***Securing the Sacred: Religion, National Security, and the Western State***. By Robert M. Bosco. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2014. 160 pp., $50.00 hardcover (ISBN-13: 978-0-472-11922-6).

***Religion in the Military Worldwide***. Edited by Ron E. Hassner. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013. 254 pp., $28.99 paperback (ISBN-13: 978-1-107-61364-5).

**Abstract**

This review essay explores the security-religion nexus by evaluating two books contributing to the “restorative turn” in International Relations (IR) theory and practice. While *Securing the Sacred* and *Religion in the Military Worldwide* “bring religion back” into the realm of international politics and security, I argue that the analytical purpose of the books is problematic, given that both studies imply a normative logic to the security-religion nexus. This is difficult for two reasons. First, it rests on an assumption about the resurgence of religion in the world and the conduct of research. Second, it furthers a powerful discourse in which religion has a rightful place in an orderly society. I therefore provide a critical contribution to the security-religion nexus by urging scholars of religion and security to embrace their underlying normative positions.

**Keywords:**

Security-religion nexus, critical, securitization, normativity

**A critical contribution to the “security-religion” nexus: going beyond the analytical**

Until recently, the subject of religion had essentially dropped from the radar of International Relations (IR) scholarship, producing a “secularized discipline” (Philpott 2002:69). The absence of religion was associated with the Westphalian peace and the rise of the “modern” state (Fox and Sandler 2004:2; Laustsen and Wæver 2000:706; Mavelli and Petito 2014a:3; Philpott 2002; Sandal and Fox 2013:2). Since Westphalia, the conventional wisdom poses religion as the ultimate threat to order and civility (Laustsen and Wæver 2000), and as a cause of violence (Sandal 2012:65), which some commentators have termed the “security-religion” nexus (Seiple and Hoover 2004). Ironically, argue Fox and Sandler (2004:2), “rather than causing religion’s demise, modernity has caused a resurgence of religion.” A burgeoning literature on religion in IR has emerged in the last decade and religion now holds a prominent place in the discipline.[[1]](#footnote-1) A conversation on the notion of post-secularity is also well under way.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Hassner’s edited volume*, Religion in the Military Worldwide* and Bosco’s *Securing the Sacred: Religion, National Security, and the Western State*, should be read as welcomed efforts to theoretically and empirically re-engage with the politics of religion in IR. They both enquire into the relationship between church and state and raise further questions on the connection between the sacred, the secular and security, which provides an opportunity to evaluate the books together. While they are much acclaimed contributions to the field, this review is concerned with their methodological underpinnings, which I argue do not permit an exhaustive critique of the security-religion nexus*.* To be precise, they both question the nexus by giving an account of religion that does not represent a threat to civil order, but rather as non-essentialized, and in Bosco’s work, as an apparatus of discursive strategy. For this reason, Bosco and Hassner’s contributions should be widely read. Yet, I contend that the critique of the security-religion nexus remains limited in both books. Understanding the latter is the goal of the review. By doing so, I offer a critical contribution to the security-religion nexus, which should push the argument of these books beyond their analytical intent. Notwithstanding the main differences between the two books (the primary being that one is an edited collection, the other a monograph), taken together, they reveal and share a lack of normative impetus that is representative of the “restorative turn” on which I will focus. The “restorative turn” furthers the idea that religion has to be “brought back in” to the field of IR and is “an attempt to restore religion to its proper place in International Relations and practice” (Hurd 2012:944). While some chapters of Hassner’s collection are more reflexive than others, my argument is intended for the volume *as a whole*. Under limited space, I unfortunately have not done justice to every contributors of Hassner’s volume.

The review goes as follow: I first provide a general evaluation of the work of Hassner and Bosco in relation to their core arguments, their methodologies and their contribution to the literature. Here, I draw on their similarities and differences. In the second section, I highlight two elements of the books that are problematic for a critical approach to the security-religion nexus: the divide between the discursive and the material and their claims on delivering non-normative arguments. Drawing on the methodological bias and assumptions on which the two books rely, forces one to take a critical approach to the security-religion nexus, for they both presuppose an underlying normative logic.

**Hassner and Bosco’s contributions**

Bosco and the authors of *Religion in the Military Worldwide* offer an innovative comparative analysis of the role of religion in various nation-states. While Bosco specifically focuses on Islam in three secular states (France, the United Kingdom and the United States), the edited volume by Hassner provides an empirically grounded exploration of religion in the military of secular *and* religious states. Assessing the impact of religion in civil society and in the military is certainly not the same kind of investigation. However, the debates over religious freedom in civil society, according to Hassner (2013:5), are mirrored in the military. In that respect, both books demonstrate that religion is pervasive and significant for civil society and the military, even in the most “secular” states.[[3]](#footnote-3)

To give an example, Skabelund and Ishikawa (2013:23) note that two thirds of the population in Japan do not believe in god or gods. During their ethnographic work, they were repeatedly told that the Self-Defense Force (SDF) had no relationship with any particular religion (Skabelund and Ishikawa 2013:26).[[4]](#footnote-4) Yet, numerous Shinto practices are favored within the military, at the expense of Buddhist and Christian rituals (Skabelund and Ishikawa 2013:26), even when the Buddhist faith represents twenty percent of believers and Shinto only six percent (Skabelund and Ishikawa 2013:25). In the end, Skabelund and Ishikawa argue that the state, Shinto and the military form a trilateral relationship that is inseparable. In the United States, Cook (2013) highlights how the tension between the two arrangements of the First Amendment of the American constitution has created a fundamental misrepresentation of religion’s role in the constitutional development of the U.S.[[5]](#footnote-5) This has led to a distortion of history whereby the United States is viewed as “God’s chosen nation” (Cook 2013:182), which needs to be “restored” from the unfortunate secular turn and the deviation from its founders (Cook 2013:188). This not only challenges how the oath to the constitution is understood, which is at the heart of military ethics, but it also exacerbates religious misinterpretations, at times when the U.S. forces are engaged in predominantly Muslim countries (Cook 2013:185). Incidents such as the painting of “Jesus killed Mohammad” on the side of US convoys in Iraq during Easter “clearly undermine efforts to prevent Muslims from interpreting the conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere as a crusade against Muslims generally” (Cook 2013:191). As Marsden (2014:482-3) observes, a military culture inspired by an evangelical worldview can often reject religious pluralism and promote its own religious agenda instead. These examples confirm that the relationship between church and state is often an ambivalent one and one that can produce preoccupying results.

Bosco (2014:4) highlights how governments can use religion to their own advantage. After the September 11 attacks, Bosco contends that the discursive strategy of the United States, France and the United Kingdom, short-circuited Huntington’s (1993) Clash of Civilizations theory by replacing it “with a different narrative about a war or conflict, not between Islam and the West, but *within* the religion of Islam.” In this context, the “distorted” and “extremist” interpretation of Islam, the one adopted by Islamic terrorists, was securitized, whereby the referent object for security was “moderate” Islam, the “true” meaning of Islam. The “true” threat is thus a twisted interpretation of Islam, whose peaceful essence is eternal (Bosco 2014:4). By doing so, the U.S., the U.K. and France, sought to reform Islam itself by promoting “authentic” Islam, upon which the neoliberal order depends (Bosco 2014:5). As Bosco (2014:28) rightly points out, “if the War on Terror had a religious component, there was no reason why the Western state too could not harness religion as a weapon.”

Nevertheless, Hassner and Bosco study the security-religion nexus using different methodologies and tools. Hassner’s book should be viewed in line with the call to “study-up” (Nader 1974), in studying the powerful rather than the powerless and disadvantaged, a usual anthropological partiality. There is relatively little research (in anthropology) on studying institutions that hold power and in understanding how these affect the poor, the disadvantaged and the local. Anthropologists tend to explore the disempowered groups not simply because they are the “underdogs,” but because “studying-up” is one of the most difficult forms of research in terms of access (O'Reilly 2009:9). As Nader (1974:302) notes “[t]he powerful are out of reach on a number of different planes: they don’t want to be studied; it is a dangerous to study the powerful; they are busy people; they are not all in one place, and so on.” Indeed, the authors of *Religion in the Military Worldwide* all point out to the difficulty of garnering insights into the role of religion in military culture. Fair (2013:101), for example, highlights that it is extremely difficult to do research into the Pakistani Army after 1990, following the exclusion of Pakistan from US defense, as a result of Pakistan’s nuclear program. This volume should therefore be seen as a desirable attempt to engage with institutions of power.

By relying on ethnographic studies, the contributors of Hassner’s volume further a “thick” comparative analysis of the study of religion in the military. A “thick” analysis starts with an investigation of religion in its various manifestations, from religious practices and knowledges, to the hierarchy of religious organizations and to the symbols and rituals it creates (Hassner 2013:7). As such, Hassner’s volume truly embraces an inter-disciplinary approach to the study of religion and politics by combining knowledge from theology and religious studies and by drawing generalized lessons from international security and organizational theory (Hassner 2013:8). This volume is in fact the first to offer such a thorough comparative investigation. Hassner (2013:4) indicates that in the three most likely journals to address religion in the military, only 19 articles have been published on this topic, confirming an under-researched area of study. Naturally, there is always room to deepen the analysis, spatially by adding more empirical cases, and temporally by focusing on the role of religion at critical moments of history. But some chapters already do this. For instance, Rouhi (2013) shows the role of religion in military operations during and after the Iranian Revolution and Komsuoǧlu and Kurtoǧlu Eskişar (2013) reveal how Islamic religious rituals originated during the Ottoman Empire.

Moreover, the fact that this book lies at the intersection of strategic culture, civil-military relations and military effectiveness makes it all the more relevant for readers with diverse backgrounds. While this book will undeniably be useful for these three academic fields, this volume perhaps ought to be destined for the military itself. The case of India, for instance, shows how inclusive and religiously tolerant a country’s military can be against a seeming conflict-ridden religious society. In effect, Ahuja (2013:160-1) demonstrates the extent to which the Indian Army accommodates the various religions hosted by this country and uses it to motivate order in the ranks. Although this diversity did not prevent a Sikh mutiny during Operation Blue Star,[[6]](#footnote-6) it hampered the expansion of the conflict within the ranks and greatly limited damage (Ahuja 2013:172). One explanation for this was the framing of the situation in a language that assigned the fault to the army’s command structure, rather than on ethnic and religious differences. Hence, the outcome of this conflict for the military in a society prone to religious conflicts, “should be instructive for other multireligious and multiethnic militaries” (Ahuja 2013:174). I would add that this account of religious diversity and tolerance could be instructive for promoting interfaith respect in society at large. In fact, it is the avoidance of viewing religious differences as ontologically real which should be instructive.

By contrast, Bosco relies on securitization theory and discourse analysis. Simply put, securitization, according to the Copenhagen School[[7]](#footnote-7) (Buzan; Wæver, and de Wilde 1998:23) (1998:23) is “the move that takes politics beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issue either as a special kind of politics or as above politics.” Wæver (1995:51) contends that by retaining the characteristics of security – urgency (legitimate use of extraordinary means) – the field of “security” can be extended to other sectors than the state. “Security” is therefore not automatically associated with the security of the state in a power balancing systemic world. Rather, by talking about referent objects– “things that are seen to be existentially threatened and that have a legitimate claim to survival” (Buzan et al. 1998:36), existential threats (what is *presented as* threatening the referent object) and securitizing actors (actors who label the threat), the Copenhagen School makes analysts ask: security for whom? security from what? and security by whom? thereby de-objectifying the nature of threats. Further, securitization theory sets up security as the effect of intersubjective security discourses, rather than simply being “given” by geopolitical realities (Guzzini 2011:331). Securitization is what we call in language theory, a “speech act” (Buzan et al. 1998:26).[[8]](#footnote-8) By framing the issue as “existentially threatening” the securitizing actor claims the right to lift the issue “above politics” and to take extraordinary measures (Buzan et al. 1998:26).

To this end, Bosco analyses numerous speeches, interviews and governmental reports in the United States, France and the United Kingdom. In that respect, it is a thorough examination of these three states’ discursive strategies in relation to Islam as well as being a sophisticated account of how securitization theory can be used empirically. Bosco’s book is thus highly beneficial for any securitization students and in the broader fields of security studies and international security. His contribution is both on an empirical and theoretical level. In the former, Bosco contends that the securitization of religion has failed in France and the UK, while it has succeeded in the U.S. The reasons for this are located in the levels of analysis. Bosco (2014:1) argues that when secular states securitize religion domestically, by engaging with internal religious actors for the purpose of national security, this results in failed securitizations.[[9]](#footnote-9) By contrast, if secular states securitize religion abroad by promoting a certain interpretation of Islam and by exporting this framework internationally, as in the case of the U.S. strategy, securitizations succeed (Bosco 2014:1). In the end, asserts Bosco (2014:2), “religion is easier securitized at the international rather than the domestic, level of analysis.” This brings the theoretical argument to the forefront, that is, that levels of analysis matter in the success or failure of securitizing moves (Bosco 2014:11).

While this is a compelling argument, I am less sure of its originality. In effect, in 2009, some of the original authors of securitization theory refined the *scaling* of the securitization framework (Buzan and Wæver 2009). Buzan and Wæver (2009:254) conceded that the orthodox theoretical structure of securitization focused on middle-level securitizations, rather than on the individual or system level. Since the gap between the individual and the middle level is now occupied by the concept of human security, the authors sought to rectify the gap between the middle and system-level by adding the notion of *macrosecuritization.*[[10]](#footnote-10) The concept of macrosecuritization draws on different-sized audiences and macro actors, which resonates with Bosco domestic versus international levels of analysis.

Bosco’s approach to levels surely adds context to the process of securitization, an element that is lacking in the Copenhagen School and criticized by authors such as Balzacq (2005, 2011b), Wilkinson (2007), Salter (2008), McDonald (2008), and Stritzel (2011). In effect, it has been argued that securitization theory gives an account of security that can be entirely decontextualized (Wilkinson 2011:94), as a result of a universalistic linguistic logic (Stritzel 2011:351).[[11]](#footnote-11) However, by making the success and failure of securitizations contingent on the domestic or the international scene, Bosco inadvertently loses some of the contextual precision required to make the securitization of religion intelligible. He thus strengthens the theory by adding the domestic/international dimensions but at the expense of defining the relevant audiences of the securitizing moves he studies. By not conceptualising the success and failure of securitization in relation to the audience, the analysis leaves a number of questions unanswered and we are left doubting of the actual failure and success of the three securitizations.[[12]](#footnote-12) For example, who is the audience of the securitizing moves? Who are the recipients of the security measures? And are the audience of the moves and the recipients of the measures, the same?

Another difficulty is that the failure of securitization is attributed to the appearance of resistance. Bosco contends that “by promoting moderate Islam [domestically], Britain and France both faced various forms of backlash and resistance from their internal populations” (Bosco 2014:8) which led to a failure of the securitization of religion. While resistance caused a change of policy in the UK, it only led to various rows between Muslim leaders and the French leading Conservative Party in France, without any substantial change in terms of counter-radicalisation and counterterrorism measures. I would argue that every securitizing move creates resistance on the part of the citizens. One simple reason for this is that a securitizing move calls for restraint on the civil liberties of the public. In a “democratic” framework, the breaking of rules will therefore ensue unwillingness towards the removal of the freedoms one previously enjoyed. If resistance means securitization failure, this is puzzling for the democratic scene. Nevertheless, this is a problem that emerges from the numerous ambiguities of securitization theory itself. On that point, my critique of Bosco is rather a critique of the Copenhagen School.

In addition, while the authors of Hassner’s volume contribute to advancing *diverse* interpretations of the role of religion in the military worldwide, Bosco has a more *unified* argument. As Hassner (2013:4) notes, the range of countries, levels of analysis and issues cannot provide a unified theory of religion in the military. In that sense, Hassner welcomes heterogeneous readings of the role of religion in the military, reflecting a turn towards a post-modern ethic of the military. This challenges the traditional idea of the military as a culture of obedience, conformity and authority (Patterson 2013:235), but it also increasingly transforms the normative framework of military operations (Patterson 2013:232). For example, Benham Rennick demonstrates in the case of Canada that increasingly individualized and subjective ways to interpret meaning have heightened the tension between Canada’s Christian heritage and Canada’s protection of religious freedom. Patterson (2013:232) contends that it is this individual radicalism that has changed the rationale for military service, from one based on historic motivations to one grounded in a sentiment of compassion and peacebuilding, as the case of Canadian humanitarian missions demonstrate. In effect, from the interviews conducted with Canadian soldiers, Benham Rennick (2013) indicates that these individuals do not identify with one single moral religious authority, but rather interpret the world and its social values through an individual and at times, relativist perspective.

Yet, the plurality of views did not prevent the dehumanization of the Somali people during the UN Observation and Peacekeeping Mission in Somalia (OUNOSOM II). Indeed, a number of abuses occurred, including the murder of a Somali teenager and the blind-folding and beating up of five young boys for stealing in the Canadian compound garbage (Benham Rennick 2013:52-3). While Benham Rennick assigns this to a lack of knowledge about other religions,[[13]](#footnote-13) I would suggest that this is the result of holding a “light” pluralism, which rests on unproblematized assumptions about morality and evil. Taking pluralism seriously means overcoming Westphalian ideas about morality and means developing what Thomas (2003:23) called a “deeper pluralism.” Thomas (2003:44) highlights the problem of “humanitarian” missions in reducing humanitarian practices to abstract moral rules in an effort to show the universality of their values. This, I believe, applies to the Canadian military. More importantly, this “light” pluralism also applies to Benham Rennick herself, who relies on difficult notions about the Other. For example, Benham Rennick (2013:55) contends that chaplains helped soldiers reconcile the ethical dilemmas they endured during mass-scale genocides that plunged soldiers in a moral anomie. She (Benham Rennick 2013:55) asserts that it “fell to the chaplains personnel [to] find meaning in the chaos that surrounded them” against the act of genocide, “an act utterly opposed to Canadian values to protect human life and appreciate differences,” *as if* genocide was an intrinsic feature of how other peoples perceive the protection of human life and difference. Under the guise of “post-modern” values of difference therefore, soldiers sought to resolve their ethical dilemmas with “other” practices.

Patterson (2013:237) concludes the volume by asserting that one of the new avenues for research should examine how the training of world religions impacts on military operations. While some argue that a faith-based approach to diplomacy can resolve religious problems in the world, Marsden (2014) challenges this view by showing that, on the contrary, partisan religious actors often overthrow foreign policy objectives.[[14]](#footnote-14) If training soldiers about world religions is based on an absolute logic of right and wrong and means bringing more knowledge about the evil of others, this would bring the same results, if not worse. When situations are viewed from a high and absolutist moral stance, the possibility of viewing the Other in other ways than abject becomes difficult (Cameron 2012:11). As Baumeister (2001:ix emphasis added) contends, “the hardest part of understanding the nature of evil is to first recognize that you or I *could*, under certain circumstances, commit many of the acts that the world has come to regard as evil.” Countering this narrative means more than merely recognising cultural diversity. It means engaging with the Other in ways that do not adopt a Westphalian logic, in which the differences of social (and religious) practices are subjugated by an ethic of cosmopolitanism (Thomas 2003:45). Still, a highlight of Hassner’s book is that it seeks to turn the lens back on “Western” own religious practices, instead of focusing on the religiosity of others (Hassner 2013:3). For this, Hassner is a vital contribution to the restorative turn.

However, the authors of the volume still rely on assumptions about religion in society, which are the result of an unproblematized methodological bias. The study of religion may be good news for the discipline, but this enterprise requires rethinking some conceptual tools (Sandal 2012:79). With Sandal (2012:67), I argue that religion cannot merely be an analytical concept for explaining the absence or existence of social phenomena, nor can it be employed as an independent variable. As Rengger (2003:336) notes, political scientists should account for the various modes in which they encounter religion. While this is perhaps more clearly lacking in Hassner’s volume, Bosco’s use of securitization theory and discourse analysis should have raised important epistemological questions. However, Bosco (2014:11 emphasis added) claims that his levels approach to securitization theory provides a way “to distinguish between ‘success’ and ‘failure’ *outside of* a normative framework.” While this offers an innovative avenue to study securitizations, it unfortunately does not go beyond the analytical level, as much of Hassner’s edited collection.

**Critical contribution to the security-religion nexus**

Broadly speaking, the two books under review can be located within the “revival of identity politics” of the end of the Cold War, where religion is one dimension of that identity.[[15]](#footnote-15) By the early 1990s, Bosco (2014:2) observes that “a number of scholars began to perceive that collective obsession with Cold War politics had allowed religion to remain hidden from view. Critics of this revival would contend that this discussion is a smokescreen for the real problem that religion is the cause of postmodern warfare (Patterson 2013:228). Whether the rise of religion in IR is a result of changes in the world “out there” or “in here,”[[16]](#footnote-16) that is, in researchers’ own mind, is a matter of debate in the two books under review. But this question is crucial because the position one takes in regard to “seeing” the revival of religion, whether it results from observations in reality or inside the mind, will considerably change the kind of study at stake. A view of religious revivalism seen as a consequence of world events “out there” will, to a certain extent, be involved in a descriptive and prescriptive analysis, by analysing the religious events that have shaped people’s attitudes toward religion. An analysis of this kind would explore, for instance, how the Iranian Revolution, the rise of Solidarity and the Polish Revolution and the tragedy of September 11, 2001, shift our understanding of international relations (Thomas 2005), and urges IR scholarship to face this “new issue” (Snyder 2011a:1).

By contrast, the view adopted in this article does not treat the resurgence of religion in IR as a result of world events, nor as novel, but rather as a result of a change in the assumptions of political scientists themselves. In other words, religion was always “out there” to be discovered and discussed.[[17]](#footnote-17) Therefore, it is not so much of interest to know why religion is back, as it was always there to begin with, but why international relations scholarship ignored religion in the first place (Fox and Sandler 2004:9). As Hurd (2012:946) argues, “[f]rom this perspective, the question for international theorists is not, ‘how to bring religion back in?’ Instead, it is what kind of work is accomplished in and through discourses of religion in particular circumstances?” This approach thus engages in a self-reflexive analysis, which does not assume “reality” to be independent of researchers’ mind, and ultimately, which is critical of the notion of 21st Century revivalism.

On the one hand, recognizing the latter position leads one to be self-reflexive and adopt interpretative methodologies. On the other, studying the revival of religion “out there” constitutes a break in the relationship between the observer and the observed, but produces a “scientific” analysis. The problem with Bosco and Hassner’s contributions is that at times, they get stuck in merely describing the securitization of religion or in describing how religion impacts on the military.[[18]](#footnote-18) This rests on a distinction between the “discursive” and the “material” and stays clear of normative arguments. To be sure, by using securitization theory and discourse analysis, Bosco does not take religion for granted; he rather argues that securitizing religion is a powerful narrative that governments have used to their own advantage. For Hassner (2013:7), the goal is “to replace the analysis of religion as an extremist, fundamentalist, and aberrant force in international security with a nuanced study of religion as a conventional and pervasive variable.” Yet, the critique of the “security-religion” nexus is not at its full potential because both still rely on certain assumptions about the role of researchers in “observing” the world and thereby in observing religion in society. A critical contribution would first acknowledge the methodological biases and silences of the researcher and provide a critique of the existing framework by highlighting an underlying normativity. “Critical” here is not referred in the sense of being “in opposition to the policy of the moment” (Mutimer; Grayson, and Beier 2013:3). Rather, it is a political commitment for the transformation of institutions, practices and dominant perceptions (Mutimer; Grayson, and Beier 2013), here, the role of religion in society and in IR more generally.

First, Hassner (2013:2) notes that when religion is examined from the perspective of international security, scholars usually emphasize the role of ideas at the cost of practices. Whilst this fits within a move towards the “practice turn,”[[19]](#footnote-19) there is no discussion on how practice and discourse are intertwined. The main concern, as Neumann (2002:628) highlights, is “how best to analyse social life given that social life can only play itself out in discourse.” Hassner’s position emphasizes the material as if the analysis of practices could be separated from their framing in language. The difficulty is that a material ontology renders the ideational world – the things that are “constructed” – impossible to analyse (Williams 1998:208). It also makes the critique much more complex. According to Lundborg and Vaughan-Williams (2015:22), “it is impossible to assume any sort of pure ‘material realm’ that is uncontaminated by language (and *vice versa*).” Hassner’s volume thus fails to point out the underlying knowledge claims that make these religious practices, rituals and constitutional challenges, possible.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Second, by examining practices analytically, the volume stays within the confines of problem-solving, in the sense that it is “value-free” (Cox 1981:129-30). Hassner (2013:10) writes that none of the states studied in the volume have found a “balance” between religious freedoms, operational requirements and constitutional values. Here, balance is viewed as the solution. At the same time, Hassner (2013:3) argues that the purpose of the book is not to argue whether religion is good or bad for the military. However, the fact that there needs to be an equilibrium between the three dimensions *is* a normative position. For too much or too little religion leads to negative consequences for society and the military. It thus presupposes that religion has, as a matter of fact, a specific place in an orderly society, and that we should seek to find that place. Whether this claim is compelling is not my point. There may be in fact, good reasons for a stable relationship between religion, operational efficiency and constitutional values. Rather, my concern is the underlying normative claim, with its accompanying assumptions, which is not recognized given the seemingly neutral position toward observing the religious practices of the military. The edited volume thus contributes to restoring religion to IR, but it also reintroduces religion in order to solve the problems posed by it. According to Hurd (2012:944), the restorative turn implies that “once religious moderates are understood, engaged and empowered, and religious fundamentalists identified, sidelined or reformed, the problems posed by religion will lessen and religious freedom will spread across the globe.” Therefore, this reifies a powerful discourse whereby particular forms of religion are authorised and not others (Hurd 2012:946), in which Hassner’s collection may be implicated.

In *Securing the Sacred*, Bosco (2014:123) argues that “successes and failures are not conceptualised normatively in this book.” This, however, is difficult for desecuritization. If securitization is neither positive or negative, there are no reasons to de-securitize. Bosco (2014:123) admits in his conclusion that to say that the securitization has failed or succeeded has “obvious normative implications.” But he (2014:125,126) chooses to use securitization theory instrumentally because advancing a “moral, post-Westphalian future world order” is equated with “assisting the state in understanding and engaging religious ideas and actors,” which “blur[s] the lines between objective and strategic knowledge and creat[es] an environment in which scholars may become unwitting apologists for hard power coercion.” Whilst this fear is certainly a valid one, Bosco falls into the positivist trap of the analysts he criticises. For it is this scientific neutrality he purports that allows his writing to be used authoritatively by the state and which facilitates the dangerous liaison between the state and academia. Moreover, embracing a normative position in securitization studies does not mean advocating the state for securitizing or not securitizing an issue. This is conflating normativity with prescription. Rather, it means being aware of one’s own assumptions in studying securitization and not breaking the bond between observer and observed. In other words, this entails recognising that one can never be neutral against a backdrop of already institutionalized, received and dominant categories. Political scientists may have a social responsibility in the effects the theories they develop and use have on the world (Ish-Shalom 2009:303), and this responsibility starts with the fundamental realization that the objects and subjects we examine in the world are not just the product of objective observations.

More importantly, studying securitization outside of a normative framework de-politicises the act of securitization. I would agree with Laustsen and Wæver (2000:739 emphasis added) that “securitization and desecuritization are *political* processes, not stable formulas.” Wæver (2011:473) ascribes the notion of “act” with political *responsibility*, and thereby agency. Indeed, by placing the success or failure of securitization “among the subject,” Wæver (2011:468) situates the theory in Arendtian politics:

The definition of securitization shapes every usage of the theory and entails this Arendtian concept of politics, because the theory places power in-between humans – not least through the central role of the audience – and insists on securityness being a quality not of threats but of their handling, that is, the theory places power not with “things” external to a community but internal to it.

If the securitization framework is to be merely used as an analytical tool, what is left of securitization as a political act? What is left of the political intentions of the securitizing actors? And what does this mean if securitization is a powerful discursive strategy as Bosco contends? Aradau (2004) argues that to advance a politics of emancipation that would unmake the exceptional and un-democratic logic of securitization, one has to return to a political space, and this means recognising the researcher’s own normativity. Deprived of political commitment, securitization and de-securitization become sterile tools (Aradau 2004:390).[[21]](#footnote-21)

My critical contribution is therefore merely to urge securitization scholars and students of the restorative turn to acknowledge their underlying normative position. My goal here is not to assist the state, the military or society at large in advocating for or against religion in society. Rather, it is to recognize that the secularization of international relations was first and foremost a political choice. Or instead, that religion has been politically silenced in IR until the end of the Cold War and revived for some purpose. As Laustsen and Wæver (2000:739) contend, “IR theory is not the neutral observer it pretends to be, it is implicated by its own secularist self-perception.” It also suggests coming to terms with the idea that the secular order may also be one of violence, exclusion and control, if we are to welcome the transition to a post-secular world (Mavelli and Petito 2014a:3). Moving towards post-secularity does not mean finding one universalistic logic of morality, but it is an attempt to find a new repertoire of categories, which can resist the secular consciousness and the modern rational framework (Mavelli and Petito 2014a:8). It is thus necessary for scholars of this nexus to acknowledge their own religion, by returning to a political space and by embracing normativity.

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1. See for example, Philpott (2002), Fox and Sandler (2004), Thomas (2005), the edited volume by Snyder (2011b), Toft, Philpott and Shah (2011), Sandal and Fox (2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See the 2012 special issue of the *Review of International Studies* on the “Postsecular in International Relations,” Volume 38, issue 5. See also the edited volume by Petito and Mavelli (2014b), and Bilgin (2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See for example, Japan, the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States, in Hassner (2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Because many hold the army responsible for the defeats of World War II, the SDF, a recent reconstitution of the old Imperial Army, is prevented from taking offensive action (Skabelund and Ishikawa 2013:25). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. These are: the liberty to exercise one’s own religion and the government’s restriction in endorsing any particular religion (Cook 2013:181). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. From June 3 to June 8, 1984, the Indian Army commanded Operation Blue Star, which attempted to regain control of the Golden Temple, one of the most sacred sites to Sikhs, previously raided by armed men. After Operation Blue Star killed 493 people including civilians, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by two of her Sikhs bodyguards, which resulted in anti-Sikhs pogroms (Ahuja 2013:172). However, whilst this could have lead to many attacks within the Army itself, Ahuja (2013:173) argues that conflict was severely limited and contained, as a result of interfaith respect in the ranks. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Securitization theory was originally developed by Ole Wæver, Barry Buzan and Jaap de Wile, otherwise called the Copenhagen School (CS), in *Security a New Framework* (1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. At least this is true in the more post-structuralist account of securitization theory. Balzacq (2011b:1), who has been at the forefront of the “post-Copenhagen” field, argues that there is a philosophical and a sociological approach to securitisation. The notion of speech-act goes hand in hand with the post-structuralist and philosophical tradition of the theory and is the one of concern here. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. This is because at the domestic level, the referent object for security is linked to questions of “national identity and loyalty to the state and its core values,” which does not occur at the international level (Bosco 2014:44). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. For example, Buzan and Wæver (2009:265) argue that the Clash of Civilizations was a macrosecuritization because Huntington calls for the “West” to unite against Asian and Islamic civilizations. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. More particularly, the emphasis on the Austinian speech act approach as performative. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The edited volume by Balzacq (2011a) provides excellent insights into the ways one can conceptualize audiences and contexts, in a move toward a sociological approach to securitization. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. As Benham Rennick (2013:59) notes, “the main problem that the CF [Canadian Forces] faces is not too much religion, but too little.” [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Marsden makes this case specifically for U.S. foreign policy. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. For an excellent introduction of religion in international relations, see the series of books published by Palgrave Macmillan on *Culture and Religion in International Relations*, edited by Yosef Lapid and Friedrich Kratochwil between 2003 and 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. This is an argument made by Jim George (1994:11) when defining a materialist ontology and by Ken Booth (1997) who contends that positivist research does not question the role of researchers and policy analysts in “describing” the state of affairs “out there.” As Booth (1997:84-85) notes, “[t]he assumption of this approach is that our conception of security derives entirely from changes “out there”—in what is thought to be the real world of international affairs—rather than changes “in here,” in the mind of the analyst.” He further brings a critique of this approach by advancing a sociology of epistemology. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. “Out there” here does not refer to a specific geographical space but refers to “reality” within the traditional philosophical dualism between reality and mind. I do not argue that religion is “out there” in the Middle East whilst the West is a secular outpost. I would like to thank the reviewer for making this clearer. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Although I would argue that this is less the case in Bosco’s book. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. For an introduction to the “Practice turn” in IR, see Schatzki, Knorr and Savigny (2001), Neumann (2002), and Pouliot and Adler (2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Ahuja is the only chapter that shows the powerful role of language in dissolving religious differences. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Aradau makes this case specifically for de-securitization. I would argue that this is valid for securitization itself. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)