

## CHAPTER 1

# Introduction

In January 2014 an arsonist attacked the historic *Maktabat al-Sa'eh* (The Pilgrim's Bookshop) library in the old Serail neighborhood of Tripoli, Lebanon. The library burned to the ground, and seventy-five thousand books were destroyed. The motives of the perpetrators remain mysterious. Rumors had circulated that Father Ibrahim Srouj, the owner of the library and a Greek orthodox priest, had written an online article, or perhaps had a pamphlet in a book in his library, insulting Islam and the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>1</sup> Others suggested that a real estate dispute between Srouj and his landlord had led to tensions.<sup>2</sup> Prominent members of local civil society condemned the arson and emphasized long-standing, cross-cutting connections between various parts of the Tripoli community.<sup>3</sup> A representative of the Lebanese Internal Security Forces, a local MP, a local Salafi sheikh, and a former prime minister rushed to Srouj's defense, insisting that those seeking to incite intercommunal strife and violence would be shunned or imprisoned. In an interview stressing the relevance of the Syrian proxy war to the attack, Sheikh Salem al-Rafei told the *Daily Star* that "the Syrian regime seeks to show that Muslims in Tripoli are extremists and don't accept other people and that it [the Damascus regime] can [alone] protect minorities."<sup>4</sup> Civil society groups gathered outside the library, a former Ottoman police barracks, to collect donations to rebuild. Supporters created a Facebook page to collect books. Photos that circulated in the media showed ordinary people wearing face masks digging through the rubble attempting to salvage damaged books.

International religious freedom advocates responded differently to the library arson. Nina Shea, director of the Hudson Institute's Center for Religious Freedom and longtime activist, proclaimed that "flames of a violent hysteria against all perceived threats to Islam are spreading rapidly

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through the Muslim world today.” Robert George, vice chair of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), lamented that “the really bad news is that this is not out of the ordinary” and called for the promotion of religious freedom as a means of preventing future attacks.<sup>5</sup> While local residents rejected both the arson and representations of it as a harbinger of deepening religious divisions, Shea and George interpreted it as evidence of the coming apart of a community, region, and, perhaps, the world, along religious lines. Importantly, Shea and George also insisted on the equivalence between the Tripoli event and other episodes elsewhere in the world, all of which, in their view, could be reduced to episodes of religious violence and attributed to a lack of religious freedom.

These contrasting responses suggest a larger story waiting to be told about the politics of religious freedom. The responses of Shea and George are part of a powerful narrative circulating in global politics attributing acts of violence to religion or religious persecution and calling for the promotion of religious freedom in response. This book explores the politics of singling out religion as a basis from which to make foreign policy, international public policy, and conduct human rights advocacy. It historicizes the intense policy interest in religion that has taken hold in North American and European international public policy circles over the past two decades. Exploring the channels through which religion has been, and continues to be, “appropriated by worldly power holders,”<sup>6</sup> it draws to the surface and explores the tensions that emerge between the forms of religion that are produced and governed through these projects, and the broader fields of religious practice that they aspire to regulate and transform. What are the consequences when the category of religion becomes an object of international law and international public policy? What are the effects, on both religious and political practices, when religions are “granted intentionality and importance” and become “shadow players” in global politics?<sup>7</sup> What are the implications of construing religion as an isolable entity and causal powerhouse in international relations? How do these political interests and investments shape how individuals and groups live out and practice their religion? As Pamela Slotte asks of human rights law, how does this approach “regulate the space in which people are given the opportunity to live out their faith”?<sup>8</sup> Are there alternatives?

Though present in some form since the United States emerged as a global superpower in the mid-twentieth century, the current drive to

“operationalize” religion through the promotion of religious freedom, interfaith understanding, toleration, and rights accelerated and became fully institutionalized after 9/11. The United States and key allies such as the United Kingdom and Canada have rallied around the notion that the flourishing of free and tolerant religion, increased dialogue between faith communities, and the legalization of minority rights are required to emancipate societies from intercommunal strife, economic deprivation, and gender and other forms of discrimination. A 2007 report by the center-right think tank Center for Strategic and International Studies, titled “Mixed Blessings: U.S. Government Engagement with Religion in Conflict-Prone Settings,” registers the shift: “Parts of the intelligence community address religion as a transnational concern; the military services are increasingly developing doctrine and training on approaching religious leaders and communities in stability operations; USAID works with faith-based organizations and incorporates religious sensitivities into some development programming; and State Department officials promote international religious freedom and are focused on improving relations with the Muslim world.”<sup>9</sup> The same report concludes that “the armed services are still determining how such knowledge should be used in practice. Much of the *strategic implementation of religious knowledge* today is occurring at the Joint Intelligence Operations Centers and the regionally focused Combatant Commands.”<sup>10</sup> Coupled with the right forms of governance achieved through the “strategic implementation of religious knowledge,” moderate religion is said to be capable of pushing back against, and ultimately triumphing over, its rivals. The right kind of religion, recognized and engaged by states and other public international authorities, has emancipatory potential. Moderate religion has the capacity to treat a variety of social ills, such as gender-based oppression and the exclusion of minorities, associated with retrograde forms of religion, fragile or failed states, and a lack of development. Tolerant religion, in this view, catalyzes democratization and political pluralism. It takes the wind out of the sails of extremist movements by offering a viable alternative to radicalization.

Of course state efforts to intervene in religious fields are not new, and various earlier moments could also be considered.<sup>11</sup> Noah Salomon discusses similar machinations in early twentieth-century British attempts to stamp out “Islamic fanaticism,” whose main theater was Sudan, through an attempt to promote moderate scholastic Islam. In an interesting reversal of contemporary practice, at that time the categories of “fanatical” and

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“moderate” were mapped onto Sufism and “scholastic Islam,” respectively.<sup>12</sup> Nandini Chatterjee has shown how religion was produced as a legal category in colonial India through a distinctly modern approach toward religious toleration that arbitrated between, rather than ignoring, religious difference. This engendered a novel species of political competition that consisted of collective claims asserted to be “religious” and accepted as such by the state: “Through the very fact of declaring a policy of religious ‘neutrality’ [the colonial state] committed itself to the identification of religious ‘rights’ borne by entities known as religious communities.”<sup>13</sup> Going back further, Napoleon’s efforts to integrate the Jewish population of France shaped and changed the practice of Judaism considerably. As Michael Goldfarb observes, “the practice of Judaism today would be unrecognizable to the recently emancipated Jews of Napoleon’s time.”<sup>14</sup>

Focusing on a contemporary international moment, the projects discussed in this book can be situated in this longer history of state efforts to define and shape forms of religiosity that are understood to be conducive to particular regimes of governance. This book does not trace these mechanisms of religious governance back to a single origin point but rather examines particular moments in which these forms of governance have become especially visible and influential in global politics. Today, spearheaded by the United States, the commitment to religious freedom and moderation has become global in scope, encompassing individual European states, the European Union, Canada, the United Nations, and many international and nongovernmental organizations, public and private. Leaders and decision makers have identified the cultivation of tolerant religion as a critical ingredient in addressing the ills that plague collective life in the early twenty-first century. Religion needs to be understood and it needs to be engaged. In the words of the US President’s Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, “We simply cannot understand our Nation or our world without understanding religion.”<sup>15</sup> In Tony Blair’s words, “the purpose should be to change the policy of governments, to start to treat this issue of religious extremism as an issue that is about religion as well as politics, to go to the roots of where a false view of religion is being promulgated and to make it a major item on the agenda of world leaders to combine effectively to combat it.”<sup>16</sup> President Obama echoed these themes at the 2014 National Prayer Breakfast, stressing the connection between religious freedom and national security: “History shows that nations that uphold the rights of their people, including the freedom of religion, are ultimately more just

and more peaceful and more successful. Nations that do not uphold these rights sow the bitter seeds of instability and violence and extremism. So freedom of religion matters to our national security.”<sup>17</sup>

While there are rich histories to be mined in the context of the American project for global religious freedom, today these political forms for managing religion are being adopted and adapted globally. Their reach is impressive, and the American experience is far from exhaustive. Religious lives and possibilities are being legally tailored by a bevy of increasingly professionalized national and transnational actors to meet the global demand for tolerant religious subjects who enjoy freedom under law.<sup>18</sup> With the United States leading the charge, and others following suit, advocacy for religious freedom, tolerance, and protections for the rights of religious minorities has “gone viral.” As a result, while being attentive to US foreign religious policy and programming, it is also important to consider how these political discourses materialize to shape legal and political fields in places such as Turkey absent explicit US religious interventionism. These discourses are being privileged in policy formulation in Canada, the United Kingdom, Italy, France, and the European Union, with the United States often cited as a model, yet without direct US political pressure. International organizations, state foreign policy establishments, nongovernmental organizations, development assistance agencies, and military establishments, to varying degrees and in different platforms, all have signed on to the project of promoting tolerant religion and moderate religious subjects. Communities around the world are increasingly understood as in need of varying degrees of social and religious engineering, ranging from a minor touch-up to an extreme makeover. Reformers seek to create the conditions in which secular states and their religious subjects become tolerant, believing or nonbelieving consumers of free religion and practitioners of faith-based solutions to collective problems. Religiously free states and subjects are said to naturally oppose terrorism, to support the free market, and to be inclined toward democracy. States marshal financial resources, gather information about religions, and train bureaucrats in departments and ministries on how to guarantee religious freedom, cultivate tolerant religious subjects, and protect religious minorities. New partnerships between state and international authorities and private actors are being created in pursuit of these objectives.<sup>19</sup> This goes beyond the American foreign policy establishment. Religious freedom, tolerance, and rights have become what Gerd Bauman describes as dominant discourses, in that each is “conceptually simple, enjoys a

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communicative monopoly, offers enormous flexibility of application, encompasses great ideological plasticity, and is serviceable for established institutional purposes.”<sup>20</sup>

This book offers a focused discussion that brings together several questions and concerns that have not been considered together before to develop three related arguments about these political projects and the fields in which they are deployed. First, it shows how particular constructs of religious freedom, religious tolerance, and the rights of religious minorities are being packaged into political projects and delivered around the world by states and others. Second, it contributes to the literature on religion and international relations by historicizing and politicizing the attempt over the past two decades to incorporate a concern for religion into the study and practice of global politics. Much of this discourse treats religion as a self-evident category that motivates a host of actions, both good and bad. This book challenges such an approach. Religion is too unstable a category to be treated as an isolable entity, whether the objective is to attempt to separate religion from law and politics or design a political response to “it.” Third, the book embeds the study of religion and politics in a series of broader social and interpretive fields by exploring the relation between these international projects and the social, religious, and political contexts in which they are deployed. Specifically, it focuses on the gaps created between the forms of religion that are sanctioned by expert knowledge and promoted through international advocacy for freedom, tolerance, and rights, and a diverse, shifting, and multiform field of lived religious practice. There is of course no strict dichotomy or sharp line to be drawn between these two categories. What I refer to as expert, official, and lived or everyday religions are all inextricably bound up with each other and with institutional religion. These distinctions are always to some extent arbitrary and porous and are themselves the product of law and governance. The challenge, then, is to signal an interest in a category, religion, which is legible to many, while also arguing for a different understanding of it.<sup>21</sup>

To this end, this book draws together and amplifies the findings of a broad and recent body of scholarship that pushes back in different ways against the received wisdom surrounding religious freedom.<sup>22</sup> It draws on a combination of my own primary research—government reports, meeting proceedings, legal decisions, media reports—and secondary research across several academic disciplines to propose a theoretical and conceptual step forward in the study of religion and world politics.

Distinguishing between religion and religious freedom as authorized by experts and governments and the broader fields in which these constructs are deployed reveals new possibilities for thinking about religion, law, and global politics. It opens new lines of sight onto political histories, struggles, and forms of religiosity that escape, defy, or are indifferent to efforts to govern religion “from above.”<sup>23</sup> New interpretive possibilities emerge as a result of thinking differently about religion, of complicating and disaggregating the category. What if religion cannot be collapsed into a force for good or evil (or both)? What if it cannot simply stand in for whatever is considered to fall outside the secular?<sup>24</sup> Religion does not stand outside or prior to other histories and institutions. Religious practices unfold amid and are entangled in all domains of human life, forms of belonging, work, play, governance, violence, and exchange.<sup>25</sup> Religion cannot be singled out from these other aspects of human experience, and yet also cannot simply be identified with these either. In exploring what this understanding of religion entails for the study of global politics, this book works to “release the space of the political from the grasp of the secularization doctrine.”<sup>26</sup> It is intended, in part, as a thought experiment that provides a glimpse of what the world would look like after religion is dethroned as a stable, coherent legal and policy category.

The argument unfolds as follows. Chapter 2 analyzes the understandings and assumptions about religion that authorize US-led global initiatives to govern religion through advocacy for freedom, tolerance, and rights. Chapters 3 through 5 follow an arc tracing how expert and official constructs of religious freedom (Chapter 3), religious tolerance and religious engagement (Chapter 4), and religious rights (Chapter 5) have been brought to life in sociopolitical and religious landscapes around the world. Though each chapter is differently structured, each explores a specific logic—freedom, tolerance, and rights—through which religion is overseen and governed globally. Each also draws attention to the gap between religion as construed by those in positions of power and the broader social, religious, economic, and political fields in which these authorized understandings are deployed. Taken together, these chapters are suggestive of the power and possibility, and also the limitations, that inhere in these political philosophical constructs (freedom, tolerance, rights) as they materialize in specific contexts. Rather than provide an exhaustive survey of these ideals in action, each chapter discusses select aspects of the work being done, and the religious and political worlds being realized, in their name.

There is variation in length and style in the empirical focal points that appear in this book, ranging from a detailed analysis of the situation of the Alevis to more focused discussions of the plight of the Sahrawi refugees in Algeria and the Rohingya in Myanmar and shorter descriptions of the politics of Guatemalan K'iche' land rights claims as they intersect with the politics of religious freedom. Two criteria governed the selection of these focal points. One is the extent to which the lives of particular individuals and groups have been, and continue to be, shaped by the social, political, and religious realities generated by these international efforts. The second is the extent to which a particular example illustrates the benefits of embedding the study of religion in a broader field of social and historical practice.

The balance of this chapter introduces three heuristics: expert religion, lived religion, and governed religion, each emphasizing a different set of themes and topics that are important to the argument as a whole. Briefly, *expert religion* is religion as construed by those who generate “policy-relevant” knowledge about religion in various contexts. In contemporary Europe and North America this field is dominated by the agenda of reassurance, which celebrates religion as a source of morality and cohesion, and, simultaneously, the agenda of surveillance, which fears religion as a potential danger to be contained and suppressed. As discussed in the next chapter these two “faces of faith” enjoy significant legal and political traction in contemporary international relations, having partially displaced among many scholars and practitioners a commitment to secularization understood as privatization. *Lived religion* is religion as practiced by everyday individuals and groups as they interact with a variety of religious authorities, rituals, texts, and institutions and seek to navigate and make sense of their lives, connections with others, and place in the world. It refers to a diverse field of human activity, relations, investments, beliefs, and practices that may or may not be captured in the set of human goings-on that are identified as “religion” for the purposes of law and governance. The latter is what I refer to as official or *governed religion*: religion as construed by those in positions of political and religious power. In today’s world, this includes states, often through the law, but also other authorities such as supranational courts, governing entities such as the European Union, a variety of international and nongovernmental organizations, and churches and other religious organizations.

I am not the first to propose such distinctions. The sociologist Linda Woodhead has distinguished between what she calls strategic religion and



tactical religion, or “Olympian” versus “non-Olympian” religion.<sup>27</sup> The former refers to the spaces created for religion by those in power—by purveyors of freedom, tolerance, and rights in the terms of this book—while the latter refers to the actions of those without power that are responding to the opportunities and constraints created by strategic religion.<sup>28</sup> Akeel Bilgrami contrasts between what he describes as “knowledges to live by” or “spiritual or learned ways of life,” and “expertise to rule by.” When the former is transformed into the latter, Bilgrami suggests, spiritual domains become impoverished, becoming the province of the few, rather than the many.<sup>29</sup> All of these distinctions have porous boundaries and blend into each other. While imperfect, they grant a certain critical distance from the oppositional pairs that loom large in the contemporary study of religion and politics, including secularism/postsecularism, establishment/disestablishment, freedom/unfreedom, and separation/accommodation. They do so by interrogating the singular, stable understanding of religion that is often presupposed on both sides of these familiar binaries. More specifically for our purposes, distinguishing between expert, lived, and official religion allows for a focused examination of the effects of construing religion as a stable object of international law and public policy. As legal and political projects that rely on the category of religion take shape, they interact with broader fields of human activity, forms of collective belonging, and a variety of sociopolitical goods and goals. Disaggregating the category of religion makes these interactions and mutual transformations easier to see.

#### EXPERT RELIGION

In 2012 Wilton Park, an executive agency of the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office published a report on religious freedom that observed that “in order to be effective, Foreign Service personnel need not only tools or toolkits but also knowledge to implement them.”<sup>30</sup> The past two decades have witnessed the rise of an insatiable demand for knowledge about religion, religious leaders, and religious politics and practices. Experts have emerged to meet this demand, resulting in a flourishing of academic and public policy scholarship on the subject of religion in relation to global theory and practice. Academic journals and conferences are overrun with studies of religion and international policy and politics. Analyses of the effects of religious actors and belief systems on international political outcomes, peaceful or violent, are ubiquitous. Professional

associations rush to create sections on “religion and” their particular field of expertise. Development experts and humanitarian groups hastily piece together their religion portfolios. White papers abound. Foundations and think tanks scramble to meet the demand for knowledge about religion in relation to every conceivable domain of human activity, from nuclear proliferation to environmental concerns, territorial expansion, asylum law, health care, and postwar reconciliation. Religion experts burnish their credentials. Universities create centers. Solutions for anxious policy makers are sought and found. The security industry, environmentalists, development experts, constitutional specialists, and democratization consultants are searching for ways to incorporate religion into their policies and programming. This is expert religion.

Chapter 2 explores the understandings of religion that underlie this outpouring of academic and public policy production. An impressive amount of scholarship over the past two decades has been presented, and received, as a corrective that is intended to remedy an alleged secularist bias permeating the academy and other elite institutions up until the so-called rediscovery of religion. This reparative and recuperative impulse vis-à-vis religion goes hand-in-hand with the denigration and marginalization of whatever and whomever is identified as “secular” or “secularist.” It is presumed that religion had been excluded, and now that we have come to our senses, it needs to be “brought back in.” Chapter 2 historicizes this narrative and one of its most influential variations, in which the world is said to be witnessing a battle between “two faces of faith”: dangerous religion and peaceful religion. With some help from the domestic and international authorities, the story goes, the latter is destined to triumph over the former.<sup>31</sup> If governments and other stakeholders can be induced to shape religion effectively and engage religious actors properly through advocacy for religious rights and freedoms, religion will serve as what one analyst describes as a “force multiplier.” It will contribute to international peace and security, economic growth, and human flourishing.

In this narrative “religion” appears as an aspect of social difference that is both a potential problem (a cause of violence and discord) and its own solution, inasmuch as interfaith cooperation can be institutionalized, extremists marginalized, and religion’s benevolent tendencies harnessed for the public good.<sup>32</sup> This counterthesis has largely supplanted the secularization-as-privatization thesis among scholars and practitioners in international affairs. It fuels many of the initiatives discussed in this book. This partial displacement of the secularization thesis is the result

of a shift in public and academic discourse in North America and Europe away from an understanding of religion as “private” and largely irrelevant to global governance, toward a different dispensation, and accompanying political agenda, in which religion is seen as public good *and* potential source of violence in need of domestication. Both dispensations could be described as secularist; as C. S. Adcock explains, and as I have shown in earlier work, “defining and contesting what counts as religious are practices internal to secular politics.”<sup>33</sup> This book maintains a distance from the discussion and debate over secularism by focusing not so much on how that which is identified as religion becomes subject to particular forms of governance, but rather how, once established, these forms of law and governance relate to the broader political, social, and religious life worlds with which they interact. The intention is to open the field onto a more encompassing social and interpretive space than that afforded by an exclusive focus on religion as construed by secular power.

But we are not there yet. Religion defined as an isolable object has become a mode through which political power operates, in the sense described by Timothy Mitchell.<sup>34</sup> To the extent that religion has assumed importance as a legal and policy category in international law and politics, as I suggest it has, governments, courts, and other authorities are compelled to define it, and to distinguish between religious and nonreligious individuals, groups, and practices. This dilemma, as others have shown, is a—if not *the*—distinguishing feature of modern secular power.<sup>35</sup> Religion is conceived, to varying degrees, as an autonomous domain that is distinct from other parts of human life. Religion is construed as normative, singular, and prior to other human affiliations and forms of sociality. There are things in the world called “religions” that are interacting with each other. Martin Stringer describes the powerful grip of these assumptions in the disciplines of sociology and political science:

From a more sociological, and increasingly from a political science-based perspective, the debate about religious diversity has assumed that there are things called “religions” out there that are interacting, and that that interaction needs to be either studied or managed. When we explore in more detail what these “things” called religions are, then in most cases the assumption being made is that a “religion” is primarily a group of people, more or less organized, who share a common belief system and who engage in a common set of rituals. It is also assumed that these people see their “religion” as a

central element of their own identity and so can define themselves relatively unproblematically as “Christian,” “Buddhist,” “Muslim” or whatever. . . . Almost all authors working in this field assume that “religions” are a social fact and that the real question is “how do they, or how should they, interact?”<sup>36</sup>

Stringer’s description is important. In contemporary international affairs, and I refer here both to the production of knowledge in the social sciences and to its application in policy circles, religions are portrayed as unproblematic social facts comprised of bounded entities and faith communities that need to be studied, engaged, and, perhaps, reformed. As Pamela Klassen and Courtney Bender observe, “modern secular fields encourage frequent appeals to the epistemological autonomy of religion and locate that autonomy in particular, recognized historically constituted traditions.”<sup>37</sup> Robert Orsi notes similarly that “a politics free of religion has come to seem naïve and old-fashioned, and with this has come an insistence on the singular, coherent and authoritative nature of religious traditions.”<sup>38</sup> This is particularly the case when it comes to the religion of the “other.” As discussed in Chapter 6, the religious lives of social scientists are often understood to be more intentional and unbounded as compared to the religious lives of those they study.<sup>39</sup>

That many scholars and decision makers understand “religions” as singular and coherent entities that motivate particular forms of politics is important for at least three reasons. First, when religion is taken as a plausible explanation for political action it sets the stage for—and arguably requires—political intervention to engage and shape it, to tap into its benevolent and transformative powers. Second, to declare religion the cause of particular political conflicts reduces complex questions of causation and obscures the broader economic, historical, and political contexts in which discrimination and violence occur. Basic categories of social conflict and coexistence are framed in religious terms. Social tensions and conflicts with multiple contributing factors are depoliticized, their causes explained away through reference to intractable religious difference. As Samuli Schielke has argued, “there is good reason to be cautious about a question that reinforces, instead of investigating, the growing imagination of a world religion as an entity with agency.”<sup>40</sup> Finally, privileging religion as an entity with agency also shapes the lives of the individuals and groups who live under these designations. The concept of lived religion offers a point of entry into these histories and experiences.

## LIVED RELIGION

There is a complex and unstable relation between the “religion” that is authorized for legal and political purposes and a broader, messier world of religious belonging, belief, and practice. Many forms of affiliation and experience fit uncomfortably, if at all, into an understanding of religion as a singular, bounded “cause” of political behavior. Many operate outside of the understanding of religion presupposed by its secular legal and administrative “management.” Many fail to conform to orthodox understandings of what religion is or should be. In the process of engaging religion and promoting religious freedom, specific forms of religion, certain religious leaders, and particular religious traditions are inevitably singled out from a more expansive field. That which is singled out is privileged and consecrated through legal and political advocacy and guarantees for freedom, rights, and toleration. It often does not align with—and may sideline or crush—disparate, improvised forms of religious belonging and practice. Dissidents, doubters, and those who identify with nonorthodox versions of protected traditions struggle for representation.

The category of lived religion is meant to draw attention to the practices that fall outside the confines of religion as construed for purposes of law and governance. And yet to distinguish between official and lived religion in this way is to risk reifying and romanticizing lived religious practice. There is tension between the claim that religion is too unstable a category for government management and the simultaneous insistence on the importance of lived religion as standing apart from official religion or expert religion. This book emphasizes the mutual interactions and blurred boundaries between these fields. Lived religion does not exist in a vacuum separate from institutional or organized religion. There are no clean lines. There is no autochthonous religion that stands independent of “elite,” “orthodox,” or “legal” religion. The challenge, then, is to constantly problematize a clean juxtaposition between everyday and official religion even while relying on these distinctions as heuristic devices that allow us to ask new kinds of questions, pressing the field in new directions. Inhabiting this productive paradox forces us to consider forms of sociality and religiosity that escape the field of vision of scholars and practitioners who are trained to study legally and academically authorized definitions of religion. The life worlds “beyond” religious freedom otherwise tend to fall between the cracks because when scholars and practitioners look for religion they seek out religious leaders and institutions,

recognizable texts and defined orthodoxies, and religious authorities in fancy robes and impressive hats. These authorities matter, but they do not exhaust the field; rather, organized or institutionalized religion occupies a series of spaces that overlaps and interacts with both “governed” and “lived” religion. Some conceptual imprecision is warranted, even necessary, in these circumstances, as Cécile Laborde has pointed out.<sup>41</sup>

While acknowledging the importance of religious authorities and institutions, and the contributions of scholars and practitioners who have been socialized to look in particular places when they are told to find “religion,” this book seeks to open the study of religion and global politics up to a broader social and interpretive field. Lived religion is part of this field but does not exhaust it, as Robert Orsi, Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, and others who have complicated the study of contemporary religion have shown. Orsi invented the term “everyday religion” to describe “not solely or primarily what happens in specially designated and consecrated sacred spaces, under the authority of religious elites, but in streets and alleys, in the souvenir stalls outside shrines, and in bedrooms and kitchens; ‘everyday religion’ does not happen at times determined by sacred calendars or official celestial computations, but by the circumstances and exigencies of people’s lives. The everyday religious is not performed by rote or in accordance with authority; it is improvised and situational.” This lends itself to the study of not specific religious traditions per se but rather the “manifold paths of daily life.” It does not exist apart from either religious tradition or religious authorities but is in constant interaction with and constituted by them.<sup>42</sup> Sullivan’s *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom* illustrates the ways in which the legal process forcibly elicits the hierarchical definition and juxtaposition of “legal” versus “outlaw” or “anarchic” religion. Her argument develops through a close reading of a 1999 trial, *Warner v. Boca Raton*, which hinged on the legality of regulations at a municipal cemetery in Boca Raton that placed limitations on how mourners could materially commemorate loved ones at their gravesites. The legal point of contention involved whether vertical commemorative statues and shrines were protected under Florida law as forms of religious expression (the plaintiffs’ argument) or should be interpreted as “optional” personal preferences that could be legally removed by cemetery groundskeepers (the city’s argument). The plaintiffs lost the case.<sup>43</sup> Sullivan, who served as an expert witness at the trial, documents in her book the always-particular understandings of religion that underlie attempts to guarantee religious freedom and illuminates the dissonance between

these understandings and the broader fields of religious practice that they shape and constrain.

This book explores these concerns in a different context, uncovering the tensions between the religion promoted and provided for through expert religion and official advocacy for freedom, tolerance, and rights, and the improvised, situational practices that often take place outside of churches, synagogues, and mosques. When states and other international authorities privilege religion in law and international public policy it often comes at the expense of these practices to the point of rendering them invisible, illegible, or unrecognizable as religion. Privileging religion in law and international public policy also creates religion through discourse about it, forcing practices into the category of “religion” that might not have been considered religious before. To fix religion in law—to give it over to expert and official religion—effaces the indeterminacy of evolving and contested sets of traditions that are not reducible to whatever the authorities count as religion.

Bringing lived religion into our field of vision as scholars of global politics also highlights a disconnect between the actual religious lives of most Americans, including those who advocate most fervently for international religious freedom, and the version of the American myth of religious freedom that is projected abroad by the US government. “Curiously,” as Sullivan explains, “a gap has opened between the version of the myth we are offering for export, and the religious lives of most Americans. Freed from the domestic constraints of the Constitution and of politics, as in so many other areas Americans are promoting a version of the rule of law that establishes authority abroad, religious and otherwise, in ways unacceptable, even incomprehensible, at home, where antinomian religion continues to flourish in new guises, whether in city squares, sweat lodges, or prisons.”<sup>44</sup> These forms of extraterritorial establishment—and the extent to which they would be considered unacceptable or even unconstitutional in the states that are sponsoring reforms—are a recurring theme of this book and the subject of Chapter 4.

## GOVERNING RELIGION

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 explore different aspects of governed religion, the religion that is privileged through advocacy for international religious freedom, religious toleration and interfaith understanding, and guarantees for the rights of religious minorities. A novel combination of global

political will, shifting patterns of religious governance, accelerating legal globalization, unparalleled financial resources, and historical contingencies such as 9/11 and the rise of counterterrorism have led to a global field of religious and social engineering that is unprecedented in size, scope, and reach. Several factors account for the acceleration and intensification of this programming in recent decades. Stringer is right that the American-led “war on terror” and the securitization of Islam are important drivers of the new religious policy imperative,<sup>45</sup> but the traction enjoyed by these projects is also attributable to longer-term shifts in how the role of government is understood in relation to religion in Europe and North America. In the United States, for example, as Sullivan argues, religion and spirituality are increasingly understood to be natural parts of the human experience, and government at all levels as a partner whose job it is to ensure the conditions of its flourishing.<sup>46</sup> Religion is being “naturalized,” and as a result the “American government speaks of its citizens as being naturally spiritual and in need of spiritual care.”<sup>47</sup> This naturalization of religion and spirituality is among the enabling conditions for the current full-court press for global spiritual reform. Government efforts to legally remake religion, craft religiously tolerant global subjects, and guarantee religiously free citizenries and polities appear as natural, or even to be expected, in a world in which the government’s job is understood to include particular forms of religious stewardship. The phenomena described in this book, then, are part of a larger story that involves a shift in the United States and, to varying degrees in Europe and elsewhere, away from the preeminence of a hard-edged separationism—distinguished by the attempt to extract religion from governmental affairs and government from religious affairs—and toward a different dispensation in which government is seen as a handmaiden and governor of tolerant, democracy-friendly, legally supervised religion—at home and abroad. In this model, the government’s job is to support and engender the conditions in which tolerant, nonestablished religion can flourish.

The three core chapters of this book explore the politics of international advocacy for religious freedom, tolerance, and the rights of religious minorities, situating these efforts in the broader fields in which they are deployed. Chapter 3 examines the politics of protecting and promoting an international right to religious freedom. Describing three consequences of framing social difference through religious rights and freedoms, it shows that these efforts single out groups for legal protection as religious groups, mold religions into discrete faith communities



with clean boundaries, clearly defined orthodoxies, and senior leaders who speak on their behalf, and privilege a modern liberal understanding of faith. Drawing on examples from Myanmar, South Sudan, Guatemala, and India, this chapter repositions religious freedom as one among many possible modes of governing social difference in contemporary international relations. Rather than a stable norm or social fact that stands above the fray, the deployment of religious rights is a technique of governance that authorizes particular forms of politics and regulates the spaces in which people live out their religion. Also running through this chapter is a concern for the politics of nonrecognition: specifically, the forms of political struggle and modes of collective belonging that are obscured by talk of international religious freedom.<sup>48</sup> Many violations of human dignity fail to register as religious freedom concerns, thus remaining outside an international spotlight that is trained on “persecuted religious minorities.” Examples discussed in the chapter include the predicament of the K’iche’ people in Guatemala, caste oppression in India, and women imprisoned for witchcraft in the Central African Republic. None of these groups conform to the persecuted religious minority framework because violations of their ritual practices do not register as religious.

Chapter 4 turns to the history and politics of US religious engagement. Religious engagement and efforts to promote religious freedom are part of a decades-long project in which the promotion of American-friendly “free” religion in other countries is understood to benefit not only Americans but also the rest of the world by saving them from religious and political tyranny. These religious reform projects are sustained by a powerful myth of American exceptionalism that posits the United States as not only the home of religious freedom, but also the place where both religion and freedom have been perfected. Contemporary religious engagement programs are the latest in a series of American attempts to position the United States as the global guardian of free religion, and freedom in general. These include US attempts to promote “global spiritual health” during the Cold War, a USAID project intended to promote religious tolerance in Albania in the early 2000s, and contemporary religious outreach and liaison activities of US military chaplains stationed overseas. The debate over religious engagement, the chapter concludes, is not a question of whether religion can be separate from government, ignored or contained—as many separationists would have it. The debate over religious engagement is also not about whether “persons of faith” should be included in public life to help achieve collective goals. The question

is how these entanglements between the US government and authorities abroad take shape when religion is privileged as a political and legal category: who gets chosen and why, which version of which religion is supported, which authorities are heard, and whose voices are silenced. To access these dynamics it is helpful to distinguish between the “governed” religion that is engaged and supported through these programs, and the broader field of practice in which they operate. Government-sponsored religious outreach requires that the government decide which groups count as “religious” and to discriminate among vying sects and denominations, privileging some at the expense of others. In the case of US foreign policy this leads to support not only for American-friendly leaders and institutions, but also for religions that conform to an American understanding of what it means for religion to be free.

Chapter 5 turns away from US foreign policy and toward international political and legal attempts to constitute and govern groups as religious minorities. Proponents of minority rights have called for urgent measures to protect the Copts in Egypt, the Ahmadis in Pakistan, and the Bahá’í in Iran, Egypt, and elsewhere as a means of securing religious diversity, shielding minority populations from discriminatory practices, and preventing religious violence. State governments, international organizations, international tribunals, and human rights advocates promote religious liberalization as the antidote to the violence and discord that is often attributed to these divisions. Enshrined in international agreements and promoted by a small army of global experts and authorities, legal protections for religious minorities are heralded as the solution to the challenges of living with religious diversity. Chapter 5 documents the risks of adopting religion as a category to draw together individuals and communities as corporate bodies that are depicted as in need of legal protection to achieve their freedom. Who defines orthodoxy? Who is transformed through such definitions into a “minority” or a “sect,” and with what social consequences? How are the complexities and ambivalences of everyday religious belonging translated and reconfigured through the process of becoming legalized and governmentalized? What is lost in the process? These questions are addressed in a case study of the legal status of the Alevis, a community and a category formally constituted as a single whole relatively recently as part of the Turkish nation-building project. Two legal constructions of Alevism, by the Turkish state and the European Court of Human Rights, anchor the discussion. While premised on differing assumptions, both of these legal construals of Alevism are exam-

ples of “governed religion” that downplay the indeterminacy surrounding Alevism as a lived tradition embedded in a broader field of social and cultural practices, while bolstering the role of the state in overseeing religiosities in the service of Turkish nationalism. To classify the Alevis as a collective subject of religious rights and freedoms guaranteed by the state and backed up by international legal instruments reinforces a tradition of Turkish secularism in which an implicit Sunni-majority state serves as the arbiter of religious identity and practice.

### CONCLUSION

The construct of religion brings together a vast, diverse, and shifting set of social and cultural phenomena. The category has a long genealogy, emerging in the contentious history of church-state religions in Europe at the time of the founding of the modern state system and forged through the histories of colonialism, state building, and other processes associated with political modernity.<sup>49</sup> As Helge Årsheim has observed it is only with the rise of religion as a generic category following the Protestant Reformation that religion became legally available as a stand-alone category, both domestically and internationally.<sup>50</sup> Religion never “left” politics or international relations but has assumed different forms and occupied different spaces under modern regimes of governance, which are often understood to be secular. Neither religions nor religious actors are singular, agentive forces that can be analyzed, quantified, engaged, celebrated, or condemned—and divided between good and bad. To rely for policy purposes on the category of religious actor is, rather, to presume a certain form of actorship motivated by religion that is neither intellectually coherent nor sociologically defensible.<sup>51</sup> It is something that is claimed about a particular group by a particular authority in a specific context.<sup>52</sup> There is often no agreement within any religious tradition on who speaks authoritatively on behalf of that tradition, who is in and who is out, which texts and practices represent the core of the tradition, and so forth. There is no single Judaism or Christianity. There are many. There are no neat lines between believers and nonbelievers, or between the world of the sacred and everyday life. As Robert Orsi shows in his ethnography of Italian Harlem, “the world of the sacred was not entered only, or even mainly, in churches: it was encountered and celebrated through family life, hospitality, and friendship, as well as in the daily trials of the people.”<sup>53</sup> This “theology of the streets” or popular spirituality is not “merely

a corruption or a poor assimilation of Catholic doctrine,” but expresses a Catholic sensibility that is “woven deep into the fabric” of people’s lives.<sup>54</sup> The complexity and ambivalence of religion and religious belonging, its embeddedness in other forms of human sociality and activity, and its persistent failure to conform to modern binaries such as belief/unbelief, good/bad, and faith/reason suggest the need for a more nuanced and context-specific approach to religion, law, and governance, domestically and internationally.

And yet the pressure for normative closure, for a definitive metalanguage in which to define and discuss religion and develop policy solutions, remains strong. Powerful forces, including the law, incentivize individuals and groups to make claims for rights, dignity, and justice in the languages of religious rights and freedoms. Political and material rewards await individuals and groups who can convincingly frame identities and specify collective needs as religious actors, religious minorities, and religious communities in search of their freedom. If being a persecuted religionist makes it more likely that one’s life chances will be improved, then we should expect to see a rise in persecuted religionists. If legalizing religious freedom makes it more likely that development assistance, trade deals, or accession to the European Union will be forthcoming, we should not be surprised to see legislative, executive, and judicial action at all levels privileging the category of religion.

Those in search of a policy prescription for how religion should be governed by the modern liberal state or the international community may be disappointed in this book. The category of religion does not lend itself to such prescriptions.<sup>55</sup> Instead this book historicizes and politicizes the new global politics of religion, turning the prism in a new way to catch sight of the possibilities of a world beyond religious freedom. It is a cautionary tale, inviting scholars and practitioners to step back and consider the work being done by the modifier “religious” when it is deployed to describe situations, actions, and decisions—and prescribe solutions. Situating religion in a series of broader social and interpretive fields allows us to see beyond sectarianism and beyond religious freedom, both of which, I suggest, are discourses of religion authorized by those in positions of power.

In conducting research for this project among scholars, policy makers, and politically active religious leaders, I was often reminded of a comment made by an eminent anthropologist in the context of a discussion of policy-relevant knowledge about religion. “Ordinary people don’t have

policies,” she suggested, “they respond to and submit to policies.”<sup>56</sup> If there is a prescriptive thread running through the book, it is to highlight the “objects” of the proliferating number of projects being undertaken in the name of religious freedom, including those who may be indifferent to or chafe against their seemingly limitless aspirations and ambitions.