

this publication and the care taken to situate and contextualise the debate make it a very rewarding read for both scholars already familiar with the subject matter as well as students delving into it for the first time. ■

ELIZABETH SHAKMAN HURD. *BEYOND
RELIGIOUS FREEDOM: THE NEW GLOBAL
POLITICS OF RELIGION*

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In Elizabeth Shakman Hurd's new book, *Beyond Religious Freedom*, international relations scholars are confronted with a sharply critical analysis of the role religion has assumed in their discipline ever since Samuel Huntington formulated the thesis of the "clash of civilisations" in 1993. Experts, policy makers, and activists, in turn, will find themselves chewing hard on the compelling evidence presented that their best intentions with regard to the defence of religious freedom in foreign countries can have unfavourable outcomes.

Hurd argues in Chapter 2 that IR scholars tend to follow an oversimplified "two faces framework" with regard to religion. They see religion as a force in society, which can have both pernicious and benign effects. The task of scholarship and policy ("expert" and "governed religion" in Hurd's terminology) is to foster the factors that make religion benign, and combat those that make it dangerous. For Hurd the two faces framework "enacts a discursive and political logic that produces its own object ('religion') and then assigns it causal powers and significance" (29). It therefore ignores both the complexities of "lived religion" (the third term used by Hurd to classify religion) as well as the reality of other forms of belonging or exclusion. The author substantiates this claim through a theory-driven analysis of a series of cases of state efforts to define and shape religion. Chapter 3 deconstructs state-sponsored international advocacy of religious freedom by organisations like the United States Commission for International Religious Freedom as a contingent power arrangement of the West. Chapter 4 analyses the reifying effects of civil (USAID) and military

(army chaplaincy) programmes geared at fostering “moderate religion” in Muslim countries. Chapter 5 assesses critically the politics of recognition of religious minorities in local contexts by external powers. Lastly, chapter 6 concludes that religion should be “dethroned as a stable interpretative and policy category” (114), that the two faces framework should be abandoned once and for all and that the study of religion should become piecemeal and contextual: “[O]ne can study the ways in which religion is delimited and deployed in specific legal, institutional, historical contexts, by whom, and for what purposes ... religion is too unstable a category to be treated otherwise” (121).

The core of Hurd’s argument about the problematic nature of the category of religion is her criticism of reification. The global politics of religious freedom claims solutions for three problems which, in Hurd’s view, defy any easy answer: the affiliation-problem (who is part of a group), the boundary-problem (how are groups distinguished from each other) and the definition-problem (what defines a group). Hurd argues that “religion” is not a valid solution for any of these problems (28-40). Hurd argues that groups singled out as worthy of protection of their religious freedom are reified through recognition. A new type of boundary is created around them. With it, obstacles to integration emerge which are even harder to overcome, because they are derived from a logic that lacks adequate context. She strengthens her claims by looking at real-world examples, like the Rohingya in Burma and the Alevi in Turkey. Even “a more encompassing, new and improved ‘international religious freedom 2.0’,” she poignantly writes, would only serve “to (re)enact a modified version of the same exclusionary logic” (63).

Both IR experts and experts on European governance of religion should use this argument as a cause for critical self-reflection. The global politics of religious freedom originated in the US. But other countries (Canada, the UK, the European Union) have also created official bodies for the promotion of international religious freedom. Inside the US, Hurd points out, many of the policies promoted under the label of “religious freedom” by the foreign department would be deemed unconstitutional under the First Amendment. In Europe, on the other hand, selective state-religion cooperation has a long tradition. The European practice of state-regulated religion and US religious freedom advocacy converge due to common concerns about religious extremism and Muslim immigrants. In this sense, Hurd’s fundamental critique of the effects of “making religion” from above applies equally to the selective cooperation models in place in many European countries. The “formalisation of identity in religious terms”

and “confessionalisation of social order” (104) is already apparent in discourses about immigrant integration in Europe today, prioritising religion over other crucial factors of inclusion and exclusion: employment, social welfare, education, mobility etc.

Hurd’s otherwise powerful argument carries the risk of becoming involuntarily affirmative of politics that antagonise international human rights as a Western invention. In Hurd’s presentation, “local actors” represent the reality of “lived religion” beyond the construction of “expert” or “governed religion”; but at the same time these “local actors” appear oddly deprived of independent agency and as the products of foreign rights intervention. This is problematic. As someone working on religion in Russia, I am well aware of the effects of international rights advocacy on local actors in an autocratic state. In Russia, people engaged in civil rights activities have seen themselves branded as “foreign agents” and have been accused of merely following foreign orders. This is a conclusion which Hurd should have rejected much more strongly than she does in her book. Local actors for the most case are not just blindly following the carrot of foreign rights advocacy, but are pragmatically using available means in an unequal struggle for civil rights in oppressive regimes. Critical theory, which presents itself as a tool of emancipation and pluralism, must be extra careful today not to provide a theoretical language for anti-Western autocratic politics.

Despite this reservation on practical grounds, I fully recommend *Beyond Religious Freedom*. It is a signpost book, and the directions it provides are more precise than merely “beyond.” It guides the reader through approaches to religion in IR theory, charts original maps of complex situations of inequality, and sets the landmark for critical analysis, which future debates in the field can effectively build on. ■