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Article (Accepted version) (Refereed)

Original citation:

[Bettiza, Gregorio and Dionigi, Filippo \(2014\) How do religious norms diffuse? Institutional translation and international change in a post-secular world society. European Journal of International Relations, online. pp. 1-26. ISSN 1354-0661](#)

DOI: [10.1177/1354066114542663](https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066114542663)

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Available in LSE Research Online: August 2014

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How do Religious Norms Diffuse? Institutional Translation and International Change in a Post-Secular World Society

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Acknowledgments: the authors would like to thank Phillip Ayoub, Adam Bower, Benjamin Brake, Katerina Dalacoura, Jeffrey Haynes, Ulrich Krotz, Vendulka Kubáľková, Luca Ozzano and Olivier Roy. We also would like to thank for their comments and suggestions on previous drafts of the paper the editors and reviewers of EJIR. Earlier drafts of the paper were presented at the ECPR 2013, EISA 2013, and SISP 2013 annual conferences. Gregorio Bettiza further acknowledges the support of the Max Weber Programme at the EUI and Filippo Dionigi of the Middle East Center at the LSE. The usual disclaimers apply.

Mainstream Constructivist scholarship on norm diffusion in international relations (IR) is marked by considerable western-centrism.¹ This bias is apparent in the overwhelming focus of Constructivist research on the promotion of what are conventionally understood to be ‘good’ global norms,² by western-based actors,³ in non-western contexts.⁴ Norms are generally presented as travelling from a western core to a non-western periphery, from western norm-makers to non-western norm-takers.⁵ It is no surprise, then, that over the years Constructivist literature has been criticized as suffering from a ‘liberal’ (Adamson, 2005), ‘cosmopolitan’ (Acharya, 2004), or ‘secular’ (Kubáľková, 2003) bias, which neglects non-western normative agency.

Constructivism’s western-centrism tends to overlook that the international sphere is replete with normative contestation.⁶ The international sphere is, in fact, inhabited by a wide variety of non-western actors and norm entrepreneurs that are not solely norm-takers, but also active norm-makers, seeking to promote and internationalize their own beliefs, values and principles. This normative competition and complexity is becoming all the more apparent as world politics turns increasingly multipolar, as well as post-western (Acharya and Buzan, 2010; Kupchan, 2013; Tickner and Wæver, 2009; Weber and Jentleson, 2010; Zakaria, 2011).

The process of contestation and interaction between western and non-western norms⁷ and their entrepreneurs in international society needs to be understood better. This paper seeks to theoretically and empirically broaden Constructivist research by looking beyond the global diffusion of liberal and secular norms by western-based actors. A small number of scholars are starting to explicitly push Constructivist thinking along similar lines (Acharya, 2013; Adamson, 2005; Merry, 2006). We aim

to advance this emerging scholarly research by exploring the processes through which non-western actors promote norms within the structures of the ‘liberal international order’ (Deudney and Ikenberry, 1999; Ikenberry, 2009). In other words, we flip the coin and investigate norm diffusion from a non-western periphery to a western core, and by non-western norm-makers to western norm-takers.

It is possible to think of several non-western agents and norms that interact with the actors and norms of the liberal order. We focus on religious-based norms promoted by actors anchored to an Islamic tradition in the context of global governance institutions such as the United Nations (UN). A focus on political Islam is warranted for a number of reasons. We believe that what Fiona Adamson (2005: 565) pointed to as the ‘relative silence’ in mainstream Constructivist research on political Islam still largely stands. This neglect is also particularly egregious since concerns about the role of Islam and Islamists of all stripes have dominated international relations practices and debates for over a decade.

The paper contends that non-western religious-based actors have the greatest opportunity to diffuse their norms, within the institutions of the liberal international order, when their norms become intelligible from a secular, liberal, normative perspective through a successful process of *institutional translation*. When using the concept of translation to explore the dynamics of norm diffusion across different institutional and cultural contexts – in particular between a religious-Islamic and a secular-liberal context – we draw from debates on the ‘post-secular’, spearheaded by Jürgen Habermas⁸ (2008; 2006; Habermas and Mendieta, 2010; Habermas et al., 2010). In particular we refer to Habermas’ institutional translation proviso, which requires that religious idioms be translated into universally acceptable secular

language not at the source but when entering the formal legislative, executive and judicial deliberations of the state.

We contend that much of the learning and deliberative process between secular and religious actors that, for Habermas, should take place in post-secular liberal domestic settings, does, in many respects, already occur in the global public sphere. We are in a post-secular world society. Thus, the Habermasian concept of institutional translation can be understood not solely as a *normative requirement* for religious arguments to be included in the political deliberations of secular institutions, but also as an analytical *causal mechanism*,⁹ through which norms that do not originate from a liberal tradition are diffused in liberal international settings and within secular global governance institutions.¹⁰

We define institutional translation as the process of normative transmission between differently situated international actors, whose principles originate from diverse cultural and ethical backgrounds, whether these are religious, secular, national, ethnic or cultural.¹¹ Within this process, the norms' meaning is contested and negotiated and, when translation is successful, it establishes an open hermeneutic margin for its interpretation. This requires, to borrow the language of Michael Walzer (1994: x), 'thinning' a 'thick' culturally embedded particularist norm.¹² A successful translation will converge towards a norm that transcends particularism, and hence enjoys legitimacy beyond the context in which it originated. The open hermeneutic margin of the translated norm provides it with a higher degree of vagueness and malleability, which facilitates agreement between promoters and receivers over the meaning and legitimacy of the norm, even if the parties differ over its ethical justification. That is, the process of translation allows for the possibility that, while a

norm entrepreneur uses one language and set of meanings rooted in a particular cultural milieu, the receiving agents, when and if they become socialised in the new norm, internalise it in their own semantics and knowledge structures.¹³

We build on an emerging interest within constructivist scholarship in processes and mechanisms of norm ‘translation’ (Boesenecker and Vinjamuri, 2011; Brake and Katzenstein, 2013; Zwingel, 2012). More specifically, we seek to contribute to the development of what can be described as a third wave of research on the cross-cultural dynamics of norm diffusion. First wave scholarship generally portrays non-western actors as norm-takers. These are socialized and ‘converted’, thanks to the ‘persuasive’ power of the ‘better argument’ or the ‘better norm’, into the structure of meaning of the entrepreneurial, liberal, western-based norm-maker.¹⁴ Second wave scholarship has been more sensitive to non-western agency and processes of cross-cultural normative contestation and re-interpretation. Yet, non-westerners are still largely seen here as norm-takers – albeit as active ‘mimickers’ (Katsumata, 2011), ‘localizers’ (Acharya, 2004), and ‘vernacularizers’ (Merry, 2006; Levitt and Merry, 2009) – and rarely appear as norm-makers.

By highlighting the mechanism of *institutional translation* we seek to open up the study of norm dynamics beyond centre-periphery diffusion, still present in notions such as vernacularization or localization for instance. Translation subsumes localization, but also includes de-localization, a process in which particular non-western norms are diffused and non-western agents become norm-makers in world politics. Moreover, compared to unidirectional processes of persuasion, institutional translation opens the study of normative dynamics by considering the active role of

western and non-western culturally-situated agency in dialogical dynamics of norm contestation.

The mechanism of institutional translation is illustrated empirically through two case studies on the normative activity of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). We concentrate on two norms that the OIC has sought to promote within the UN, with varying degrees of success, since the late 1990s: the dialogue of civilisations and the defamation of religion. These cases are not intended to be exhaustive, but to shed some light on norm diffusion through processes of institutional translation in at least two ways. First, they exemplify the promotion, by non-western norm-makers, of norms that originate outside the liberal tradition. Second, their contrasting outcomes show the value of institutional translation in explaining how religious norms, and more generally non-western norms, diffuse in global settings. We argue that the diffusion of the dialogue of civilisations was the result of the successful institutional translation of the norm from its original Islamic formulation into a principle embraced also by non-OIC states. The non-diffusion of religious defamation was due in large part to the barriers faced in translating the norm into a more universally acceptable idiom, hence failing to garner widespread support.

Non-western agency, religious norms, and the limits of Constructivist research

Spearheaded by Constructivist scholars, the empirical and theoretical investigation into the causes and consequences of norm diffusion in international society has become a thriving research program in IR. This literature concentrates

mostly on certain types of norm dynamics. In particular the dynamics of liberal, cosmopolitan, secular norms - whether human rights, gender rights, international law, good governance, and so on - that are promoted, in international and local non-western contexts, by norm-makers largely of western origin, or closely tied to the structures of the western-based liberal international order.¹⁵

This focus, we argue, is the outcome of an implicit western-centrism present in much IR theory.¹⁶ This bias, when it comes to Constructivist research on norm dynamics, is problematic for a number of reasons. First, it underpins a narrow research agenda, which overlooks the variety of non-western norm entrepreneurs populating the international sphere and seeking to promote their own values. Second, because it appears tied largely to a view of world politics anchored to the ‘unipolar moment’ (Krauthammer, 1990) – indirectly playing into triumphalist ‘end of history’ narratives (Fukuyama, 2006) – at a time when the international is increasingly becoming multipolar as well as post-western (Acharya and Buzan, 2010; Kupchan, 2013; Weber and Jentleson, 2010; Zakaria, 2011).

What is generally called the resurgence of religion and the post-secular turn in the social world and scholarly thinking are an underexplored resource for broadening research on international change and norm dynamics beyond Constructivism’s current western-centrism. There are, for instance, an emerging number of alternative conceptions on how to structure domestic and international orders drawing on religion: the spread of *Jihadi* ideology and movements (Mendelsohn, 2012); the diffusion of Sharia Courts in the UK (Jucan and Georgia, 2011); the turn towards Confucian values as an instrument of Chinese soft power (Paradise, 2009); the revaluation and growth in faith-based approaches to poverty reduction and

development (Clarke, 2007); the articulation of transnational Muslim or Sikh identities and political projects (Shani, 2008); and the diffusion of Islamic finance (Lai, 2013).¹⁷

Literature on religion in IR has expanded substantially over the past decade. A central debate here has revolved around the degree of change in international relations, as a practice and body of knowledge, brought about by religion's resurgence. On the one hand, some argue that religion's return has the potential to bring about profound international transformations, compelling scholars to abandon old paradigms and radically rethink the premises of IR theory, especially its positivist and secularist foundations (Hanson, 2006; Hatzopoulos and Petito, 2003b; Hurd, 2008; Kubálková, 2003; Philpott, 2002; Thomas, 2005; Wilson, 2012; for a critique see Bellin, 2008). On the other hand, some suggest instead that, while the turn to the sacred does present important challenges for IR, religion can nevertheless be absorbed into IR's main theoretical paradigms with only minor adjustments (Nexon, 2011; Sandal and Fox, 2013; Sandal and James, 2010; Snyder, 2011; for a critique see Kubálková, 2013).

In practice, however, the above divisions become somewhat blurry. In fact, there is an emerging consensus among scholars of religion in IR, that Constructivism provides one of the most appropriate frameworks with which to capture the international dynamics and impact of the sacred. For instance, leading scholars of religion in IR are applying Constructivist insights to understand and explain the powerful role that religious identities, ideas, agents, and communities play in conflict resolution (Sandal, 2011), or in structuring the international system (Philpott, 2001). In parallel, Constructivist scholars, less anchored to the above debates on religion in

IR, are increasingly using their theoretical frameworks to investigate the normative activity and agency of Islamist movements in Central Asia (Adamson, 2005), or of humanitarian religious-based actors around the world (Barnett and Stein, 2012; Boesenecker and Vinjamuri, 2011).

While representing innovative avenues of research, much of this literature, however, tends to borrow and adjust Constructivist frameworks to the specificity of religious agents and ideational dynamics. It is less explicitly geared towards teasing out how social and political research, originating in scholarly debates on religion, can more broadly move forward Constructivist research on international norm dynamics. In other words, the novelty that religious resurgence processes, and post-secular theorizing may represent, for Constructivism is often left under-explored. We suggest that Habermasian post-secular thinking has the potential to empirically and theoretically expand Constructivist research on cross-cultural norm diffusion and contestation in novel and important ways. We want to be more modest here than proposing the abandonment of old, or the creation of novel, theoretical paradigms when considering the dynamics of religious norms in IR. Yet we also want to be more ambitious than simply absorbing religion into standard IR Constructivist theory. We are proposing a more explicit *via media*, which we believe is to the mutual benefit of both enterprises.

First, the notion of a post-secular society – when transferred from the domestic to the global realm – broadens the Constructivist horizon towards a greater appreciation and consideration of ideational dynamics, which have been, thus far, under-researched. Namely, processes of religious-based norm diffusion, in western-dominated liberal international contexts, by non-western norm entrepreneurs. Second,

the concept of institutional translation used by Habermas in his post-secular writings deepens our knowledge of the mechanisms through which norms are promoted, contested, re-interpreted, and diffused across cultural/normative milieus. Lastly, we believe that this type of re-engagement with Constructivism also benefits scholarship on religion and the post-secular more broadly. It re-energizes attempts to show why, without taking religious dynamics seriously, IR scholars have only a partial view of the international. In fact, even though – or possibly because – over the past decade scholarship on religion has successfully carved out a space for itself in IR, there is a real chance that this research program detaches itself from broader debates in the discipline. We offer one possible way forward to avoid this risk.

Institutional translation: from post-secular normative theory to analytical causal mechanism

In response to religion's political revival over the past decades, Habermas has progressively revised his assumptions about the place of religion in the domestic public sphere of constitutional liberal democracies (Habermas, 2008; Habermas, 2006; Habermas and Mendieta, 2010; Habermas et al., 2010). He has engaged in a self-reflective process about the 'aggressive secularist' (see also Connolly, 1999) assumptions underlying much contemporary liberal political philosophy, which tends to confine religion to the private sphere. Habermas has come to articulate a normative ideal structured around the possibility of a 'post-secular society', open and inclusive of religions in the public sphere, which facilitates engagement between religious and secular citizens.

Habermas' post-secular proposal

Contemporary liberal thought, Habermas argues, asks too much of religious citizens, who are expected to provide secular reasons for their religiously inspired political mobilization in order to be legitimately admitted to the public sphere. Such a state of affairs robs contemporary debates of those critical voices and moral intuitions that religions can bring to the table, while unduly excluding from political participation persons who may be neither willing nor able to split their moral convictions and vocabulary into profane and religious strands. By distributing 'cognitive burdens unequally between secular and religious citizens' (Habermas, 2006: 13), much contemporary liberal thought seems to go against liberalism's own ethos of guaranteeing equal moral value to persons in pluralist societies. Habermas' objective is to provide an updated liberal framework under which religious arguments and perspectives can reasonably re-enter the public sphere, while simultaneously seeking to salvage the strict impartiality of liberal state institutions and its corollary norms of church and state separation.

To overcome these problems, Habermas narrows the scope of aggressive secularism over politics by introducing an 'institutional translation' proviso. The duty of providing secular translations to religious reasoning in liberal politics does not apply to all citizens, but only to state officials. State 'neutrality', for Habermas (2008: 28), 'does not preclude the permissibility of religious utterances within the political public sphere'. The separation of church and state, however, does demand that an 'institutional threshold' be kept in place, acting as a 'filter', which allows into the formal proceedings of the state – whether legal deliberations or political decision making – only contributions that can be translated from religious vocabulary into a

generally accessible, secular, language (2008: 28; 2006: 10). Habermas' (2006: 10) institutional translation proviso, hence, would allow religious citizens not 'to split their identity into a public and a private part the moment they participate in public discourses', giving them the chance instead to 'express and justify their convictions in a religious language if they cannot find secular 'translations' for them'.

For Habermas (2006: 17), 'the contents which reason appropriates through translation must not be lost for faith'. Put differently, the process of institutional translation from religious into secular language is designed to allow the moral intuitions of faith to be accessible also to 'non-believers through the universal language of reason', while at the same time keeping 'the boundaries of knowledge and faith firmly in place' (Mavelli and Petito, 2012: 936). A successful translation then becomes a precondition for the substantive content of religious voices to be taken up in the agendas and negotiations within political bodies.

For effective translations to occur, both religious and secular actors need to adopt a self-reflective stance that opens up space for mutual learning and cooperation. Religious citizens ought to recognize that, at the level of state institutions and practices, 'only secular reasons count therein' (Habermas, 2006: 10) and, hence, they should accept that their arguments be translated. Secular citizens must share the burden of translating religious into non-religious reasons. To do so, they should recognize that they 'live in a post-secular society that is *epistemically adjusted* to the continued existence of religious communities' (Habermas, 2006: 15). They ought to abandon both secularist readings of modernity as well as laicist understandings of church-state separation, which 'confuse the neutrality of a secular state in view of competing religious worldviews with the purging of the political public sphere of all

religious contributions' (Habermas, 2008: 28). Secular citizens should move beyond 'mere tolerance' (Habermas, 2006: 15) and remain 'agnostic' *vis-à-vis* religious truth-claims in the public sphere (Habermas, 2006: 17), in order to enter into genuine dialogue with religious citizens and take religious contributions in politics seriously.

Institutional translation and norm diffusion

We have not surveyed Habermas' proposal in order to make a further intervention in the normative debates that his post-secular thinking has generated.¹⁸ We instead wish to employ part of his conceptual toolbox to understand and explain international change. Our premise is that much of Habermas' normative proposal, which he admits is explicitly directed at European laicist states and societies, is already an empirical reality around the world.

Hence, we argue that processes of translation that Habermas posits ought to include post-secular domestic settings, are already taking place at the international level. We are in a 'post-secular world society' (Habermas and Mendieta, 2010; see also Barbato and Kratochwil, 2009; Mavelli and Petito, 2012).¹⁹ This world society is structured around an increasingly pluralist global public sphere, which includes a wide range of religious-based actors and liberal global governance institutions. More specifically we contend that the two presuppositions necessary for effective institutional translations to occur – mutual reflectivity and desire to learn on the part of secular and religious actors – are generally present within the UN system, an institution constitutive of the 'liberal international order' (Deudney and Ikenberry, 1999).

The UN is a secular institution, but not an aggressive secularist one. It is secular because its goals, activities, and organizational structure are neither religious nor do they subscribe to any religious ethic. It is not aggressive secularist, however, because it's underlying mission and norms are not anti-religious. In fact, the UN has generally been neutral and open towards the public participation of religious groups and communities in its debates and activities. Religious actors and voices have competed, and engaged in dialogue, with secular and secularist actors since the organization's founding moments and, it appears, in ever-growing numbers from the 1990s onwards (Haynes, 2013).

By taking this analytical perspective we investigate processes where institutional translations – based on a genuine exchange between secular and religious perspectives – are leading to new normative frameworks in the context of the UN system. We move beyond understanding institutional translation as a *normative requirement*, conceptualizing it instead as a *causal mechanism* that helps explain how certain religious norms acquire greater traction, becoming institutionalized within the secularized milieu of global governance institutions, while others do not.²⁰

We also build upon, and seek to contribute to, an emerging interest within Constructivist scholarship itself in the processes and mechanisms of norm 'translation' (Boesenecker and Vinjamuri, 2011; Brake and Katzenstein, 2013; Zwingel, 2012; Merry, 2006). Susanne Zwingel (2012: 124) argues that normative translations require both 'the cultural concepts and the transmitters of these concepts such as language and customs' of the norm promoter, to be converted into 'the language and customs' of the receiving agent's 'system of meaning to enable cross-cultural understanding'. This is rarely a one-sided endeavour, but rather 'complicated

and open-ended' (2012: 124). 'Translation', Benjamin Brake and Peter Katzenstein (2013: 730) similarly contend, 'evokes the uncertainty of the outcome', which is dependent very much on the interaction between different normative systems and their embedded agents.

The concept of translation, hence, underscores the centrality of interaction between culturally situated agents, whereby 'global norm creation and appropriation' unfolds as 'an open process of negotiation' (Zwingel, 2012: 122). Importantly, we conceptualise this interaction as a dialogical, two-way process, whereby – in Walzerian terms – a 'thicker' culturally situated norm is translated into a 'thinner' norm, which both norm-maker and norm-taker can agree upon. This 'thinning' process echoes Habermas' idea of 'filtering' (2006: 10; 2008: 28). Moreover, we argue that a norm that is successfully translated beyond the situated, thicker, normative context in which it originated, is characterized by an open hermeneutic margin for interpretation. As we shall see below, the successful thinning of a norm allows it also to acquire a degree of vagueness and malleability that enables an agreement between the norm-maker and the norm-taker over the norm's meaning and legitimacy, regardless of their cultural/normative divide.

An interest in translation can be seen as part of an emerging third wave of scholarship that seeks to unpack the complex dynamics of cross-cultural norm diffusion. First wave scholarship generally refers to 'persuasion' as the main mechanism through which norms diffuse (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Risse, 2000). A norm-maker, generally western-based, persuades the norm-taker, generally non-western, thanks to the power of the 'better argument' or the 'better norm', to adopt the former's liberal normative structure. In some first wave

accounts of norm diffusion, this process of persuasion may also rely on the agency of local NGOs that have fully subscribed to liberal norms and therefore contribute to their diffusion in domestic politics (Risse et al., 1999). When discussion about the challenges of norm diffusion across cultural contexts features here, this emphasizes mechanisms of persuasion which very much depend on the entrepreneurial skills of the western norm-maker to strategically ‘frame’ or ‘graft’ norms in such a way that they ‘resonate’, ‘fit’, or ‘match’ with the norm-taker’s local cultural context (see for instance Price, 2003: 596).

Second wave scholarship has looked more closely at the agency and cultural background of non-western norm-takers. This has led to the identification of mechanisms that, unlike persuasion or fit, capture with greater nuance processes whereby liberal international norms diffuse through cross-cultural reinterpretation. In this context, non-western agents – whether civil society actors, states, or regional organizations – are presented either as active ‘mimickers’ (Katsumata, 2011), or selective ‘localizers’ (Acharya, 2004) and ‘vernacularizers’ (Levitt and Merry, 2009; Merry, 2006), or impervious ‘resisters’ (Kinzelbach, 2013), of international liberal, cosmopolitan, secular norms.

Compared to first wave scholarship, which theorises mostly one-way processes of persuasion, and attendant practices of grafting and fitting, instead the mechanism of translation puts greater stress, similarly to second wave scholarship, on cross-cultural normative contestation. Translation highlights how norm-takers are not always pristinely socialized or, better, ‘converted’²¹ into the norm-maker’s value structure. Norms, as Zwingel (2012: 126) aptly puts it, are to a large extent ‘cross-culturally negotiated [...] rather than imposed’. In particular, translation captures

processes where the norm entrepreneur uses one language and set of meanings, rooted in its own particular cultural and normative milieu (*pace* fitting), and where the receiving agents, when and if they become socialized in the new norm, internalize it in their own language and set of meanings (*pace* persuasion). Translation is clearly anchored to a Habermasian logic of argument, yet it does not require and expect agents to change their identities as an outcome of deliberative processes.²²

Although translation shares much with dynamics identified by second wave scholarship – particularly with processes of localization and vernacularization – it captures a more general and far-reaching process. Localization and vernacularization still reproduce a core-periphery, global-local, norm dynamic present in much of first wave literature. Furthermore, these processes, especially in the case of vernacularization, can lead to some important aspects of the original norm being ‘lost in translation’.²³ In successful processes of institutional translation, instead, the original meaning of the norm cannot be lost for the norm-maker. Furthermore, the notion of translation is agnostic about the direction in which norms travel. As we show below, it detects also processes of diffusion relating to norms that do not originate in the liberal western centre. Translation captures cross-cultural dynamics of norm diffusion between and across levels of analysis, as norms are promoted and travel ‘upward, downward, and sideways’ (Brake and Katzenstein, 2013: 729). This allows exploring non-western agents not solely as active norm-takers, but also as independent norm-makers, who attempt to internationalize norms beyond their cultural and local context.

The case of OIC’s normative action

Islam and political Islam have become an important source on the basis of which much international political and military activity has been legitimized and taken place in the past decades. The OIC is one of the international multilateral actors that have often sought to promote norms reflecting its Islamic inspiration within the international sphere. Founded in 1969, the OIC gathers together 57 states and defines itself as ‘the collective voice of the Muslim world’. Among the OIC’s key aims, presented in its charter, is to ‘Protect and defend the true image of Islam, to combat defamation of Islam and encourage dialogue among civilisations and religions’ (Organization of Islamic Conference, N.D.).

We focus in particular on the OIC and its member states’ effort to promote dialogue of civilisations as well as religious defamation norms at the UN. As we shall see, the religious character of an organization and its norms do not necessarily conflict with the principles that regulate international society. Yet, the accommodation of a religion-based organization’s normative agenda within secular liberal institutions, such as the UN, can produce frictions and ambiguous results. We explore the OIC delegation’s activism at the UN because liberal global governance institutions epitomise the empirical and normative conditions at the international level that allow for processes of institutional translation between the secular and the religious to occur, conditions which Habermas posits are necessary for post-secular societies to emerge.

Dialogue of Civilisations

Middle Eastern politics were deeply affected by the global changes brought about by the end of the Cold War. During the 1990s, exhausted by a devastating war with Iraq (1980-1988) and by sustained economic sanctions, at a time of unrivalled

American power, the Iranian government increasingly adopted stances that signalled a growing will to normalise relations with western states. This period saw the election of, first, Akbar Ahmed Rafsanjani, and then Muhammad Khatami to the Iranian presidency. Despite being fully committed to the Islamic revolution, both presidents were increasingly concerned with the negative repercussions of Iran's prolonged international isolation and both therefore adopted new foreign policy stances (Ehteshami, 2002).

Within this context, Khatami put forward the normative proposal for a dialogue of civilisations at the OIC, and later through the OIC to the international community.²⁴ As conceived by Khatami, and endorsed by Muslim-majority states during the OIC's Eighth Islamic Summit Conference in Teheran in 1997, the dialogue of civilisations was intended as a global initiative seeking to promote international peace by establishing the conditions for respect and dialogical exchange between peoples and states anchored to diverse, but equally respectable, civilisations – above all between the world of Islam and the West. The OIC's 1997 Summit Conference Final Communiqué emphasized the need to encourage 'dialogue among civilizations' and to facilitate the opening of the Islamic Ummah 'to the rest of the world within the framework of dialogue among civilizations' (Organization of Islamic Conference, 1997).

The announcement was not an exercise in void public rhetoric. It was, instead, the prelude for what became a mounting campaign to promote an international norm that emphasized the importance of inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue for the maintenance of international peace. This was an initiative that went well beyond

traditional diplomatic practices and views of world order (Marchetti, 2009; Petito, 2009).

Khatami's, and the OIC's, vision for inter-civilisational dialogue were rooted in a particular reading of Islamic tradition. The OIC's communiqué would not fail to explain that 'the need to establish understanding and interaction among various cultures, [is] in line with the Islamic teachings of tolerance, justice and peace' (Organization of Islamic Cooperation, 1997). More specifically, the former Iranian President presented the dialogue of civilisation as an instance of *ijtihad*,²⁵ whereby the Islamic message should be reinterpreted on the basis of its foundational principles, but also in light of the historical changes and contexts which Muslims experience (Khatami et al., 2001). This context, for Khatami, was one of shifting civilisational dynamics, where the 'Islamic *Ummah*, once a flag-bearer of knowledge, thought and civilisation, has in recent centuries elapsed into weakness and backwardness' and had consigned itself to a 'painful state of passivity *vis-à-vis* the ostentatious dominant [western] civilization of the time' (Khatami, 1997).

The dialogue of civilisations was intended by Iran and the OIC not only as way of re-establishing productive relations with the international community and improve Islam's image. It was also designed to improve the internal condition of 'Islamic civilisation' and to put it on an equal footing with the West (Khatami, 1997). Through dialogue, Khatami and the member states delegations of the OIC sought to fight stereotypes of Islam, which clash of civilisations theories were spreading. 'Emphasizing the imperative of positive interaction, dialogue and understanding among cultures and religions', the OIC's Final Communiqué highlighted, was based

on ‘rejecting the theories of clash and conflict which breed mistrust’ (Organization of Islamic Cooperation, 1997).

More importantly, though, the norm was grounded in a profound critique of ‘end of history’ (Fukuyama, 2006) narratives that dominated western discourses at the time. The dialogue of civilisations was understood as a process whereby different cultural and moral views would enjoy equal importance and influence, in contrast to the ‘dangerous and destructive claim’ (Khatami et al., 2001) that world history fulfils itself in an inevitable expansion of western liberalism.

For Khatami (1997), western civilisation is ‘derived from the Greek city-states and the later Roman political system’. Muslim society, instead, has its origin in ‘*Madinat al-Nabi*’ (the city of the Prophet), which represents the ideal of civilisation, in Islamic tradition, and marks the passage from the age of ‘*jāhiliyya*’ (ignorance)²⁶ to the age of divine revelation. Only when Muslims are ‘secure in their true Islamic identity’ can they intervene, as equals, in a genuine dialogue of civilisations (Khatami, 1997). While acknowledging differences is important, these do not need to spell conflict. The Quranic verse ‘East and West belong to God’,²⁷ is seen by Khatami as supporting the notion that all civilisations share the principle of the divine origin of humanity, and therefore are called to cooperate with each other on an equal basis, rather than seeking to dominate each other (Khatami et al., 2001).²⁸

From a localized norm, situated in an Islamic discursive framework, the initiative was then promoted at the UN. In 1998, Khatami and the OIC delegation to the UN proposed, to the General Assembly (UNGA), that 2001 be designated the ‘United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilisations’. At this stage, normative action was still fully embedded in an Islamic perspective. In a speech peppered with

references to ‘God’, Khatami – who would present himself ‘as a man from the East, the origin of the brilliant civilisations and the birthplace of divine prophets,’ – ²⁹ put forward his proposal for a dialogue of civilisations by grounding it in the history of Islam and the Iranian revolution.³⁰

Following Khatami’s address Iranian representatives, along with a number of delegates of non-OIC countries³¹, began to work on a resolution to be submitted to the UNGA for approval. Despite its original religious foundations, the first draft did not include any explicit reference to Islam or to God, referring to ‘civilisations’, ‘nations’, ‘cultural pluralism’ or ‘creative human diversity’ instead.³² The early signs of a process of institutional translation are manifest at this stage. From being originally ‘thickly’ embedded in Islamic discourse, the norm of civilisational dialogue began a process of ‘thinning’, aiming to set it in harmony with the secularized and liberal language of UN resolutions. The dialogical dimension of the process was evident when a representative of the EU, speaking on behalf of a majority of western states, expressed gratitude to the drafters of the resolution for their ‘constructive approach’³³ when it came to rephrasing Iran’s original proposal in a more delocalised idiom.

After a final re-drafting,³⁴ the resolution was then submitted for discussion to the UNGA in November 1998.³⁵ The debate that took place at the UNGA shows how the norm, through a process of translation from its highly contextual and particularist Islamic origins, successfully acquired an open hermeneutic margin that allowed it to be interpreted by various states on the basis of their own cultural and ethical perspective. Senegal’s ambassador to the UN, for example, explained his intention to vote for the resolution by referring to the national anti-colonial, pan-African, tradition initiated by its founder Leopold Sedar Senghor.³⁶ The Austrian delegation to the

UNGA, speaking also on behalf of the European Union (EU), justified its support by saying that Europeans ‘know from their own historical experience that societies and cultures must not be seen as isolated entities, especially in an increasingly globalized world.’³⁷ The Egyptian representative referred to Egypt’s historical and ‘multi-civilisational’ tradition (including Islam).³⁸ The diplomatic delegates of countries as Malaysia, India, Syria, Solomon Islands, Japan and New Zealand all brought their own perspectives to the forum converging on the legitimacy of the norm, but differing on the cultural sources of its foundation. Importantly, the UN observer for the OIC, in expressing its support, reiterated the importance of Islam as a foundation for civilisational dialogue, revealing how Muslim-majority states believed the original meaning of the norm had not been lost in translation.

The resolution was approved by consensus in 1998, as UNGA resolution 53/22, establishing 2001 as the ‘United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations.’ The first part of 2001 saw a pattern of activities, culminating in the Vilnius International Conference on the Dialogue among Civilizations, which took place a few months before the events of September 11.

We argue that institutional translation contributes to explain why the proposal by the Iranian government came to be widely accepted. The reformist leadership of Khatami, and attempts at a US-Iranian détente during the late 1990s, may have played a positive role in the norm’s success. Yet, we suggest, an explanation that relies solely on US-Iranian converging interests is incomplete.

US-Iranian rapprochement – which was not only short-lived but also a highly complex and intermittent affair – cannot fully account for the widespread acceptance of the norm by the international community in 1998, and for the norm’s capacity to

outlive its allegedly favourable historical moment. As some suggest, the US government saw small value in an initiative which did little to advance its direct interests in the region (Tazmini, 2009: 92-97). Indeed, the US administration at the time was rather lukewarm towards the norm and its representative mostly sat on the margins during the resolution drafting process. It was European policymakers that mostly took the initiative to support a ‘thinned’ norm, which they recognized as valid from their ethical perspective.

Second, on the occasions when the US and Iran sought to work together – for instance, during the “6 plus 2” UN negotiations on Afghanistan between 1999 to 2001 – this engagement was marked more by diplomatic spats than fruitful cooperation (Wright, 2007). Yet, despite these unfavourable conditions, the norm promoted by Khatami and the OIC received a further boost by the UNGA in November 2001, when 110 states approved, by consensus, the establishment, in a post-9/11 environment, of the ‘Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations’.³⁹ The consensus around creating a basis for the continued practice of this norm over the years was an indicator that the dialogue of civilisations was not a short-lived experiment, but a practice rooted in a normative shift progressively internalized by the international community.

Third, after 2001, US-Iranian relations quickly deteriorated. A growing rift between the two countries was marked on various occasions as the Iranian Supreme Guide Khamen‘ai spoiled Khatami’s attempts at détente; when George W. Bush designated Iran as part of the ‘axis of evil’; as the Iranian nuclear crisis was reignited in 2002; and when Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was elected president in 2005. Notwithstanding the these growing tensions, and more broadly between the West and the Muslim world at the height of the War on Terror, multiple UN resolutions at the

UNGA and the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) kept referring to the dialogue of civilisations as an authoritative normative source, even after 2001.⁴⁰

In 2005, civilisational dialogue norms became further institutionalized within global governance structures when Spain and Turkey jointly proposed the creation of an UN Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC). A High-Level Group for the Alliance was appointed, which included Khatami among its members, demonstrating continuity between the dialogue of civilisations initiative and the Alliance of Civilizations.⁴¹ The Alliance of Civilizations was acknowledged by consensus at the UNGA in 2009⁴² and has become a fully operational institution with an expanding record of activities.

Overall, thanks to the full endorsement of the international community, the dialogue of civilisations norm has become ‘settled’ (Frost, 1996: 105-112) in the institutions and practices of international society. What allowed the norm to diffuse, and to outlive the contingent historical context in which it originated, was its ability to transcend its ‘thick’ particularist origins, through the process of institutional translation that took place between OIC and non-OIC UN delegates during the drafting and then approval of the UNGA resolution 53/22. This process was only marginally dependent on the nature of Iranian foreign relations. In fact, as we shall see in the next section, a norm promoted with the backing of the OIC, by countries with much closer ties to the US and the West than Iran, would experience a very different fate.

Defamation of Religions

When Salman Rushdie’s novel, *The Satanic Verses*, was published in 1988 Islamic leaders and heads of states of Muslim majority countries protested and accused the British Indian author of blasphemy. In 1989, Ayatollah Ruhollah

Khomeini issued a *fatwa*, calling for the death of Rushdie. This was the first major international episode of what has become a key contemporary grievance for Islamic and Islamist actors. That is, the perception that Islam, as a religion, and Muslims, as a community, are negatively stereotyped and purposefully offended. This concern has increasingly emerged in the post-9/11 world, in the case of the Bush administration's detention practices in the War on Terror, the Danish cartoon controversy in 2005/2006, and the anti-Islamic film published on Youtube in 2013.

The condemnation and criminalization of offences towards the sacred, are common phenomena in most religions. The Islamic tradition has its own categories and language. Rushdie was accused of betraying the message of Islam, and therefore committing the sin of *ridda* (apostasy), which in some interpretations of Islamic jurisprudence can be punished with death. (Kepel, 2002: 186-187; Rehman, 2010) Blasphemy, differently from apostasy, constitutes a more generic offense to the sacredness of Islam and its prophet Muhammad, practiced by non-Muslims (Rehman, 2010). In line with this interpretation of Islam, several Muslim-majority countries, such as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Egypt, domestically enforce legislation against blasphemy or apostasy (Rehman and Berry, 2012; Peters and Vries, 1976; O'Sullivan, 2003).

From the late 1990s, Muslim states sought to advance internationally, in coordination with the OIC, a normative claim to interdict the defamation of Islam, first, and religion, after. The defamation of Islam is understood by the OIC mostly as 'a claim of damage and disrepute being done to Islam.' (Alfandari et al., 2011) By styling its normative activity in terms of defamation, the OIC sought to outlaw blasphemy globally. As part of its strategy, the OIC Permanent Observer Mission to

the UN would submit draft resolutions in various UN institutional contexts, hoping that these, over time, would become a source of international law. The endeavour turned out to be a failure because the norm faced significant institutional translation barriers. As we shall see, in fact, an explanation that does not look at the failed process of translation, but focuses solely on interests, would not be able to explain fully the observed outcome.

The Pakistani delegation to the UN first introduced a draft resolution, on behalf of the OIC, on combating the ‘Defamation of Islam’, at the UN Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) in 1999. The resolution was intended to counter ‘new manifestations of intolerance and misunderstanding, not to say hatred, of Islam and Muslims,’⁴³ and to oppose international portrayals of Islam as a religion hostile to human rights. The debate that the proposal sparked in the committee was an early symptom of the consistent and multiple translation problems the norm would face over the years.

The draft resolution prompted a tense exchange of views with ambassadors from the EU and other western states.⁴⁴ They found the resolution ‘not balanced’⁴⁵, because of its exclusive reference to Islam. Western representatives did not oppose, in principle, the idea of a resolution fostering religious tolerance, but proposed a set of amendments,⁴⁶ which substituted ‘defamation’ for ‘stereotyping’ and abandoned any mention of Islam in favour of a general reference to all religions. In short, the EU delegation was trying to propose an institutional translation of the norm. The Pakistani delegation, on behalf of the OIC, nonetheless, saw eliminating any reference to Islam as ‘defeat[ing] the purpose of the text’ and asked Germany to withdraw the amendments.⁴⁷

Consensus on the resolution was patently missing and another round of negotiations was necessary. Eventually, a compromise was reached and resolution 1999/82 was adopted by consensus at the UNCHR.⁴⁸ The new resolution now had a more general title, ‘Defamation of Religions’, but still singled out the case of Islam in the text. Western states remained deeply unsatisfied. The German delegate argued that no religion could be evoked as a pretext for human rights violations, and EU member states made clear that ‘they did not attach any legal meaning to the term ;defamation’, as used in the resolution.⁴⁹

When Pakistan’s delegation on behalf of the OIC proposed at the UNCHR a highly specific norm ‘thickly’ grounded in the Islamic prohibition of blasphemy (Rehman and Berry, 2012: 444-449), the members of the international community entered into a debate over the meaning of the norm and the possibility of its institutional translation. The debate on resolution 1999/82 was only the beginning of a process of norm contestation between the OIC representatives and their critics that would last over a decade. From the point of view of the critics of the anti-defamation norm, no legitimate measure could single out Islam as a religion deserving particular protection, nor could a religion itself be legally protected, since only persons are entitled to rights (Dacey, 2012: 2-3). Moreover the OIC delegates’ proposal manifestly clashed with freedom of opinion and speech norms.

These translation hurdles were never fully remedied in subsequent drafts proposed by the OIC representatives. From 1999 to 2005 the delegations of states representing the OIC promoted the same ‘Defamation of Religion’ resolution at the UNCHR. From 2001, however, the diplomatic officials of western states adopted a particular strategy. First, they requested an individually recorded vote over the

resolution proposed by the OIC delegates. This allowed them to show their dissent over the norm, although the OIC was still able to get the resolution approved by a majority, thanks to the support of most developing countries. Second, the representatives of the western coalition proposed a competing norm in the form of an UNGA resolution titled ‘elimination of all forms of religious intolerance’⁵⁰. This formulation of the norm did not contain reference to a specific religion and was firmly rooted in the liberal principles that inform western states as well as the UN charter (Alfandari et al., 2011: 7).

From 2005, in the wake of the Danish cartoon controversy, the OIC stepped up its campaign to sponsor religious defamation resolutions at the UNGA, similar to those presented at the UNCHR since 2001.⁵¹ Unsurprisingly, the delegations of western countries continued to vote against this, while, proposing their own version of the norm, albeit under the slightly revised form of ‘elimination of all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on religion or belief.’ Each time the OIC presented a resolution criminalizing defamation of religion, western diplomats proposed their own.⁵² Any attempt at translation had faltered, as alternative proposals were put forward reflecting the particular normative background of the parties.

From 2005 to 2010 there was a steady erosion of support for the OIC’s resolution at the UNGA, as a growing number of previously supportive delegations of developing states started to abstain or vote against. By 2010, delegations from western states obtained full international consensus over their formulation of the norm, but the OIC’s normative activity was faltering. In 2010 the OIC’s resolution passed through the UNGA with the lowest number of votes possible; in fact, votes in favour were fewer than the sum of abstentions and votes against. In 2009 and in 2010, OIC representatives from Syria⁵³ and Tajikistan⁵⁴ voiced their disappointment over an allegedly non-

cooperative stance of western states on the issue. A parallel process was taking place at the UNHRC with the same procedures and outcomes.

A number of high-level UN officials played a pivotal role in delegitimizing the OIC's proposals in the eyes of the wider international community within the UNHRC, the UNGA, and other UN venues.⁵⁵ The UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion, the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights were increasingly called upon to address the issue of defamation of religions (Alfandari et al., 2011: 21-26; Kayaoglu, 2012b: 14-19; Langer, 2010). Despite a series of disagreements (Rehman and Berry, 2012: 440-441) – reflecting the contested nature of the norm itself – their work contributed to build an influential body of opinion on defamation that argued against the need for new legal standards. UN officials mostly called on OIC states to replace the focus on 'defamation' with the legal concept of combating 'incitement to national, racial or religious hatred' grounded in international law.

With dwindling international support, in 2011 the member states delegations of the OIC decided to drop their campaign, fearing a negative vote both at the UNGA and the UNHRC. Instead, resolutions 16/18 and 66/167 were adopted by consensus, respectively at the UNHRC and the UNGA, under the title 'combating intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of, and discrimination, incitement to violence, and violence against persons based on religion or belief.' These resolutions were mostly receptive of the requests of western states in previous years, avoided the term defamation, and sanctioned a shift from protecting Islam from criticism, to protecting individuals from discrimination or violence based on religion (Evans, 2011). No calls were made for legal restrictions on expression, but rather, there were

proposals in favour of positive measures to address intolerance and violence based on religion.

Despite reaching an agreement on paper, the OIC has largely seen this as a defeat. That's because its defamation norm was 'lost in translation'. Leaders from OIC countries such as Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have repeatedly declared their unchanged commitment to continuing promoting the norm internationally (Goodenough, 2011). Since 2011, the OIC has pursued several initiatives on defamation within its membership and outside the purview of the UN (Rehman and Berry, 2012: 450-453).

Overall, through most of the period of normative contestation, western leaders did have recognizable incentives to endorse the OIC's proposal on defamation. Much of the debate on the anti-defamation norm proposed by the OIC took place at a time when the War on Terror was at its height. The images of the Guantanamo Detention Centre, the torture cases of Abu Ghraib, and the Danish cartoon controversy, embarrassed many western political actors and created the perception of an alleged 'war against Islam'. Indeed, western leaders would repeatedly emphasise their distance from incidents perceived as attacks on Muslims and their dignity.⁵⁶

Given these circumstances, it remains to be explained why the US and European delegations at the UN did not support the OIC's proposal. This is especially so since, unlike the dialogue of civilisations, the defamation norm was sponsored through the OIC, at the UN, by states with close strategic ties to western countries, such as Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. In response to the OIC's normative activity and concerns, western countries were available to consider a global norm promoting religious tolerance, and did propose one. In spite of what were historically ideal

conditions for an anti-defamation norm to become fully institutionalized, this did not occur. Critics – western diplomats and UN high-level officials – did not question the legitimacy of Muslim concerns. They found fault with the specificity of the OIC’s normative proposal, and its lack of an open hermeneutic margin, which could ensure that the norm would be seen as legitimate from different ethical perspectives. The diffusion of the defamation norm faced barriers in translation, rather than fundamentally conflicting interests.

Conclusion

This article has drawn on the insights of Habermasian post-secular theory, in order to move IR Constructivist research on norm dynamics beyond its current western-centric focus. We have sought to broaden this research agenda, by investigating the dynamics of religious-based norms, promoted by non-western norm-makers, within the institutional structures of the international liberal order. To this end, we have conceptualized institutional translation as a key mechanism that contributes to explain the success or failure of contentious cross-cultural processes of norm diffusion.

We have defined institutional translation as a process whereby normative claims, situated in a ‘thick’ particular value system, are rephrased through a dialogical process into a ‘thinner’, more general, and universal idiom within an institutional context. When institutional translation is successful, the process establishes an open hermeneutic margin, which allows the norm to be interpreted and acknowledged as legitimate from multiple ethical perspectives. We understand translation as different

from, but also complementary to, previous research on mechanisms of norm diffusion. Early, first wave literature, unpacks the ‘persuasive’ power of liberal, western norm-makers in converting norm-takers into the former’s value system. Second wave literature critiques accounts of persuasion by highlighting instead the creative agency of culturally situated non-western, norm-takers in processes of normative ‘adaptation’, ‘localization’ and ‘vernacularization’.

Compared to persuasion, institutional translation emphasizes how normative consensus can be reached without actors needing to change their identities as an outcome of norm diffusion. Differently from second wave literature, institutional translation is agnostic about the direction in which norms travel, and sees non-western agents also as active global norm-makers and not only as local norm-takers. Overall, the concept of institutional translation helps to explain when and how norms that originate outside of the liberal tradition diffuse internationally, hence shedding light on important normative dynamics that remain largely under-investigated.

To make the case for less western-centric research on norm dynamics and the explanatory value of institutional translation, this study analysed the contrasting cases of diffusion of two Islamic-based norms promoted globally by the OIC: the dialogue of civilizations and the defamation of religions. We traced how, in the case of the dialogue of civilization, the claims in support of the norm from Iran’s government and the OIC’s observer mission to the UN went through a successful process of institutional translation, allowing the norm to become diffused and institutionalized in the UN system. This occurred because a ‘thinning’ of the norm was possible, without loosing its original meaning for OIC states’ representatives, while also allowing non-OIC states’ delegations to recognize the norm’s legitimacy from their own distinct

cultural perspectives. This was not an instance of persuasion, since no socialization/conversion to Islam was required by non-Muslim states, nor was it necessary for the UNGA to endorse Islamic principles.

We show how Khatami and the OIC proposed the dialogue of civilization in a historical period marked by an opening of Iran towards the West. However, we also show that the fate of the dialogue initiative was only marginally dependent on this context. In fact, an Iran-West rapprochement was far from an obvious reality at the beginning of the normative process, and became impossible after 2001, when the dialogue of civilisations norm became ever more embedded within the structures of the UN system. We find, then, that institutional translation provides a more comprehensive explanatory account than one that takes into consideration solely contingent political calculations.

The second example presented a case of non-diffusion due to a failed process of institutional translation. Multiple dialogical attempts between the OIC and Western states and UN officials took place for over a decade (1999-2011) in an effort to translate the Islamic prohibition against defamation, based on notions of blasphemy and apostasy. Yet, the parties were unable to reach a common agreement on the legitimacy of the norm from both Islamic and secular, liberal, perspectives. The obstacle in establishing an open hermeneutic margin, we argued, was a crucial factor that hindered the OIC's ability to diffuse the norm against defamation globally.

In fact, this occurred despite a favourable historical and political context, where western representatives did have multiple incentives to work with the OIC to pass a similar norm. First, western leaders were well aware that they needed to avoid, in the context of the War on Terror, the perception that they were engaged in a war

against Islam. Second, western delegations did, in fact, consider and then would promote resolutions aimed at fostering religious tolerance. Third, compared to the dialogue of civilization, which was largely promoted by Iran and the OIC under Khatami's leadership, norms against defamation were advanced through the OIC by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, countries with closer ties to the West than Iran. The non-diffusion of this norm was not an epiphenomenon incidental to broader political dynamics but is more comprehensively explained as the result of a failed translation.

We acknowledge that, on the basis of only two examples, it is difficult to make generalisations. Yet, we hope that we have begun to show how attention to processes of institutional translation has the potential to capture dynamics of norms contestation and diffusion across diverse culturally situated normative actors, until now generally overlooked. The hope is to foster a research agenda more sensitive towards understanding and explaining the emerging patterns of international change of an increasingly culturally diverse multipolar world society.

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¹ On western-centrism in IR see: Acharya (2011); Acharya and Buzan (2007); Hobson (2012); Tickner and Wæver (2009).

² Whether human rights, gender or race equality, environmental protection, international law, weapons taboos, or good governance norms. The term ‘good’ norms is taken from Checkel (1998: 339); Finnemore and Sikkink (2001: 403).

³ Whether civil society activists, North American and western European states, or liberal international and regional organizations such as the United Nations or the European Union.

⁴ The literature on norm diffusion is vast, for pioneering work by leading scholars see for example: Barnett and Finnemore (2004); Finnemore and Sikkink (1998); Keck and Sikkink (1998); Klotz (1999); Price (1997); Reus-Smit (2004); Risse et al. (1999); Sikkink (2011); Simmons (2009).

⁵ ‘Norm-maker’ and ‘norm-taker’ are from Checkel (1999).

⁶ A growing interest in norm contestation is emerging in IR. A first strand theorizes norms as always inherently ‘contested’ (Wiener, 2004), more akin to ongoing ‘process’ rather than finished ‘things’ (Krook and True, 2012), whose meaning is rarely settled and often open to multiple interpretations contingent on cultural, political, and temporal context (see also Bucher, 2014; Payne, 2001). A second strand focuses on the fragility of norm internalization and on processes of normative ‘regress’ from ‘good’ to ‘bad’ norms (Heller and Kahl, 2013; McKeown, 2009; see also Krebs and Jackson, 2007; Panke and Petersohn, 2012). A third strand, which this paper speaks to, focuses on the encounter and/or competition between agents situated in different localities who draw from distinct cultural and ethical milieus in their normative activity (Acharya, 2004; Adamson, 2005; Boesenecker and Vinjamuri, 2011).

⁷ We understand norm as ‘collective expectations for the proper behavior of actors with a given identity’ (Katzenstein, 1996: 5).

⁸ For early entries by sociologists on the resurgence of religion in modern times, see Berger (1999); Casanova (1994). In leading voices in IR, see: Barbato and Kratochwil (2009); Hatzopoulos and Petitto (2003a); Haynes (1998); Hurd (2008); Philpott (2002); Thomas (2005); Toft et al. (2011)

⁹ For recent literature on causal mechanisms in IR, see Bennett (2013). On the philosophical underpinning of the mechanistic understanding of causality see Kurki (2006).

¹⁰ This analytical perspective sidesteps contentious normative debates surrounding whether Habermas’ post-secular proposal goes too far, or not far enough, in opening contemporary politics and liberal thought to religious perspectives. For comprehensive overviews of these debates in political and social theory see Constellations (2007) and Calhoun et al. (2013). For an IR perspective, see RIS (2012) and Barbato and Kratochwil (2009).

¹¹ As this passage highlights, we do not exclude a priori that the mechanism of institutional translation drawn here from Habermasian post-secular theorizing on secular-religious encounters, could not be applied to illustrate other cross-cultural, core-periphery, processes of norm contestation and diffusion more broadly.

¹² We thank an anonymous reviewer for this point.

¹³ Our notion of ‘open hermeneutic margin’ echoes the observation, by Mona Lena Krook and Jacqui True (2012: 104), that ‘the norms that spread across the international system tend to be vague, enabling their content to be filled in many ways and thereby to be appropriated for a variety of different purposes’.

¹⁴ For important entries in this scholarship see endnote 4.

¹⁵ See endnote 4.

¹⁶ See endnote 2.

¹⁷ On religion as an alternative source of world ordering, see Barbato and Kratochwil (2009); Philpott (2002); Thomas (2005).

¹⁸ See endnote 10.

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- ¹⁹ We ground the concept of ‘world society’ in English School theory, understood as the domain of political activity that captures the complexity of transnational, non-state and human relations (Buzan, 2004).
- ²⁰ We are not the first to make a move from Habermasian normative theory to IR Constructivism. For a pioneering example, not related to post-secular theorizing however, see Risse (2000).
- ²¹ For persuasion as a process of ‘conversion’ see Busby (2007: 251).
- ²² On persuasion entailing a process of identity change see, among many, Risse (2000: 8)
- ²³ See the discussion in Levitt and Merry (2009: 458)
- ²⁴ On dialogue of civilisation as a norm see: Dallmayr and Manoochehri (2007); Kayaoglu (2012a); Petito (2011).
- ²⁵ In Islamic scholarship *ijtihad* refers to the interpretation and re-interpretation of religious sources on the basis of historical circumstances (Abdel Haleem, 2011: 62).
- ²⁶ The concept of *jāhiliyya* refers to the period that predates the announcement of the divine revelation.
- ²⁷ Sura 2 verse 109 of the Qura’n.
- ²⁸ For a theological review of the Quranic foundations of civilisational dialogue see Baharuddin et al. (2009: 302-303).
- ²⁹ UN Doc. A/53/PV.8 p. 4.
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ For the list of the countries see UN Doc. A/53/L.23.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ UN Doc. A/53/PV.53, p. 7.
- ³⁴ UN Doc. A/53/L.23/Rev. 1.
- ³⁵ UN Doc. A/53/PV.53.
- ³⁶ UN Doc. A/53/PV.53, p. 4.
- ³⁷ UN Doc. A/53/PV.53, p. 6.
- ³⁸ UN Doc. A/53/PV.53, p. 5.
- ³⁹ UNGA Res. For the sponsoring states see UN Doc. A/56/L.3/Add.1.
- ⁴⁰ For example all the resolutions on religious defamation (see below) refer to the dialogue of civilisations resolutions in their preambular clauses.
- ⁴¹ UN Doc. SG/SM/10073/Rev.1
- ⁴² UNGA Res. 64/14, UN Doc. A/RES/64/14.
- ⁴³ UN Doc. E/CN.4/1999/SR.61
- ⁴⁴ Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxemburg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, UK subsequently joined by other western countries. Also Japan and India express similar concerns.
- ⁴⁵ UN Doc. E/CN.4/1999/SR.61, p.2.
- ⁴⁶ UN Doc. E/CN.4/1999/L.90
- ⁴⁷ UN Doc. E/CN.4/1999/SR.61, p.3
- ⁴⁸ UNCHR Res. 1999/82 and UNCHR Res. 2000/84.
- ⁴⁹ UN Doc. E/CN.4/1999/SR.62, p.3.
- ⁵⁰ UNGA Res. 56/157. Most resolutions passed by consensus, except in 2003 when the vote was recorded. UN Doc. E/2003/23 p. 413
- ⁵¹ All these resolutions refer to Islam as the specific target of defamation and discrimination on several occasions. See UNGA Res. 60/150, 61/164, 62/154, 63/171, 64/156, 65/224.

⁵² UNGA res. 60/166, 61/161, 61/157, 61/181, 64/164, 65/211, 66/168, 67/179.

⁵³ A/64/PV.65 p. 15-7.

⁵⁴ A/65/PV.71 p. 16-7.

⁵⁵ For instance, during the proceedings of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Elaboration of Complementary Standards to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, in the aftermath of the 2001 World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance.

⁵⁶ See for example FoxNews.com (2004).