to be quarantined, restored, recuperated, condemned or celebrated.

Like its predecessors, the recuperative narrative is also distinguished by a tendency to re-instantiate a modern, propositional understanding of religion that, as Harrison and others suggest, is itself a necessary pre-condition for the coming into being of the secular. Like the myth of enlightened science displacing superstitious religion, seen first in Protestant reform critiques of Catholicism, as Harrison notes, this narrative is ‘at once descriptive, normative and predictive.’ It simplifies and, at times, distorts messier and more complex historical realities. As the category of religion began to congeal during and after the Reformation, the practices that it named were interwoven in complex and shifting formations with social practices and institutions, forms of law, and other methods and modes of governance and forms of sociality. Separationist and restorative narratives, it follows, both can be considered ‘secularist’ in that they share a deep preoccupation with drawing and enforcing the line between religion and politics.

As Cassie Adcock observes, ‘defining and contesting what counts as religious are practices internal to secular politics.’¹¹ Or as Matthew Scherer puts it in his discussion of the assumptions about religion underlying the recent Hosanna-Tabor and Hobby Lobby decisions by the U.S. Supreme Court, ‘it is a distinctly secular fiction that here authorizes the autonomy of religion.’¹² Both narratives transform religion into an object of politics.

These critiques notwithstanding, the capacity of the restorative narrative to shape U.S. foreign and global religion policy remains undiminished. It may be on the rise. In Brussels, Washington, Canberra, Ottawa and elsewhere there is considerable enthusiasm surrounding this governing consensus. How does the restorative narrative inform everyday international political and legal practice? What are its consequences for dissenting and unorthodox forms of belief, belonging, solidarity and subjectivity – whether designated as political, religious, both or neither? To situate this narrative historically and understand its transformative potential requires bringing debates on secularization a bit closer to the ground than is often the case among intellectual historians. With this objective in mind, the next section explores how this narrative informs specific aspects of contemporary U.S. foreign policy. My concern is with how it becomes operationalized, materialized or ‘brought to life’ in a particular set of historical circumstances. A case in point is the expanding job duties of U.S. military chaplains, whose responsibilities now include religious outreach and religious liaison in the communities in which U.S. troops are deployed. A second is the new U.S. religion bureaucracy at the Department of State, a sprawling and ever-proliferating series of offices and agencies dedicated to realizing the mandate to ‘bring religion back in.’ In both of these cases the narrative of de-secularization shapes U.S. foreign religious policy and practice.

2. Life on the global faith-scape¹³

The rapidly expanding job duties of U.S. military chaplains stationed overseas bear the marks of the restorative narrative.¹⁴ Once tasked with meeting the religious needs of service members and their families abroad, since 2009 chaplains have been required to serve as cultural consultants, as sources of what is known in the military as ‘human terrain intelligence’ and as formal liaisons with local religious leaders abroad. In 2009 U.S. military doctrine formalized an expanded religious liaison and religious advisement role, requiring that military chaplains ‘participate in operational planning and advise the command and staff on matters related to religion’ and ‘provide assistance in liaison with local religious leaders in a given area of operation.’¹⁵ As Stacey Gutkowski and George Wilkes explain, under the new U.S. military regulations:

in addition to liaising with the local population, the chaplain must act ‘as the principal adviser to the commander on religious affairs ... [as] a member of the commander’s personal staff ...’ Such action is authorized where a chaplain ‘meets with a leader on matters of religion to ameliorate suffering and to promote peace and the benevolent expression of religion.’¹⁶

American military chaplains promote what is understood by the American government to be the benevolent expression of religion. In Iraq and Afghanistan, chaplains establish religious councils, coordinate mosque renovations, and seek to reconcile with the families of civilians killed by U.S. forces. They organize community religious celebrations and train local security forces to serve as chaplains.¹⁷ In a report he authored for the U.S. Institute

of Peace, chaplain Larry Adams-Thompson described a ‘mullah engagement strategy,’ a program that he designed to systematize interactions between chaplains and local Afghan mullahs.¹⁸ Adams-Thompson obtained one million dollars in commander’s emergency response program funds to work through provincial reconstruction team commanders to arrange meetings between chaplains and mullahs. Through the program, chaplains ‘coordinated with mullahs for the renovation of religious structures and the provision of such items as carpets and sound systems for mosques, generators for orphanages, and educational supplies for schools.’¹⁹

Chaplains also supervise Qur’an lessons and provide tolerance training for their foreign counterparts. In 2011, Navy Chaplain Lieutenant Commander Nathan Solomon found himself in ‘the unexpected role of counterinsurgent’ (and an authority on the Qur’an) when he and his colleagues in Afghanistan were ordered to find ways to ‘counter the Taliban’s message.’ Solomon and his Afghan liaison started Qur’an lessons for local citizens that were delivered weekly by radio, and invited area elders and mullahs for a *shura* where influential local tribesmen explained ‘Islam’s true nature.’²⁰ Chaplains also provide tolerance and religious support training for their overseas counterparts. In 2012 U.S. Army Africa chaplain John McGraw traveled to Kinshasa to provide resiliency training to the Democratic Republic of the Congo’s (DRC) Armed Forces chaplains. As McGraw explains, ‘the Congolese are very spiritual people ... DRC chaplains are great pastors and preachers, yet they want to know more about improving their ministry with soldiers and the areas of pastoral care.’ Follow-on training with DRC chaplains focused on training in combat stress prevention, family life skills counseling, and other ‘religious support’ missions. Africa Command chaplain Jerry Lewis, who accompanied McGraw to Kinshasa, stressed that ‘the roles of chaplains can have big connections to peace and stability of this nation, and there are great contributions that our chaplains can make here in the future.’²¹

The expanding remit of chaplains’ duties to include religious engagement and tolerance training reflects the influence of the restorative imperative. These duties reflect a strengthened commitment in the context of the so-called War on Terror to religious leaders and communities as strategic resources with the potential to serve U.S. nation-building and stabilization objectives, reminiscent of U.S. anticommunist efforts in Southeast Asia during the early Cold War.²² According to this script, religious leaders are sources of cultural intelligence that, properly engaged, can yield positive outcomes for U.S. interests. As one Washington think tank report concluded,

In response to recent military operations that include close contact with local populations and a mixture of traditional and counterinsurgency tactics, a growing literature on the utility of ‘ethnographic intelligence (EI),’ ‘cultural intelligence,’ and ‘human terrain intelligence’ for the battlefield has emerged. This new group of cultural intelligence advocates considers *religious groups to be a critical empowered network*, with ‘key personnel and groups [that] have become the new key terrain. These may comprise religious clerics ... or anyone with influence over a large or important constituency.’²³

Cultural information about host populations, including information about religious sites, leaders and practices, is considered as having operational relevance.

Chaplains are one of the principal channels for these efforts, serving as cultural consultants, sources of intelligence, religious educators and liaisons with local religious leaders. An increasingly important part of their job is to promote what the U.S. government

identifies as benevolent religion and to marginalize those forms deemed threatening to American interests, or incompatible with broader American understandings of what it means for religion to be free. This requires making decisions about which individuals and groups count as ‘religious,’ which leaders are eligible to speak on behalf of which communities, and which religious groups are best suited to fulfill American strategic objectives. Military chaplains are expected to identify and promote U.S.-friendly religious authorities and communities in a context in which the government is increasingly understood as the handmaiden and governor of tolerant, nonsectarian religion.²⁴

The Office of Religion and Global Affairs at the U.S. State Department is driven by a similar mandate also shaped by the restorative narrative. In a 2015 article ‘Religion and Diplomacy’ in *America* magazine,²⁵ Secretary of State John Kerry describes the rationale behind the 2013 launch of the State Department’s Office of Religion and Global Affairs which is one of several institutional expressions of the restorative narrative in the U.S. bureaucracy. According to Kerry, the office was created to implement President Obama’s U.S. Strategy on Religious Leader and Faith Community Engagement. Kerry writes:

Its mission is clear: to expand our understanding of religious dynamics and engagement with religious actors. The office is led by Shaun Casey ... As U.S. special representative for religion and global affairs, he is charged with growing our ability to reach out to more communities and to create greater understanding among peoples and countries.

For Kerry the office fulfills three objectives:

First, it provides me with high-level advice on policy matters as they relate to religion. In many countries around the globe, a comprehensive look at almost any policy area requires attention to religious dynamics. Second, it works with U.S. embassies and consulates to improve their capacity to assess religious dynamics and *engage religious actors*. We want foreign service officers to know how to *work effectively with local religious individuals and groups*. Finally, it serves as an initial point of contact for organizations and people interested in discussing foreign policy issues related to religion. That final charge revolves around an important skill in diplomacy: listening. We regularly *meet with religious leaders and religiously based organizations*, listening to their thoughts and suggestions in order to work with them on matters of significance to both sides ... Although just two years old, the office has already met with over 1,000 religious leaders from five continents and a range of religious traditions. (emphasis added)

Kerry notes approvingly that the State Department is:

providing resources to support our diplomats’ engagement with religious actors. The office is designing and implementing training modules for a broad range of State Department officials – from ambassadors to new foreign service officers – on fundamental issues related to religion and foreign policy. These interactive materials and creative teaching methodologies will increase the knowledge of the department’s officers serving overseas. The courses will help officers think about the complex issues surrounding religious actors, religious dynamics and American interests in a comprehensive framework designed to support our foreign policy goals.

The foreign religious outreach activities of State’s Office of Religion and Global Affairs and the expanded job duties of the U.S. military chaplaincy are each understood in First Amendment terms to secure the possibility of the free exercise of religion, and not to promote its establishment. It is assumed that government-sponsored religious outreach

can serve as an evenhanded and neutral modality of restoring religion to international affairs, compensating for its alleged exclusion while simultaneously securing its free exercise. To privilege religion as a platform from which to conduct foreign policy and engage overseas counterparts, however, puts the onus on the government, military and/or its representatives and subcontractors to determine who is a religious actor and who is not, who counts as a religious authority and who does not, and which religions or denominations are considered legitimate partners for engagement and which are not. In requiring that such determinations be made, religious engagement by diplomats and chaplains alike serves to foment intra-communal conflict over the politics of representation and the distribution of scarce resources, while marginalizing dissenters and those on the fringes or outside of the communities that are selected for engagement. Only official and tolerant religions and religious representatives can be supported through these projects, occluding and distorting a much broader field of practice, belonging and belief. And so, while religious engagement does involve an attempt to strengthen U.S.-friendly religious authorities and communities abroad, it is at the same time a project of religious intervention and religious reform. It involves transforming religions into what is understood by the Americans or those acting in their name to be better (that is, more ‘free,’ less encumbered by extremist tendencies) versions of themselves. Politically, these efforts promote religious leaders that are amenable U.S. strategic and economic interests. Religiously, they promote forms of religion that conform to American understandings of what it means to be free. It is in this sense that the institutionalization of the restorative narrative generates new forms of *both* politics and religion.

The assumptions underlying this particular version of the restorative mandate are also particular to the American experience and are not universal.²⁶ As the sociologist of religion Courtney Bender explains, American understandings of ‘free religion’ are informed by a background assumption in which ‘free-church Protestantism is the norm against which all other religious groups are measured as capable of being free, and capable of forming the kind of religious actors who can defend “religious freedom.”’²⁷ Lori Beaman and Winnifred Sullivan argue similarly that the free-church model of religion has become ‘largely naturalized in the US, even for Catholics and many non-Christian communities.’ As they explain:

the U.S. does not have a church, in the church-state sense, because American Christianity, as well as the other US-based religious communities that have adopted its institutional forms, have been dominated historically by the free-church model of the antinomian branch of the Reformation, through an explicit rejection of the Church of England – and later in a negative response to Catholic immigration.²⁸

Given these peculiarities of U.S. religious and political history, it is not surprising that certain religions and religious leaders appear fit for U.S. global engagement while others do not. Some conform to the American model better than others. Some groups do not qualify as religions at all in the eyes of the authorities.²⁹ Some are ‘obviously’ extremists. Choices have to be made. It is difficult to overstate the significance of the historical particularities of the American religio-political experience in analyzing U.S. attempts to institutionalize and globalize the restorative narrative.

Secretary Kerry and his staff appear to sense this intuitively, perhaps accounting for the markedly more defensive tone that takes over in the second half of his *America* article. ‘I understand that there may be concerns about the U.S. government engaging religion in

this way,' Kerry observes nervously. 'Some may worry we will mistakenly see religious influences when only political and social ones exist, or we will overstep the separation of church and state laid out in the First Amendment.' But here Kerry misconstrues and underestimates the critique of the restorative narrative afforded by approaching it as a narrative of de-secularization along the lines I am proposing here. The debate over the so-called return of religion to international affairs is not about seeing religious influences when 'only' political and social ones exist. The problem is not the reduction of religion to economics, society or politics. In fact, as Kerry and his supporters would likely agree, to presume that these spheres could be authoritatively and definitively disentangled in order to facilitate the determination that religion either is or is not 'relevant' to a particular situation misses the point. We need to reset the conversation in a different register. This means attending to the specificities of religion and politics on the ground in particular times and places. It means contextualizing and politicizing entangled modes of politics, forms of religiosity, and other aspects of human sociality and solidarity. It means leaving behind interpretive frames that privilege 'religion' and 'religious actors,' and that approach them as qualitatively different and in isolation from other societal forces. It means setting aside the assumption that religion is both the problem and the solution to challenges of collective life, particularly when it comes to the specter of violence.

The real debate over the influence of the restorative narrative in policy circles is not about whether religion can be separate from government, ignored or contained – as many separationists would have it. The notion of separation has broken down as a useful description of the relationship between religion, law and public policy.³⁰ Alessandro Ferrari puts it well: 'both the separatist and the confessional models, in fact, have lost most of their significance.'³¹ There is no religion anywhere without government involvement in some form. Rather, religion assumes different forms and occupies different spaces under modern regimes of governance, many of which are often described as 'secular.'³² The debate over the restorative narrative is also not about whether 'persons of faith' should be included in public life to help achieve collective goals. Of course they should. The question to consider is how specific entanglements between governments and individuals and institutions abroad take shape: Who gets chosen, and why? How are they identified, and by whom? Which versions of which religion are supported? Which religious authorities are privileged and empowered, and whom exactly are they understood to represent? How do these determinations shape political and religious possibilities on the ground?

To the extent that the restorative narrative continues to gain traction in Euro-American foreign policy and IR, it will entrench secular-religious and religious-religious divides. Further politicizing these divides will heighten their social salience and lead to the marginalization of oppositional and nonconforming individuals, groups and ways of life. Governments will be obligated to decide which groups count as 'religions' and to choose among vying sects and denominations, privileging some at the expense of others. As most scholars of religion will acknowledge, there is rarely agreement within any tradition on who speaks authoritatively for that tradition, which leader is in or out of favor or which texts and practices represent the core of the tradition. The pretense that it is possible to identify and engage 'religions' or the 'religious' neutrally, on equal footing, masks the politics of government-sponsored religious engagement: it is easier for the religion(s) of the majority, the religion of those who are in power or the particular version of a religion supported by the United States, the United Nations, the Chinese government, corporate interests,

the European Union or other power brokers to carry more weight than others. Groups that are disfavored are more likely to be classified as cults or extremists. Sympathetic allies are registered and protected as tolerant and orthodox. There are no universal rules for distinguishing in any neutral or objective way between religion and non-religion, moderate and extreme, tolerant and intolerant for the purposes of public policy or foreign policy. Lines have to be drawn. The religions of the majority, the politically powerful, or those sympathetic to U.S. political, economic and strategic interests will attract positive attention and, in many cases, material support. Groups that ‘look like a religion’ are more likely to receive attention. Dissenters, doubters and those on the edges fade into the background. Nontraditional religions are met with skepticism and puzzlement, or are simply ignored. On the global faith-scape of government-sponsored religious engagement the U.S. and other power brokers become the arbiters of ‘what and who counts in the construction of human activity as “religious”³³ and which versions of which religions count most.

To be clear, in developing this critique of the restorative narrative and its political entailments my intention is not to call for a return to a (mythical) clean and clear separation between religion and politics. It is rather to cast doubt on the restorative narrative’s self-representation that the practices that it authorizes serve to equalize the field by bringing heretofore excluded ‘religious’ voices into the political fold. Historicizing and contextualizing that claim reveals a rather different story. Namely, the restorative narrative legitimizes and instantiates forms of politics that create, reify and empower *particular* politically acceptable religions and religious leaders while contributing to the exclusion of a range of oppositional forms of both politics *and* religion. Dissenters are cast as superstitious, extremist, reactionary, dangerous, a threat to the nation or simply as ‘not religious.’ They are marked as unworthy of or unqualified for U.S. and/or international engagement.

Who are these dissenters? Who has a voice on the global faith-scape and who does not? What are the implications of this governing consensus for the lives of those it oversees? What is the ‘view from the other side’? Pinar Kemerli’s recent work on Turkish Islamist conscientious objectors (COs) is helpful here. Kemerli explains that the rise of Islamist COs is a relatively new development on the Turkish religio-political landscape. As she observes, ‘religious pacifism, or a critique of militarism grounded in religion, was not part of antimilitarist politics and discourse in Turkey until 2007, when a pious Muslim, Enver Aydemir, declared his conscientious objection.’³⁴ According to Kemerli, Turkish COs, ‘resist both mandatory conscription and the Turkish state’s use of Islamic discourses of jihad and martyrdom to legitimize it.’ The Islamist COs she interviewed dissent from the interpretations of Islam (particularly the discourse of *jihad*) and the discourse of militarism that organize and authorize Turkish nationalist discourse. In staking his claim as a CO, Enver Aydemir is thus critiquing *both* religion and politics – they are in this instance, as in so many others, inseparable. Aydemir is critiquing a specific interpretation and appropriation of Islam by the Turkish military establishment. As Kemerli explains it, ‘in the view of Islamist COs neither the sanctioning of the Turkish army as the agent of jihad nor the characterization of military service as a holy duty rests on valid Islamic foundations. In this reading, far from being consistent with jihad, military service in the Turkish army violates its basic principles, especially with respect to the killing of other Muslims in Turkey’s nationalist military operations.’³⁵ As she concludes,

the Islamist conscientious objection movement demonstrates not only the diversity of Islamic groups and sensibilities in contemporary Turkey, but also the difficulties faced by nationalist projects to discipline religious imaginaries and put them to the service of the modern state.³⁶

Religious and political alternatives such as those represented by Islamist COs in Turkey, and other dissenting forms of political and religious identity and subjectivity elsewhere, become illegible when read through the attempt by the United States and others to ‘restore religion’ to foreign policy and global public life. The position of Turkish COs, their dissenting interpretations of Islam, and their critique of the Turkish state’s (mis)-appropriation thereof, are invisible in a world of state-sponsored ‘religious’ engagement in which only religions and religious authorities that conform to state-authorized political and religious normativities qualify for engagement and, oftentimes, material support. Those that do not meet this standard, such as the Turkish COs, are invisible politically and religiously because they fail to conform to the Turkish government’s criteria for legibility and legitimacy. In other words, they fail to qualify politically as religious actors. No government outreach program will be allowed to engage Turkish COs such as those that Kemerli describes. Unsympathetic to the Turkish nationalist and militarist rendering of Islam, they do not qualify as groups meriting engagement. Given the rise of state repression of all forms of dissent in Turkey following the failed coup attempt of 15 July 2016, the range of internal actors that qualify for international ‘religious engagement’ is likely to be constricted further.

These dynamics point to an insight that threads through much of the most promising recent scholarship on religion and/in politics: it is impossible for any state apparatus to fully fix, capture and master any particular (socio-religious) tradition. This comes across in Kemerli’s remark that, ‘Islamist COs’ oppositional interpretations and practices show that religious traditions are too rich and dynamic to be mastered completely by state power.³⁷ Noah Salomon takes this a step further in his rich political ethnography of the Islamic state-building project in Sudan, *For Love of the Prophet: An Ethnography of Sudan’s Islamic State*. Arguing against Wael Hallaq’s claim that an Islamic state is impossible, Salomon shows that the paradox and problem of the Islamic state is rather that rendering ‘Islam’ as the foundation for politics ensures that *all* forms of Islam – even the most apolitical – will come to attain political stakes and significance. It is a form of hyper-politicization. As he explains,

it is in this way and due to the proliferation of claims to Islamic authority – rather than that of the incompatibility of some coherent and singular model of subjectivation called Islam and that of modern state-based governance, as some scholars have recently argued – that perhaps makes the Islamic state if not an impossibility, far more of a difficult entity to stabilize than rival modes of state-based governance.³⁸

How might scholars account for what happens when state-sponsored European and North American efforts to ‘restore religion’ to international public life meet the diverse and complex fields chronicled by Salomon, Kemerli and others?³⁹ There is no single answer to this question. Individuals and communities have complex and shifting relations to the institutions and authorities that claim to represent them. Some, like the Turkish Islamist COs, have fallen away from state institutions and authorities, or perhaps never subscribed to them. Others are drawn to more than one religious or communal tradition simultaneously. Still others, as in the Sudanese case described by Salomon, may not

recognize (all or any) of the claims to Islamic authority that are made by the state in the name of Islamic tradition. In all cases, as Salomon points out and as Kemerli could have, studying the religious politics of the ruling party or parties is insufficient to the task of coming to terms with the immense diversity of (Islamic and other forms of) politics. As both of these authors demonstrate, Islamic resources also serve as a powerful and persuasive location of critique of elite political practice in and beyond the state, even as the latter may continue to attempt to legitimize its actions with recourse to Islam.

A related insight applies to the domestic politics of the U.S. and its allies and partners. The restorative narrative – a project of the ruling elite if ever there was one – and its various policy instantiations serve to occlude more complex fields of practice and contestation at home as well as abroad. Politicizing particular aspects of those fields by coopting whatever or whomever the authorities identify as peaceable and tolerant religion intensifies religious-religious and religious-secular tensions. It transforms diverse and shifting fields of belonging and belief into coherent entities that are legible to the authorities, casting out a range of nonconforming practices and modes of affiliation. It reframes political struggles and deflects attention from more complicated, sedimented, and multidimensional histories of vulnerability and marginalization.⁴⁰ And it empowers particular leaders to speak on behalf of their ‘communities.’

3. Conclusion

The restorative narrative often presents itself as common sense. Irenic forms of religion should be restored to international public life, it suggests, and violent ones transformed or eradicated through a series of public–private partnerships pursued in the name of international peace, justice and security. Despite its congratulatory self-presentation, the narrative relies on at least three problematic assumptions about the history of secularization: (1) that the processes associated with secularization evacuated religion from politics and public life; (2) that restoring religion to international public life is a self-evident process, rather than a series of political-normative acts that both rely on and create new forms of both religion and politics and (3) that the right kind of ‘religion,’ under the benevolent oversight of the authorities (religious or secular), engenders democratization, security, nonviolence, a capacity for altruism, economic prosperity, various forms political cooperation and so on.

The influence of these powerful fictions is leading to new forms of governance. Turning to ‘religions’ as all encompassing and larger than life, the restorative agenda feeds an image (while also creating a reality) of religions as entities with agency that are understood to shape outcomes in history while remaining untouched by history.⁴¹ The result is world religions discourse gone wild. Religions are transformed into bounded objects with agency. Public authorities at all levels become their governors, guardians and partners. Religious groups take shape simultaneously as political actors and ‘faith communities,’ with clearly defined orthodoxies and peaceable spokesmen – and most of them are men.

The stabilization and institutionalization of religion as an object of governance in national and international politics is not a departure from secularist presumption but re-energizes particular religion-religion and religious-secular divisions as organizing principles of public international life. Rather than simply accommodating religion, the restorative narrative remakes and retrenches those binaries. This often serves to inflame rather

than calm social tensions.⁴² Groups singled out for engagement and showered with attention and funds may benefit politically in the short term, but suffer in other ways in the long run as a result of being coopted by the authorities. Critical and oppositional voices, perspectives and forms of solidarity fall just beyond and beneath the peripheral vision of the overseers and cheerleaders of the new global faith-scape.

The celebratory tone of Secretary Kerry's article and the steady stream of triumphalist accounts of the recuperation of religion into international public life belie a more complex series of political and religious realities. That which falls under the heading of religion is a contested, shifting, and loosely defined mash-up of families of beliefs, institutional forms, and fields of practice and experience. Fueled by various attempts to operationalize the restorative narrative, state-sponsored religious outreach forcibly distills this messy and moving field into something governable. It squeezes a diverse set of human goings-on into the mold of whatever is defined as religions deserving of engagement. That religion is given a seat at the table, and others are not. This enacts a divide between official religion and the rest of world's religion – including practices that many would consider sacred but that do not qualify officially as a religion. Unofficial, unsanctioned, unorthodox practices, traditions and encounters with the gods are crowded out. Secretary Kerry is right when he says that U.S. 'foreign policy needs a more sophisticated approach to religion.' It has yet to be realized. Perhaps it will fall into place serendipitously when the powers-that-be lose interest, move on to something new, and give up desperately trying to bring religion back in.

Notes

1. Pocock, "Historiography as a Form of Political Thought," 1.
2. Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations*.
3. Hurd, *Beyond Religious Freedom*.
4. Hunter, "Secularization Histories as Cultural-Political Programs."
5. Berger, "The Pathologies of Religious Freedom."
6. Hunter, "Secularization Histories as Cultural-Political Programs."
7. Scherer, *Beyond Church and State*, 76, 63.
8. The word 'protestant' is intentionally spelled with a small 'p' in this sentence following Winifred Sullivan. As she explains: 'I use "protestant" not in a narrow churchy sense, but rather loosely to describe a set of political ideas and cultural practices that emerged in early modern Europe in and after the Reformation; that is, I refer to "protestant," as opposed to "catholic," models of church/state relations . . . Religion – "true" religion some would say – on this modern protestant reading, came to be understood as being private, voluntary, individual, textual, and believed. Public, coercive, communal, oral, and enacted religion, on the other hand, was seen to be "false". The second kind of religion, iconically represented historically in the United States, for the most part by the Roman Catholic Church (and by Islam today) was, and perhaps still is, the religion of most of the world. Indeed, from a contemporary academic perspective, that religion with which many religion scholars are most concerned has been carefully and systematically excluded, both rhetorically and legally, from modern public space. Crudely speaking, it is the first kind – the modern protestant kind – that is "free." The other kind is closely regulated by law.' Sullivan, *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom*, 8.
9. Agrama, *Questioning Secularism*, 27.
10. Chatterjee, "English Law, Brahma Marriage."
11. Adcock, *The Limits of Tolerance*.
12. Scherer, "The New Religious Freedom."
13. The term faith-scape is Colbert's. See "The De-Deification of the American Faithscape."

14. The discussion of chaplains in the following paragraphs is adapted from Hurd's *Beyond Religious Freedom: The New Global Politics of Religion*. © 2015 by Princeton University Press. Reprinted by permission.
15. Otis, "An Overview of the U.S. Military Chaplaincy."
16. Gutkowski and Wilkes, "Changing Chaplaincy.," quoting U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Religious Affairs in Joint Operations (Washington, DC: Office of the U.S. Chief of Chaplains, Joint Publication 1–05, November 13, 2009): chaps. 3, 5.
17. Adams, "Chaplains as Liaisons."
18. *Ibid.*, 43.
19. *Ibid.*, 16–17.
20. Mockenhaupt, "Enlisting Allah."
21. Bartell, "U.S. Army Africa Chaplains Teach Resiliency in Africa."
22. See Chapter 4 of *Beyond Religious Freedom*.
23. Danan, *Mixed Blessings*, 25, emphasis added, quoting Major Laura Geldhof et al., "Intelligent Design: COIN Operations and Intelligence Collection and Analysis," *Military Review*, September/October 2006, reprinted from the original publication in *Special Warfare*, May/June 2006.
24. For a beautifully written study of the implications of this shifting understanding of the government's proper role vis-à-vis religion and spirituality in the U.S., see Fallers Sullivan, *A Ministry of Presence*. In a study of chaplains in the U.S. National Park Service, in hospitals, in the military, and on the docks, Sullivan finds their work to be both necessary and complex, defying easy categorizations and challenging scholars of law and religion to think anew about religion and governance. Eliding tired constructs of freedom and establishment, Sullivan shows that in the U.S. context chaplains have come to embody simultaneously, and paradoxically, both a form of governmentality (some might even say establishment) and a form of disestablishment. They do so by participating in a public–private regulatory form that she dubs 'spiritual governance,' a formation that appears when we look 'beyond conventional churches and proper noun religions' to attend to the 'way ordinary religion is not free but is shaped by ordinary law.'
25. Kerry, "Religion and Diplomacy."
26. I am exploring these questions in a new collaborative research project co-organized with Winnifred Sullivan. For a project description see <http://buffett.northwestern.edu/programs/religion-home-abroad/about.html>.
27. In describing the ubiquity of this model Bender observes that 'even the staunchest sociological critics of the religious economies models share its basic premise – namely that a plurality of religious groups is needed to indicate a thriving religious freedom, and that the American example presents a clear case of actually free religion.' Bender, "Power of Pluralist Thinking," 71.
28. Beaman and Fallers Sullivan, "Neighbo(u)rly Misreadings and Mis-construals," 3.
29. For examples see the discussion of the politics of non-recognition in Chapter 3 of *Beyond Religious Freedom*.
30. Fallers Sullivan, Yelle, and Taussig-Rubbo, "Introduction," 13.
31. Ferrari, "Religious Education in a Globalized Europe," 115.
32. Hurd, *Politics of Secularism*, Chap. 2.
33. Klassen and Bender, "Introduction: Habits of Pluralism." 19.
34. Kemerli, "Religious Militarism."
35. *Ibid.*, 292.
36. *Ibid.*, 282.
37. *Ibid.*, 295.
38. Salomon, *For Love of the Prophet*, 170.
39. See also Schonthal, *Buddhism, Politics and the Limits of Law*.
40. Salomon, "The New Global Politics of Religion."
41. Shortall, "Lost in Translation."

42. For detailed evidence backing up this claim in the context of postcolonial Sri Lankan religious politics see Schonthal, *Buddhism, Politics and the Limits of Law*.

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