



# **Becoming Recognizable**

## **Postcolonial Independence and the Reification of Religion**

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### **Abstract**

The thesis argues that international scholarship has failed to take into account the manner in which the process of recognition presupposes and reproduces already recognizable objects and agents. The example used in the thesis is that extant studies on the recognition of religion in international affairs assume that religion is always already present and intelligible as a category of political thought and action. It continues to demonstrate how this tendency is inherent in the theory and practices of recognition more broadly. In forgoing study of the processes through which these agents and objects were differentiated and individuated in the first place, recognition cannot but contribute to their reification. Moving beyond this impasse in IR Theory, the thesis argues, requires a more finely attuned genealogical sensitivity when it comes to the question how entities of international politics become recognizable. This suggests that scholars dwell on the processes through which they are constituted and made intelligible, i.e. recognizable.

This insight is illustrated with reference to how “religion” became internationally recognizable as a differentiable and politically relevant category in and through two distinct yet related historical processes: the partition of South Asia with the establishment of Pakistan and the foundation of the state of Israel in the wake of the demise of the British Empire. Both states were claimed, enacted and subsequently recognized along the lines of religious difference; Muslim/non-Muslim in the case of Pakistan and Jew/non-Jew in the case of Israel. By studying macro and micro processes through which religion became a differentiated, taken-for-granted juridical, cultural and political category the thesis shows the processes through which religion became recognizable and how this particular recognizable version of religion was reified through the international recognition thereof, that is, the recognition of these two states as a Muslim Homeland and a Jewish National Home.

The thesis thus argues against the assumption that religion, in and of itself is a root cause in the establishment of these two states, a source of violence in the

ongoing conflicts with their neighbors, or an instrument of peace. Rather it argues that religion was made recognizable and reified in a particular shape and meaning through the processes of the international recognition of the two post-colonial states. Rather than looking to recognize the importance of religion in international affairs, the thesis investigates the multiple manners in which religion emerged as a politically salient point of reference according to which a changing international order took shape and along the lines of which new international agency was and is claimed and recognized.



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### **Bio**

Maria Birnbaum is a researcher of International Relations at the European University Institute focusing on International Political Theory, Critical Theory, Secularism, Culture, Religion and Colonial History of the Middle East and South Asia. She has been a visiting scholar at Northwestern University and currently holds a position as a research assistant in the ERC funded project ReligioWest. Birnbaum's latest publication *Exclusive Pluralism* is forthcoming with Brill.