university of groningen

University Medical Center Groningen

University of Groningen

Post secularism and International Relations

Mavelli, Luca; Wilson, Erin

Published in:
Routledge Handbook of Religion and Politics

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Final author's version (accepted by publisher, after peer review)

Publication date:
2016

Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database

Citation for published version (APA):
Mavelli, L., & Wilson, E. (2016). Post secularism and International Relations. In J. Haynes (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Politics* (2 ed., pp. 251-269). Routledge.

Copyright
Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

The publication may also be distributed here under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the “Taverne” license. More information can be found on the University of Groningen website: https://www.rug.nl/library/open-access/self-archiving-pure/taverne-amendment.

Take-down policy
If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): http://www.rug.nl/research/portal. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.

Download date: 04-06-2022

Postsecularism and International Relations

Luca Mavelli and Erin K. Wilson

Introduction

Postsecularism has gained increasing relevance within and beyond international relations (IR) in recent years. Within IR, the term has been employed primarily in two different yet interconnected ways. Firstly, postsecularism has operated descriptively to explain the return or resilience of religious traditions in modern life. This has produced two different responses. On the one hand, scholars have attempted to develop conceptual frameworks that move beyond the dominant assumptions of secularization theory in order to explain religion's surprising persistence in late modernity. On the other hand, there have been calls for the development of new models of politics able to include religious views. Such calls represent the second and more innovative meaning attributed to postsecularism, in which it operates as a form of radical theorising and critique prompted by the idea that values such as democracy, freedom, equality, inclusion, and justice may not necessarily be best pursued within an exclusively immanent secular framework. Quite the opposite, the secular may be a site of isolation, domination, violence, and exclusion.

The thriving debate on religion in international politics originally revolved around the 'return of religion' in IR. Scholars have focused on how religion could be incorporated into existing conceptual and political frameworks by exploring its contribution to processes of modernisation, democratisation and peace-building and its wider implications for future world orders. The recent debate on postsecularism, however, has more radical connotations which encompass the idea of a paradigm shift. This is an attempt to move beyond the secular and thus the secular/religious divide, which can be considered one of the foundational dimensions of Western secular modernity. The question raised by the postsecular, then, is not just one of incorporation of the presence of religion into existing theoretical frameworks, but one of conceptual innovation to account for a transformation which invests the very structures of consciousness and power, and existing understandings of political community.

The importance of this transformation surfaces in recent writings from Jürgen Habermas, the thinker who, probably more than anyone else, has contributed to igniting the current debate on postsecularism. For Habermas, postsecularism is a 'change in consciousness' that characterises traditionally secular societies, such as European ones.[1] This change stems from, on the one hand, the emergence of increasingly pluralistic societies, where a growing number of citizens are bearers of religious convictions, which calls for the elaboration of new frameworks of public engagement and civic coexistence; and, on the other, from the crisis of secularism and secular consciousness,

[1] Habermas, "Notes on a Post-Secular Society".

characterised by a progressive fragmentation of values and an underlying incapacity to address pressing ethical and political questions (such as euthanasia or social justice) in a context of increasing neoliberal globalization.[2] These two questions, according to Habermas, demand new sources of moral inspiration and interpretation and suggest that 'the modernization of public consciousness' can no longer be conceived solely as the secularisation of religious sensibilities, but demands a reflexive cooperative effort of both secular and religious mentalities.[3] Religion can thus act as a reservoir of moral resources for the secular domain.

The debate on postsecularism has primarily focused on the normative implications of this argument by discussing the possibility of 'a model of law and politics in which religious arguments are not excluded from political debate',[4] in order to face the challenges of pluralism, cohesion and integration in a globalised world in which secularism no longer or not always seems to be capable of providing the framework in which democratic participation, freedom, equality, justice and inclusion may be achieved. A second, interconnected, but less studied dimension of postsecularism concerns the underlying politics of resistance that characterises this concept. Once again Habermas seems to suggest this path when he argues that postsecularism is an attempt to rescue a 'pure practical reason' that 'can no longer be so confident in its ability to counteract a modernization spinning out of control armed solely with the insights of a theory of justice' and to oppose the disruptive forces of 'markets and administrative powers' which 'are displacing social solidarity'.[5] As Mariano Barbato points out, postsecularism for Habermas is the use of 'religious semantic potential' to oppose 'the pathologies of neoliberal modernisation and globalisation'.[6] Similarly, Paul Cloke and Justin Beaumont describe it as 'an expression of resistance to prevailing injustices under neoliberal global capitalism, and an energy and hope in something that brings more justice for all citizens'.[7]

This chapter introduces these two dimensions of the contemporary debate on postsecularism in IR. It starts by looking at Habermas' understanding of postsecularism and argue that, despite its merit and achievements, his perspective is shaped by an ultimately secular logic that reduces religion to a set of cognitive choices and a function in broader processes of social production, using it instrumentally to address the crisis of secularism by leaving the political authority of the latter fundamentally unchallenged. This, in turn, neglects religion as tradition, practice, and lived experience. These problems, we argue, rest on a disembodied and cognitive understanding of religion and, accordingly, of postsecularism. In the second section we discuss the role of emotions in shaping a contending 'embodied' understanding of postsecularism and provide an empirical illustration of this argument by exploring the 2011 Egyptian revolution. The discussion highlights how postsecularism cannot solely be conceived as a cooperative cognitive effort between secular and religious mentalities, but also as a form of resistance sustained by embodied practices. In the

[2] Ibid.
[3] Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 310.
[4] Cooke, "A Secular State for a Postsecular Society?", 225.
[5] Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 211, 111.
[6] Barbato, "Conceptions of the Self for Post-secular Emancipation", 549.
[7] Cloke and Beaumont, "Geographies of Postsecular Rapprochement in the City", 32.

third section, we analyse how cognitive and embodied understandings of postsecularism need not be seen in opposition but can actually work in cooperation. This, however, also requires reconsidering the traditional boundaries between secularism and religion and taking into account the authority of secularism as a power/knowledge regime that shapes contemporary understanding of religiosity and practices of solidarity. To illustrate this argument, we explore contemporary discourses surrounding migration, particularly those concerning responsibility for the deaths of migrants crossing the Mediterranean in the attempt to reach Europe and how they reproduce in a secular fashion an underlying theological argument that blames the migrants for their own deaths. We then discuss how faith-based organizations may be considered postsecular agents who resist this logic, and whose contribution encompasses *both* reasoned argumentations in the public sphere and embodied practices of solidarity towards migrants. The conclusion explores some of the implications of the arguments advanced in the chapter for future research agendas on postsecularism in IR.

1. Habermas' cognitive account of postsecularism

Until the mid-2000s, Habermas had overlooked the constitutive role of religion in the public sphere by endorsing a model of dialogic interaction based upon secular rationality. However, in his latest publications,[8] he has questioned the extent to which the ideal of a common human reason as the epistemic justification for the secular state can demand that citizens with religious beliefs act in the public sphere as if they were devoid of any religious conviction. The problem, he argues, is that 'many religious citizens would not be able to undertake such an artificial division within their own minds without jeopardizing their existence as pious persons'.[9] Moreover, should the secular state discourage religious persons and communities from expressing themselves politically, it would risk cutting 'itself off from key resources for the creation of meaning and identity. Secular citizens or those of other religious persuasions can under certain circumstances learn something from religious contributions'.[10] 'We should respect the "power of articulation" of religious language and recover the "regenerative power" it offers for a "dwindling normative consciousness"', yet 'without burning the bridges to secular languages and cultures.'[11]

To make room for religious contributions in the public sphere, Habermas suggests drawing a line between 'informal public sphere', where religious reason can flow unconstrained, and 'institutional public sphere', where only secular reason counts.[12] This separation means that for religious beliefs to have institutional representation, they must be 'translated' into secular language. *Separation* and *translation* are for Habermas essential requirements: separation to protect religious and cultural

[8] See in particular: Jürgen Habermas and et al., *An Awareness of What is Missing*; Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*; Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere"; Habermas and Ratzinger, *Dialectics of Secularization*.
[9] Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere", 8.
[10] Ibid., 10.
[11] Habermas cited in Harrington, "Habermas and the 'Post-Secular Society'", 544.
[12] Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere", 9.

minorities; translation to allow the wider public – be it secular or of a different faith – to understand and subject religious arguments to rational scrutiny.

This understanding of postsecularism is grounded in a shift from traditional to more reflexive forms of secular and religious consciousnesses (what Habermas would call 'postconventional morality') capable of questioning their own limitations and recognising the reciprocal validity of their respective arguments. For Habermas, postsecularism is an ethos grounded in the mind: it is the outcome of a cooperative cognitive effort of secular and religious citizens, both conceived as the expression of a postconventional consciousness capable of reflecting upon itself and using religion in a way that may help us 'express our best moral intuitions without tearing down the bridges to secular languages and cultures,'[13] thus keeping the boundaries of knowledge and faith firmly in place, preventing that reason may succumb to the potentially 'irrational effusion' of religious motives.[14]

Habermas' account has received two main criticisms. First, it restates the primacy of secular reason, as it requires that for religious arguments to have a space in the institutional public sphere, they be 'translated' into secular language. For Fred Dallmayr, however, the Habermasian idea that 'there is a standard [secular] public discourse whose language is readily accessible' is 'a myth of the Enlightenment'. He asks: Are not modern rationalist texts, from Kant to Rawls, 'exceedingly difficult texts constantly in need of interpretation and re-interpretation, and hence of translation into more accessible language? . . . Do the judgments of courts not always involve the interpretation, application, and thus practical translation of earlier legal texts, precedents, and judicial opinions? And do members of parliament not always claim to interpret, apply and hence translate the will of the "people"'?'[15] The second main criticism concerns Habermas' instrumental notion of religion, which reduces the latter to a set of cognitive choices and a function in broader processes of social production, where religion's main (and somehow paradoxical) task is to address the crisis of instrumental secular reason.

This perspective, as Luca Mavelli has argued elsewhere,[16] is the product of a dualistic image of human nature as the unstable mixture of body and soul, which in turn supports an idea of critique and emancipation as a process of transcendence of the body. This dualistic idea of human nature finds its most systematic instantiation in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Kant conceived of man as 'homo duplex', that is, as a 'sensibly affected rational being' split between the 'freedom of pure intellect' ('a rational nature . . . shared with God and the angels') and the 'desires of a sensuous nature'.[17] For Kant, our bodily and sensuous nature is 'morally corrupting', as it constrains our capacity to join 'the world of pure, self-governing intelligences',[18] where all concepts have the status of universal frameworks of moral and practical action. Accordingly, Kant grounded the possibility of

[13] Habermas cited in Harrington, "Habermas and the 'Post-Secular Society'", 544.
[14] Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 243.
[15] Dallmayr, "Post-secularity and (global) politics", 968.
[16] Mavelli, *Europe's Encounter with Islam*.
[17] Hunter, "The Morals of Metaphysics", 911, 910.
[18] Ibid., 912.

critique and emancipation on an impulse of self-transcendence whereby the individual rises above the bodily/phenomenal/empirical world to join the transcendental world of pure intellect.

Kant, however, deemed traditional religion as an essential component of this process of self-transcendence for two main reasons. First, religion can act as a motivational force that may elicit a moral life. As Emmet Kennedy explains, 'Kant thought it impossible to act morally if there were no sanctions to do so … He feared how we would be apt to act, if there were no ultimate reward or punishment. If the soul is mortal and all ends at death, man can calculate his pleasures and pains as he likes (hedonism)'.[19] Second, religion endows the secular with an understanding of critique as a process of self-transcendence where communion with God is replaced by communion with our 'higher intellect', that is, our soul. However, according to Kant, once traditional religion has motivated us to act morally and embrace a communion with our soul, it should leave the scene to 'rational religion', namely a 'universal moral faith' that, under the checks of reason, can perform its role of guardianship and source of inspiration for moral life.

Habermas' idea of postsecularism actualises Kant's notion of rational religion. Whereas for Kant traditional religion could act as a source of moral persuasion (often through the threat of eternal sanction), for Habermas it is a reservoir of moral resources. Whereas for Kant traditional religion provided a model of self-transcendence that enables the individual to grasp the universal law of morality, for Habermas it is part of the dialogic interaction between secular and religious mentalities that may enable us to 'express our best moral intuitions'. However, inasmuch as Kant considered that ultimately traditional religion should leave the scene for a universal rational form of religion, so Habermas conceives postsecularism as a domain in which secular reason has precedence and traditional religion can find a space only if translated into secular language. Finally, if Kant considered that rational religion was only possible through a process of transcendence of the senses, for Habermas the only dimension of traditional religion that may enable a postsecular public sphere concerns its cognitive moral aspects. Accordingly, Habermas focuses on religion's semantic potential and almost completely overlooks religion as a sensory and lived experience, practice, emotions, mode of subjectivation, or community of believers. Habermas, in other words, neglects the embodied dimension of religion as the latter is conceived as something that can undermine religion's semantic potential and lead to 'irrational effusion'.

Habermas' postsecularism as an ideal of critique and resistance to the crisis and instrumental rationality of secularism thus rests on a disembodied rendering of religion. This requires a shift from traditional to postsecular forms of religious allegiances. Once properly translated into secular language – i.e., once turned postsecular – the moral intuitions of the former can be useful to address the crisis of secular reason. This account, this section has argued, rests on a Kantian process of transcendence of the body, which supports an understanding of critique, emancipation, and resistance as part of the search for universal structures to oppose to the fluctuation of our empirical, emotional, and embodied condition. In the next section we discuss how this rendering of

[19] Kennedy, *Secularism and its Opponents*, 138.

postsecularism may curtail our capacity to conceptualise postsecular resistance in IR by looking at the 2011 Egyptian revolution.

2. An embodied understanding of postsecularism: The case of the 2011 Egyptian revolution

A distinctive image of the 2011 Egyptian revolution that led to the ousting of President Hosni Mubarak is that of the chanting crowds in Tahrir Square: 'self-organized plural groups working collectively "on the ground" and laying claim to the present and the future of Egypt'.[20] 'The people wants the fall of the regime' was the main slogan of the revolution. It embodied awareness of a newly found unity and a call for collective action that defeated long-established factionalisms. Indeed, a distinctive aspect of the initial (and short-lived) phase of the revolution was its cutting across the institutional, political, and psychological barriers that had long 'polarized Egypt's political terrain between more Islamically-oriented currents (most prominent among them, the Muslim Brotherhood) and secular-liberal ones'.[21] As Charles Hirschkind points out, '[c]ompeting visions of Egypt's future have long been divided along secular versus religious lines,'[22] to the effect that the polarisation between secularists and Islamists has been a central question in Egyptian politics, with implications for 'every sphere of the political and the social realms'.[23] Accordingly, the chanting crowds in Tahrir Square, comprised as they were of secularists, Islamists, Muslim Brothers, communists, leftists, and liberals, and where Muslims and Christians prayed together without being perceived by leftists and liberals as a threat, could be described as a postsecular moment of resistance to Mubarak's regime.

[20] Esmeir, "Anti-Authoritarian Revolution".
[21] Hirschkind, "New Media and Political Dissent in Egypt", 138–9.
[22] Hirschkind, "Beyond Secular and Religious", 50.
[23] Abdelrahman, *Civil Society Exposed*, 108.

Joint protest of secularists and Islamists in Tahrir Square, Cairo, February 2011

The intense postsecular rapprochement that marked the initial phase of the revolution deserves attention for two main reasons. First, the secularist-Islamist polarization in Egypt should not be understood exclusively as an expression of contending political visions, but also as an instantiation of secularism as 'an expression of the state's sovereign power'.[24] This perspective emphasizes that 'secularism involves less a separation of religion and politics than the fashioning of religion as an object of continual management and intervention' to make 'religious life and sensibility' *amenable* and *useful* to the requirements of state sovereignty.[25]

Secularism thus understood is the power to define the space, forms and meanings that religion may legitimately 'occupy in society'.[26] This is a power that the Mubarak regime constantly 'exploited over the last 30 years in order to ensure a weak opposition'.[27] The regime regularly presented itself as a moderate bank against the mounting wave of allegedly radical Islamist forces such as the Muslim Brotherhood, save for supporting ultra-conservative Islamic groups, such as the Salafists, as a counterbalancing 'Islamist alternative' and to boost its Islamic credentials. Mubarak's strategy was part of a tradition of sovereign power's management and 'use' of religion for political purposes. This includes President Nasser's decision to bring Al-Azhar University, the world centre of Islamic

[24] Agrama, "Secularism, Sovereignty, Indeterminacy", 500.
[25] Ibid., 499. See also Asad, *Formations of the Secular;* and Connolly, *Why I Am Not A Secularist*.
[26] Asad, Formations of the Secular, 210.
[27] Hirschkind, "New Media and Political Dissent in Egypt", 139.

knowledge, under direct control of the state in order to quell the opposition of the Muslim Brothers and propagate his vision of socialism, or President Sadat's decision to amend the political parties' law by forbidding them from carrying out any activity considered against the principles of Sharia and national unity in order to curb any potential challenge to the regime.[28]

The postsecular rapprochement between secularists and Islamists in Egypt, then, was not just – as in Habermas' formulation – the encounter of secular and religious mentalities recognising the reciprocal validity of their respective arguments, but also a form of resistance against the secular power of the Mubarak regime to polarize secular and religious identities and shape understandings of Islam complacent with sovereign power. Habermas' approach is unable to grasp this dimension as it conceives of secularism and religion as worldviews, rather than mutually dependent forms of power and knowledge where the portrayal of the secular as the domain of reason and argumentation entails the construction of the religious as the domain of emotions and irrationality.

Undoubtedly, the postsecular rapprochement between secularists and Islamists in Egypt was also marked by forms of dialogic engagement of the kind conceptualised by Habermas. In particular, digital activism contributed to creating a space of convergence for secularist and Islamist bloggers, which resulted in 'practices of public reason and dialogue' and forms of 'critical engagement'[29] concerning democratic reforms and opposition to those issues that plagued the life of ordinary Egyptians such as unemployment, tyranny, corruption, and mistreatment.

However, this dialogic space of interaction was also accompanied by more *visceral*, *emotional, and embodied* forms of postsecularism. Marc Lynch, for instance, discusses how Muslim Brothers' blogs often presented their 'human side', with family pictures and stories of daily life, allowing them to 'form relationships with non-Brother youth, each discovering the humanity of the other'.[30] 'I wanted to show that Brothers are humans who have the same dreams [as anyone else]. We have fun. We drink [tea and coffee]. We sit at cafés. We go to movies. We demonstrate . . . and we blog for freedom', wrote 'Abd al-Mun'im Mahmoud, author of the blog 'I Am the Muslim Brotherhood'.[31] This human element resonates with the reflections of a secular blogger 'Ala' 'Abd al-Fattah, who, following his encounter with several Muslim Brothers in jail, wrote on his blog: 'They were from this new breed of Islamist that reads blogs, watches al-Jazeera, sings sha'bi (popular) songs, talks about intense love stories and chants 'down with Mubarak'.[32]

This sense of emotional commonality found a vivid manifestation in resistance to the violence of the regime through the denunciation of the brutality of its political apparatus. Under the slogan 'No more fear of the state', a growing community of secularist and Islamist bloggers, since the mid-2000s, started to post on the internet images and videos of police abuses, showing how those being targeted were not just political opponents who supposedly threatened the regime, but ordinary

[28] Shehata, *Islamists and Secularists in Egypt*.
[29] See in particular: Ibid. and Lynch, "Young Brothers in Cyberspace".
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.

people whom the regime was supposed to protect. These images were picked up by independent media and given further resonance, with the effect of triggering a national debate that forced the government press to report the news and the government to defend itself from the accusation of torture.

Some of the bloggers who posted images and videos of tortured bodies were loosely connected to the Egyptian movement for change, also known as Kefaya (*Enough!*), demanding the end of Mubarak's regime and the implementation of democratic reforms. Established in 2004, this movement brought together a vast array of Egyptian opposition forces, from Muslim Brothers to secular leftists. Several Islamist bloggers, including Muslim Brothers, also contributed to circulate documents and videos of police abuses. As journalist and blogger Hossam el-Hamalawy stated following a meeting of bloggers in 2007 to coordinate a campaign against Mubarak's police torture: 'The small audience was a microcosm of a growing rich pluralistic blogosphere. There were religious and secularists, veiled and unveiled, Copts and Muslims, leftists, liberal, Islamists and independents– all keen on ridding Egypt of its police torture epidemic'.[33] It is noteworthy that the brief resume of the conference written by el-Hamalawy, an avowed secular socialist, appeared on the Muslim Brotherhood website, to which he is a regular contributor. This website published a number of articles, documents, images and videos against torture, often in collaboration with other opposition movements.[34]

By making videos and images of police abuses on ordinary people public, Egyptian bloggers not only contributed to unleash a sense of moral indignation and human solidarity beyond the secularist-Islamist polarisation, but enacted a politics of resistance centred on the body. By forcing the tortured body back into the public domain, images and videos contributed to disclosing and making visible the inscriptions of power/knowledge regimes onto the body, thus turning the body from an 'inscribed surface of events'[35] at the mercy of the regime's power, into a source of resistance. Violated bodies became the metaphor of a different kind of unity, namely a postsecular unity encompassing all Egyptians and symbolised by the body of Egypt – a body 'abused, raped and beaten by the state',[36] but also capable of resisting, if only for the initial phase of the revolution and the few years running up to it, the secularist-Islamist fracture and the regime that fomented it.

A key moment of this postsecular politics of resistance centred on the tortured body was the death of Khaled Said, dubbed by the media as 'the face that launched a revolution'.[37] Khaled Said was a 28-year-old from the Egyptian coastal city of Alexandria. On June 6 2010, he was beaten to death by two plainclothes officers who seized him in an internet cafe. When summoned to the morgue the next day, Khaled's family members found themselves in front of a completely disfigured face. Khaled's head was lying on a pool of blood and showed several fractures; his nose was broken, some

[33] El-Hamalawy, "Bloggers and Rights Activists Against Torture Meeting".
[34] Azimi, "Bloggers, Kifaya and Ikhwanweb Against Torture".
[35] Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", 87.
[36] Rifaat, "Blogging the Body", 66.
[37] Ross and Cole, "Egypt: The Face that Launched a Revolution".

of his front teeth missing, and his jaw was dislocated. Khaled's relatives managed to snap a picture of his deformed face and posted it on the internet together with the accusation that Khaled 'was tortured to death for possessing video material that implicates members of the police in a drug deal'.[38]

The picture triggered a large outcry, with massive protests in Alexandria and Cairo at the end of June 2010, and went viral at the beginning of July, when Wael Ghonim, a young Google executive, opened a Facebook page entitled 'We are all Khaled Said', which began to attract supporters in the order of thousands.[39] According to Human Rights Watch, one of the reasons for the unprecedented wave of protests which followed the death of Khaled Said is that many people could identify with him as victims of police violence.[40] This emotional identification went beyond the sharing of a traumatic experience. As was written in the aftermath of his death, Khaled Said 'was someone's son, someone's brother, someone's friend, someone's neighbour, someone's customer, and if not for what had happened, someone's future'.[41] That is, Said was an ordinary citizen, who – to borrow the words of a female opposition blogger named Baheyya in a 2005 post – represented 'an entire subculture of invisible citizens in this country with first-hand experience of the state's ferocity'; men and women with 'scarred souls and violated bodies whose stories we don't know'.[42] On the eve of the massive protests which led to the resignation of Hosni Mubarak, the Facebook page 'We are all Khaled Said' had reached more than 80.000 supporters. It was the first, together with the April 6 Youth Movement Facebook group, to invite Egyptians to protest on January 25 (not incidentally, National Police Day) through a Facebook event page called 'The Day of the Revolution Against Torture, Poverty, Corruption and Unemployment'.[43]

Resistance to the violence of the regime, to be sure, was not the 'cause' of the revolution, but rather one of the 'catalysts' which precipitated the long list of Egyptian grievances (poverty, corruption, inequality, restriction of liberties) by bringing the confrontation with the regime onto an almost *existential* level, where the tortured body made public epitomized an ultimate form of *negation of life*. This existential dimension culminated in the 'exceptional existential moment' of the revolution which, as Hussein Ali Agrama points out, saw the protestors standing 'apart from the modern game of defining and distinguishing religion and politics', to the effect that they 'expressed every potential language of justice, secular or religious, but embraced none'.[44] The crowds in Tahrir Square where secularists and Islamists gathered together were an exceptional (and short-lived) expression of a postsecular politics of resistance that drew inspiration from both reason and emotions.

[38] Al Jazeera, "Police killing sparks Egypt protest".
[39] http://www.facebook.com/ElShaheeed (Arabic version); http://www.facebook.com/elshaheeed.co.uk (English version); see also http://www.elshaheeed.co.uk/.
[40] Human Rights Watch, "Work on Him Until He Confesses", 1.
[41] Ali, "Egypt's Collision Course With History".
[42] Baheyya, "Remeber Them".
[43] Sutter, "The faces of Egypt's 'Revolution 2.0".
[44] Agrama, "Asecular Revolution".

3. Towards a cognitive *and* embodied postsecularism: The case of faith-based organisation and migration

The Egyptian case highlights three main limits of Habermas' account. First, by neglecting the body and emotions and confining postsecularism to the instrumental use of the moral teachings of religion to cure the distortions of secularism, Habermas' approach makes it impossible to grasp the emotional dimension of postsecular resistance and the extent to which it may be linked to embodied practices. Second, by neglecting the idea that secularism may be a tool of power and knowledge that strives to shape forms of religiosity complacent with sovereign power, Habermas' approach makes it difficult to distinguish between those religious doctrines (such as Salafism in Egypt) that support sovereign power, however unjust and violent it may be, and those grassroots, heterogeneous and more spontaneous forms of religiosity that emerged in the early stages of the Egyptian uprising as manifested in the common prayers of Muslims and Christians, in secularists guarding Muslims to ensure their security, or in Muslims guarding Coptic churches during Christian prayers. The third limit of Habermas' idea of postsecularism concerns the underlying separation between secularism and religion. If one considers Carl Schmitt's famous argument that 'all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts',[45] abandons Habermas' idea of these two spheres as worldviews, and embraces the idea that they may be political categories whereby regimes of power and knowledge are deployed, what emerges is the possibility that the boundary separating secularism and religion may not be as 'hard' as Habermas suggests.

To illustrate this argument, we discuss how contemporary discourses surrounding migration, particularly those concerning responsibility for the deaths of migrants crossing the Mediterranean in the attempt to reach the coasts of Europe, reproduce in a secular fashion an underlying theological discourse which blames the migrants for their own deaths. Consider, for instance, the October 2014 UK Government announcement that it would no longer support search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean on the grounds that such operations are 'an unintended "pull factor", encouraging more migrants to attempt the dangerous sea crossing and thereby leading to more tragic and unnecessary deaths'.[46] The construction and distribution of responsibility that frames this argument portrays the migrants as fundamentally irresponsible as they have chosen to embark on a journey that between January and September 2014 saw 3000 people lose their lives,[47] and over 20,000 deaths in the last twenty years.[48] This argument is made possible by deliberately neglecting the 'push factors' behind the lives packed on the precarious boats crossing the Mediterranean, namely extreme poverty, persecution, war, famines and genocide, amongst others, with migrants turned into weapons by European fears of invasion and unscrupulous regimes such as Gaddafi's and the Islamic State in Libya. By ignoring these 'push factors', the UK can portray itself as a responsible actor, whose responsibility consists in letting the irresponsible migrants drown to prevent future

[45] Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 42.
[46] Travis, "UK axes support".
[47] Brian and Laczko, "Fatal Journeys".
[48] Shenker, "Mediterranean migrant deaths".

'unnecessary deaths'. In this account, the migrants are the only ones to blame for their own death. The UK is by no means alone is such a harsh stance, with successive Australian governments using similar logic to justify the excision of the entire Australian mainland from the migration zone for anyone arriving by boat, the current 'stop the boats' policy[49] and the decision to leave the bodies of drowned asylum seekers in the ocean.[50] As Maley points out, such policies are not about 'saving lives' or preventing 'unnecessary deaths'. 'The real message of the new Australian [and UK] approach is a simple one: "Go and die somewhere else"'.[51]

This logic enables the construction of migrants as bare lives, namely lives that can be 'killed with impunity'.[52] They can be killed by the violence of the secular law (even though they have not yet violated any law), which has decreed the halt of search and rescue operations, and be denied compassion for their tragic destiny. This condemnation, we argue, can be understood as a form of secular theodicy or sociodicy. Theodicy concerns the problems of how to reconcile the existences of God with the presence of evil in the world, namely, 'How is it that a power which is said to be at once omnipotent and kind could have created such an irrational world of undeserved suffering, unpunished injustice and hopeless stupidity"?[53] According to Max Weber, the question of theodicy is *the* fundamental question of all religions, which they have addressed by inscribing suffering, injustice and violence in the inscrutable God-given order of creation. However, Weber contends, with the process of secularization and the emergence of a Man-made order theodicy does not disappear, but simply secularises.[54] Suffering, violence and inequality no longer find their meaning and justification in God, but either in the greater good (of society, the state, the economy) or as the outcome of individual (ir)responsibility.

Secular theodicies include, for instance, the liberal idea that income inequalities can be an incentive for the worst-off to improve their condition with overall benefits for society as a whole through 'the invisible hand' of the market[55] or, according to Pierre Bourdieu, neoliberalism as a whole. The latter, Bourdieu argues, 'justifies suffering on the ground that it is necessary for economic progress', and legitimates a 'racism of intelligence' which depicts the poor as 'intellectually incapable' and therefore responsible for their own condition.[56] When it comes to the drowned migrants, the underlying secular theodicy behind their double condemnation enables the projection of responsibility whereby they are considered to merely deserve their due. In this framework, letting migrants drown becomes rational and instrumental to insure that the social fabric will not be destroyed by the presence of 'others', that jobs will not be taken, that identities will be preserved.

[49] Cullen, "Bowen defends migration policy rethink".
[50] Jabour, "Bodies of drowned asylum seekers".
[51] Maley, "Die somewhere else".
[52] Agamben, *Homo Sacer*.
[53] Weber, "Politics as Vocation", 122.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Elster, "Snobs", 10.
[56] Bourdieu, *Acts of Resistance*, 35; Bourdieu, *Firing back*, 33.

This case raises two important questions in relation to Habermas' argument. First, while the justification to no longer support search and rescue operations is secular and rational, its underlying logic rests on and reproduces a theological discourse. In fact, one may argue that the justification not to save drowning migrants is not rational, but purely instrumental, as it exploits popular emotional and irrational fears of 'strangers'. And yet, from the government's perspective it may be absolutely rational to second these feelings for the purpose of preserving power. What seems certain is that at the heart of the matter there is an ultimately dehumanizing logic that constructs migrants as a security issue rather than human beings in need of solidarity. Habermas' critique of a secular instrumental reason dominated by the disruptive forces of 'markets and administrative powers' which 'are displacing social solidarity' and incapable to address pressing ethical and political questions speaks to this case. However, the postsecular solution he advocates – drawing on the moral intuitions of faith in order to infuse values into the secular domain – rests on the problematic assumption that secularism and religion are two different and clearly demarcated worldviews. As the above discussion suggests, however, these two domains may often be indistinguishable. If this is the case, postsecularism cannot be conceived solely as the cooperative cognitive effort of secular and religious views, but should be the very attempt to question these categories whenever they are employed to justify forms of violence, oppression, and exclusion. To this end, we contend, the cognitive effort cannot be thought in isolation from emotional and embodied practices of resistance.

Grassroots actors involved in forced migration are a case in point, transcending the religious/secular divide and engaging in embodied practices of solidarity and resistance with asylum seekers and refugees. These practices have emerged largely in response to the secular theodicies described above, where asylum seekers and refugees are criminalized, cast as lawbreakers, 'queue jumpers' and potential terrorists,[57] justifying increasingly harsh policies of marginalization and exclusion. Faith-based actors' resistance to these policies draws on traditions of sanctuary and asylum that exist across numerous religious traditions.[58] Actions range from providing housing assistance, food, education and healthcare;[59] billeting asylum seekers with host families to build understanding;[60] visiting and praying with asylum seekers in detention centres;[61] and nonviolent protest. Grassroots actors draw on a range of resources, both 'religious' and 'secular', to critique and challenge the theodicies underlying governments' asylum policies, offering alternative moral frameworks that utilize 'religious' and 'secular' arguments to recast migration as a humanitarian rather than a security issue, and emphasise common bonds of shared humanity between asylum seekers and host populations.

Let us consider two recent cases exemplifying cognitive and embodied postsecular resistance to secular theodicy. Led by a group of multidenominational Christian leaders and including activists from many and no faith traditions, Love Makes A Way (LMAW) is a protest movement in Australia,

[57] Abbott, "Press Conference".
[58] Wilson, "Much to be proud of, much to be done".
[59] See, for example, Rabben, *Give Refuge to the Stranger*.
[60] Stapleton, "France: more than space to live".
[61] Wilson, "Theorizing religion as politics".

self-consciously positioned as a continuation of the nonviolent civil disobedience engaged in by Martin Luther King Jr and his followers during the US Civil Rights Movement.[62] LMAW's main goal is to raise awareness about the plight of children in detention and campaign for their release. Protesters conduct 'pray-ins' at the offices of Australian parliamentarians.[63] When asked to leave, the protesters refuse, saying they will stay until they are told when all children will be released from detention. Consequently, 138 protesters have been arrested and charged, approximately half of who are clergy and nuns. Some have been strip searched by police. To date, however, subsequent court hearings have resulted in all charges being dismissed, or small fines.[64]

Following one court hearing, protesters stripped to their underwear outside the courtroom before walking to the Foreign Affairs Minister's office as an act of defiance in response to being strip searched by police. As the activists were disrobing, spokesperson Jarrod McKenna read from Matthew 5:38-44, going on to say, 'Those who thought that strip searches would be enough to stop us; well, we serve with Jesus, who was strip-searched before he went to the cross.'[65] McKenna's statement, coupled with the simultaneous act of stripping by the protesters, is a moment in which the cognitive and embodied practices of postsecular resistance can be clearly seen operating together.

Love Makes A Way protesters march from the Perth Court House to the Offices of Julie Bishop, MP, Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs at the time of writing.

A second example is the Palm Sunday 'Walk for justice for refugees'. While Palm Sunday has historically been a focal point of many left-leaning protest and resistance movements, since 2014 in Australia the marches have focused specifically on opposing the Australian government's treatment

[62] Gray, "Loving disobedience".
[63] Wilson, "Theorizing religion as politics".
[64] Gray, "Loving disobedience".
[65] Wahlquist, "Christians strip off in Perth court protest".

of asylum seekers. Participants range from religious leaders, lay people, activists, unionists, people of all faiths and none.[66] Protesters assemble outside landmarks in capital cities then march through central business areas. Through the physical act of gathering and walking together, disrupting traffic and carrying signs such as 'Jesus was a refugee', protesters engage in embodied acts of resistance, while at the same time, through speeches given by leading figures in business, the arts and civil society, the cognitive form of postsecular resistance is also visible.

Images from the 2015 Palm Sunday March for Justice for Refugees in Melbourne, Australia

At the 2015 Perth gathering, acclaimed Australian author Tim Winton delivered a speech exemplifying the postsecular resistance we are describing in this chapter. Winton challenged the secular theodicy underlying government policies, offering an alternative theodicy in which the Australian government and the fear and apathy of the Australian public are responsible for the fate of asylum seekers, not the migrants themselves:

> So great and so wild is our fear, we can no longer see them [asylum seekers] as people, as fellow humans. First, we criminalised them. Then, we turned them into faceless objects… for someone seeking asylum, someone arriving by boat, this special species of creature called a

[66] Lillebuen, "Church-goers, activists come together".

> "boat person"... Pity is forbidden. All the usual standards are overturned. Their legal right to seek asylum is denied. They're vilified as "illegals". And their suffering is denied. As if they're not our brothers and sisters. Yes, we hate suffering. But apparently their kind of suffering is no longer legitimate. And therefore, it's no longer our problem. Our moral and legal obligations to help them are null and void.[67]

Winton offers an alternative moral framework that draws on both 'secular' and 'religious' resources, including 'mateship' and 'a fair go', themes central to Australian national identity. He draws on imagery and narratives from the Christian tradition to critique dominant attitudes towards asylum seekers, while at the same time lauding secular egalitarianism as a defining characteristic of Australia:

> There's a punitive spirit abroad, something closer to Victorian England than the modern, secular, egalitarian country I love… In this country, a nation built upon people fleeing brutes and brutality for 200 years, we have a tradition of fairness and decency and openness of which we're rightly proud. Whether we're inspired by the Christian parable of the Good Samaritan, the universal dignity of humankind, or the sanctity of the individual, we've always thought it low and cowardly to avert our gaze from someone in trouble or need, to turn our face from them as though they did not exist… That's where our tradition of mateship comes from. Not from closing ranks against the outsider, but from lifting someone else up, helping them out, resisting the cowardly urge to walk by…
>
> Now, of course, we don't see faces. And that's no accident. The government hides them from us… Asylum seekers are rendered as objects, creatures, cargo, contraband, and criminals. And so, quite deliberately, the old common sense of human decency is supplanted by a new consensus…
>
> Jesus said: "What shall it profit a man to gain the whole world only to lose his soul?" And I wonder: What does it profit a people to do likewise, to shun the weak and punish the oppressed, to cage children, and make criminals out of refugees? What about our soul as a people?[68]

Winton's speech, arguably, is not a call to a particular kind of secular or religious ethics, but a plea for an ethics that transcends such divisions and instead focuses on a sense of common humanity, a postsecular ethics, a plea echoed and taken up by numerous actors involved in asylum politics, within and beyond Australia.

We have argued, in this section, that the secular/religious divide underpinning much Western political practice and analysis of religion in IR must be rethought, moving away from understanding this division as a description of worldviews and instead conceiving the secular and the religious as political categories where regimes of knowledge and power are (re)produced, the line between

[67] Winton, "State the soul-searching Australia".
[68] Ibid.

these political categories far more blurred than Habermasian postsecularism acknowledges. The analysis of the politics of contemporary forced migration highlighted how the secular and the religious operate in this way, firstly in the logic employed by state powers to exclude asylum seekers, which, following Weber, we have described as secular theodicies, and secondly in the responses of grassroots actors challenging and resisting these secular theodicies. Not only do these grassroots actors transcend the division between religious and secular, they also employ cognitive and embodied forms of postsecular resistance to challenge secular formations of power that oppress and exclude.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the emergence of postsecularism as a form of critique and resistance to dominant secular, (neo)liberal ethics in contemporary IR. Much of the recent debate around postsecularism has been catalysed by the Habermasian approach, which, as we noted, is problematic for a number of reasons. Habermasian postsecularism ultimately operates from within the prevailing secular framework and logic. This is evident, firstly, in its construction of religion as a primarily cognitive activity, neglecting the embodied, lived, experiential dimensions of religion. Secondly, Habermas neglects the power of secularism, enabling it to construct religion in narrow ways and delimit where and when religion can appropriately enter and contribute to debates within the public sphere. In essence, then, Habermasian postsecularism reinforces rather than disrupts the secular/religious divide that underpins the structures and logics giving shape to contemporary Western politics and society.

Following on from this critique, we have suggested several ways in which the debate surrounding postsecularism may be expanded to address the shortcomings of the Habermasian approach and enable further nuance and complexity in the analysis of religion in IR. The first of these is shifting the focus of the postsecular from religion as a cognitive activity to understanding it as both cognitive and embodied. The Egyptian and the asylum cases show the limits of a purely cognitive account of postsecularism. However, the necessity of a postsecular imagination capable to consider this embodied, practical, and experiential dimension of faith clashes with the cognitive understanding of religion sustained by the power/knowledge regime of Western secularism. The apprehension for any attempt at reconsidering the boundary between the secular and the religious, the rational and the emotional, is well summarised by Habermas: '[Once the] boundary between faith and knowledge becomes porous, and once religious motives force their way into philosophy under false pretences, reason loses its foothold and succumbs to irrational effusion'.

The question of the postsecular crosses paths with another surprisingly neglected area of inquiry in IR, namely the study of emotions in world politics. Although not specifically aimed at addressing this debate, this chapter nonetheless explored some of the roles that emotions played in the 2011 Egyptian revolutions and how an embodied understanding of postsecular resistance in a non-

Western setting could prove a particularly insightful lens to this end. The analysis in this chapter thus suggests three potential future research avenues on the postsecular in IR.

First, although dominant, the Kantian-Habermasian perspective is not the only tradition of Western secularism. William Connolly, for instance, has pointed in the direction of a minor Western tradition centred on the thought of Baruch Spinoza whose 'metaphysical monism' challenges the mind/body dualism, considering them as expressions of the same substance.[69] This perspective, Connolly contends, advances an idea of ethics not as the search for universal categorical imperatives, but as an embodied-spiritual cultivation of ethical dispositions, resisting 'the thin intellectualism that grips secularism – that is, the idea that thinking can be separated from its affective dimension and that exercises of the self and collective rituals merely represent or symbolize beliefs'.[70] The challenge for scholars of postsecularism in IR is thus to move beyond the Kantian-Habermasian 'cognitive' tradition of secularity by considering conceptual resources of contending secular traditions sensitive to emotions, and how these traditions may be 'harness[ed] for radical purposes,'[71] such as devising modes of subjectivity beyond the mind/body dualism or disclosing the power/knowledge inscriptions of existing secular formations.

Second, the argument advanced in this chapter invites us to look beyond the Western canon and reflect upon the postsecular question in non-Western settings. This leads to another key implication of the analysis, namely that the postsecular cannot be considered an exclusive concern of Western-European societies as Habermas suggests.[72] There is no doubt that '[e]xtant conceptions of secularity, secularisation or secularism inevitably find their originary impetus in Protestant Christian settlements negotiated within European cultural spaces'.[73] Yet, it is also the case that histories of the 'Western' and 'non-Western' worlds are connected and that secularism is an important 'derivative discourse' in the Islamic world and elsewhere, where it 'acquired a familiar currency in shaping models to banish religion from politics'.[74]

Third, both the Egyptian and the asylum cases demonstrate that, contra Habermas, the secular and the religious are not distinct, separate worldviews but rather domains of knowledge and power that can be deployed to mutually constitute and reinforce one another in the service of or in resistance to sovereign power. Although the process of disciplining religion could be described as an almost universal corollary of processes of state formation, these reflections suggest the impossibility of a single, undifferentiated understanding of the postsecular for the international system and the necessity to interrogate contextual issues that underpin postsecularism, starting with an investigation of the specific forms and practices of secularism. The power of secularism of the Mubarak regime to foster expressions of religiosity complacent with sovereign power, for example, cannot be considered in isolation from a more general crisis of the Islamic tradition as marked by a

[69] Connolly, "Europe: A Minor Tradition", 83.
[70] Ibid., 84.
[71] Linklater, *The Transformation of Political Community*, 5.
[72] Habermas, "Notes on a Post-Secular Society".
[73] Pasha, "Islam and the postsecular", 1047.
[74] Ibid., 1052.

progressive disconnection between dogma and conduct. Egyptian novelist Alaa Al Aswany draws a connection between the fact that in Islam 'rituals have become an end in themselves instead of a means to improve and chasten oneself' and the widespread and systematic use of torture in Egypt.[75] It is astonishing, he writes, to think that in the 'human slaughterhouses' of State Security premises 'there is always a prayer room where the torturers can perform their prayers at the appointed times . . . Those responsible for wrecking the lives of these wretches and their families are Muslims who are rarely without calluses on their foreheads from regular praying and who never feel that what they are doing makes them any less religious.'[76] The incapacity of Islam to offer resistance against this violence is a product of a 'permanent and systematic policy applied by the state' as well as of an Islam that 'has been transformed into a package of measures a Muslim has to complete without necessarily having any effect on his or her conduct of life'.[77]

Similarly, the political actors articulating and implementation of the secular theodicy we described where migrants are blamed for their own fate, constructed as objects undeserving of compassion and humanity, are often the same political actors proclaiming the importance of Christianity in their own personal lives as well as the life of the nation.[78] At the same time, activists involved in resisting the secular theodicies of governments on migration draw on both 'secular' and 'religious', cognitive and embodied modes of resistance. Both cases highlight that understanding the postsecular as a cognitive cooperation between two worldviews does not do justice to the complex ways in which the secular and the religious are entangled as domains of power and knowledge either in the service of or in resistance to the state in contemporary politics.

As we have attempted to show, the postsecular involves rethinking our understanding of subjectivity beyond the mind/body dichotomy; our understanding of the boundary between the secular and the religious as the product of multiple regimes of power and knowledge, rather than a natural divide; and our understanding of the international, in a perspective which acknowledges the European genealogy of secularity, but is also cognisant of the challenges to secular formations in the so-called 'Islamic world' and beyond. Ultimately, the postsecular offers a new critical edge to reconsider the very categories of critique and resistance by interrogating and questioning the boundary between the secular and the religious, turning this boundary into a space in which new forms of embodied political agency and imagination may be observed.

[75] Al Aswany, *On the State of Egypt*, 152.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.
[78] See for instance Cameron (2014), "Opening speech".