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2016

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Challenging Christian Liberalism:
Religious Minorities and the Public Sphere

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

in

Communication

by

Hannah Dick

Committee in charge:

Professor John McMurria, Chair
Professor John Evans
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2016

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2016

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

While writing a dissertation is a lengthy and protracted process, I am extremely privileged to have had the opportunity to do so. I would not have had this opportunity without the bizarrely uncompromising encouragement from my parents to follow my passion. Huge thanks to my incredible mother, Kathie Schutta, for her tremendous support, and for being excited about the opportunities (and nomadic lifestyle) that academia has provided. Thanks to my father, Edward Dick, for urging me to seek new experiences and unconventional ideas. John McMurria is the most patient and kind advisor a student could ask for, and his insightful, nuanced critiques have shaped this dissertation into something that I am incredibly proud of. The rest of my committee – John Evans, Val Hartouni, Marcel Hénaff, and Robert Horwitz – have contributed unique, indelible, and cogent feedback throughout the process. Special thanks to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) for funding my dissertation research. Others without whom this dissertation would not be in tangible form: the staff, faculty, and graduate community in the Department of Communication at UCSD; my San Diego family & foolish friends; Laura McIntire, whose yoga classes have kept me of sound mind; and Subterranean coffee in Hillcrest.

Chapter 5 is a modified version of an article previously published in *Culture and Religion*, “Atheism in Religious Clothing?: Accounting for Atheist Interventions in the Public Sphere” (2015). I am the sole author on this paper.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Challenging Christian Liberalism:
Religious Minorities and the Public Sphere

by

Hannah Dick

Doctor of Philosophy in Communication

University of California, San Diego, 2016

Professor John McMurria, Chair

The liberal democratic state does not have an adequate way of talking about, or engaging with, religion today. In this dissertation I argue that religious minorities are expanding the scope of the liberal democratic public sphere through a series of contestations. I draw on three case studies in Canada and the United States to argue that the framework of the liberal public sphere is decidedly Christian in orientation, and that religious minorities are making this evident through their interventions in public arenas. I develop a critical analytic based on Habermas's concept of the public sphere, drawing on Habermas's critics as well as the work of Foucault. I retain the notion of the public

sphere but emphasize the role of dissensus, rather than consensus, in achieving the liberal goal of equality. I argue that the public sphere is not a neutral arena for public deliberation, because it has historically privileged Christian forms of expression.

I then use my critical analytic of the public sphere in order to perform a close reading of three case studies in which religious minorities intervene in the public sphere. I look at cases of Mormons in the American spheres of politics and popular culture; changing notions of reasonable accommodation in the Canadian province of Québec, and legislative challenges by Muslims and Sikhs to uphold the right of religious expression; and atheists in the U.S., Canada, and the U.K. who argue that their brand of atheism is either a church or a creed requiring accommodations from the state.

Rather than dismissing religion as a matter of private concern, scholars seeking to understand the contemporary role of religion in the state ought to take seriously the public expressions of religious minorities. These interventions reverify the citizenship rights of religious minorities, on the one hand, and lay bare the Christian Liberalism of the public sphere on the other.

Introduction

We do not have a good way of talking about religion in the contemporary public sphere. Religion emerges in various forms in public debates, in popular culture, in court cases and legislation. When it does, however, the state, its residents, and the media alike seem to be at a loss for how to address it. A laundry list of recent public cases involving religion illustrates this problematic:

- The 2014 Hobby Lobby decision, in which the U.S. Supreme Court declared that a corporation has the right to deny certain forms of health care insurance coverage based on religious grounds. A corporate entity can therefore be said to have religious beliefs.
- Islamophobic reactions from Europeans and Americans towards Syrian refugees fleeing the horrors of the so-called Islamic State in late 2015, and the concomitant support of the refugees from various conservative evangelical and Mormon groups fearful that banning Islam might lead to other retractions of religious freedom.
- The early 2016 standoff between federal authorities and armed occupiers led by Ammon Bundy at the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Harney County, Oregon. The occupiers were motivated at least in part by Mormonism, and a number of them identified only as “Captain Moroni” (a significant military and theological figure in Mormon history).
- Uproar over the attempt to erect an Islamic cultural center due to its proximity to the site of the former World Trade Center. When Park51 became redefined in

many media outlets as the ‘Ground Zero Mosque,’ it ultimately resulted in a much more modest design proposal at the site.

Cases like these present an interesting challenge for both politicians and academics: how can we account for public expressions of religious claims when they come up against other forms of liberal discourse? I argue that when we see evidence of religion made public, which comes to us via media representations, we are forced to confront an underlying contradiction at the heart of liberalism: that someone else’s freedom *to* religion can contradict our freedom *from* religion (or vice versa). Put another way, liberalism’s attempt to maintain a neutral public arena for rights claims cannot fully account for the public expression of religiosity. When these claims are put into public view, a variety of contradictions inherent in liberalism come to the foreground.

Indeed, in its 2014 American Values Survey, the Public Religion Research Institute found that almost half (46%) of those polled were concerned about government interfering with the freedom to practice religion, while an equal number of people (46%) reported concern with “religious groups trying to pass laws that force their beliefs on others” (Jones et al., 2014: 4). Only 4% of those polled reported feeling concern about infringements on *both* freedom to and freedom from religion (Jones et al., 2014: 41). The populace is thus highly divided in terms of the First Amendment, and which component of it is most under threat. When religious discourses do emerge in public venues, the way that they are treated is highly dependent on the tradition from which they originate, alongside the political investments of the state. Religious minorities are not talked about in the same vein as religious majorities, and not all religious minorities are created equal in the liberal democratic state. It is significant, for example, that according to surveys the

American public overwhelmingly prefers a religious president over an atheist one, but when asked about affiliation they strongly prefer a Christian over a non-Christian (Jones and Cox, 2011). Attitudes toward Islam are growing increasingly negative amongst Americans (Jones et al., 2015: 4), while in Canada the 2015 federal election was decided in part on the issue of whether Muslim women should be allowed to wear various forms of head-coverings in public service sectors. And yet the topic of allowances for Christian expressions rarely enters the public forum, because they are already established as matters of cultural tradition and therefore are not up for debate. Some forms of religious expression are treated as matters of tolerance or accommodation; others are simply a matter of fact.

Conventional ways of understanding religion's role within the state usually fall into one of two categories: the liberal state is neutral to all religious groups, and privileges none (secularization); or the liberal state actively encourages religious expressions, but only in the domestic or private sphere (privatization). This dissertation reveals the problems with these two approaches by pointing out instances of minority religion made public. I argue that thinking of religion as a private affair does a huge disservice to our theoretical attempts to understand cases like the ones listed above.

In this dissertation I put forth a more nuanced method for understanding the dynamic tensions between religious minorities and the liberal democratic state. Rather than proposing a top-down approach driven by political theory, I argue that studying religion today requires a bottom-up, case study approach grounded in critical cultural studies. Relying on three case studies I argue that the interventions of some religious minorities in the liberal democratic public sphere are accomplishing two things: 1)

expanding the scope of citizenship rights for minorities; and 2) laying bare the Christian orientations of the liberal democratic state.

My critical analytic is informed by Foucauldian discourse analysis and Habermas's concept of the normative *public sphere*. The first chapter is an elucidation of the ways that Habermas and Foucault can be used to complement one another. I retain the notion of the public sphere, but in a significantly more expansive manner than that advocated by Habermas. I draw on critiques of the liberal bourgeois public sphere from feminists and scholars of cultural studies, and combine these with an emphasis on *dissensus* that I take from political theorist Seyla Benhabib and philosopher Jacques Rancière. I use Foucault to shift the focus of analysis from the center of the public sphere to the periphery, where religious actors contest the parameters of exclusion that are drawn around this space.

In the second chapter I develop the concept of *Christian Liberalism*, which I argue is the actual structuring device of the public sphere today in the U.S. and Canada. I offer a brief history of liberalism in the West, tempered with critiques of its normative assumptions. I draw on Wendy Brown's work on the regulating function of tolerance talk in liberal democracies to show how Christian Liberalism has, in practice, functioned as an unmarked center minoritizing non-mainstream religious practices. In both Canada as well as America, liberalism and its concomitant discourse of secularism obfuscates the role Christianity has played in excluding various forms of religious discourse from the public sphere, while privileging others.

After developing this critical public sphere approach I apply it to three case studies. In each case I argue that the state functions more democratically when minorities

disrupt the status quo, intervening in public debates. These interventions take many forms, including expanding the scope of the public sphere via popular culture, legislative challenges, and calls for a reverification of minority rights. By focusing on the particularities of these cases I argue that a critical public sphere approach must attend to the specific ways that religious minorities engage in the public sphere, rather than relying on broad generalizations.

Canada and America are both liberal democracies. One of the main arguments I make has to do with the hypocritical stance of liberalism as accordingly pluralist and inclusive, and effectively Christian and excluding. I ask to what degree religion has been mobilized in debates over citizenship and explore the challenges that religious identity poses for ‘religiously neutral’ states like the U.S. and Canada. The purpose of the dissertation is to highlight some of the contradictions of liberalism in these two nations, both of which value diversity, tolerance and accommodation but which in practice privilege certain kinds of religious expressions over others. Rather than arguing for or against the notion that religion ought to be part of public conversations, I suggest that liberal democracies must be more self-aware about when and how religion *already* permeates the political and cultural institutions that undergird it.

Methodology: The Case Study Approach, Guided by a Critical Analytic

I analyze three case studies across the U.S. and Canada in this dissertation. The choice of the two nations is at once the product of their cultural similarities and geographic proximity, and also the result of my extensive lived experience in both countries.

While my project is not a comparative analysis of the media systems in the U.S. and Canada, I do make some general claims about the role of minority religious groups in the liberal democratic state. In a comparative assessment of global media models, Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini categorize both Canada and the U.S. within the Liberal Model of media systems (2004). While these nations' systems demonstrate important differences, their inclusion within a singular model of media systems helps isolate variables in the formation of the public sphere. Broadly, the Liberal Model reflects a political orientation towards liberalism, majoritarianism, and moderate pluralism (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 237–248). Media systems within these nations tend to be market-driven and heavily commercialized, but journalism is also strongly professionalized (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 198). The press is oriented towards information and fact-driven reporting, and even newspapers with explicit ideological agendas tend not to carry these over to news reporting (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 208). However Hallin and Mancini also point out that this approach towards neutral reporting does not mean that journalism is without a point of view; rather, journalism in both the U.S. and Canada is fairly centrist, and largely appeals to a white middle-class readership (2004: 210). The first two case studies are located clearly within these national boundaries, but the third significantly blurs them and is transnational in scope. Rather than determining the nature of discourse in each liberal democratic nation, my goal is to understand the dynamics between religious minorities in various contexts and the work they do to challenge Christian Liberalism. One argument that I make is that different cases constitute different forms of the public sphere – some national, some transnational – even as the state, as a guarantor of rights, remains important for religious minorities seeking accommodation

and acceptance. While I consider the role of news reporting as integral to the formation of the public sphere, I do not look at journalism exclusively.

I have selected cases that are relatively recent, and which have emerged within broad public discourse. That is to say, they have circulated within mainstream media outlets, so that these religious groups can be said to have entered the broad public sphere.¹ As a result, I draw on case studies around which there is a significant amount of media content. I have also selected cases where the edifice of Christian Liberalism has been strikingly revealed by these interventions. These are cases that have successfully expanded the field of rights and acceptability within the public sphere, and in so doing have revealed the Christian Liberalism at the core of the liberal state.

I am not seeking to describe the media worlds constructed by religious groups themselves; while I attend to religious media like the “I’m a Mormon” advertising campaign, I do not address religious media that do not enter into the mainstream public sphere. I am interested in the contexts surrounding disruptions in the public sphere, rather than aspects of counterpublic minority religious communities that do not get expressed as such.

My approach elaborates a conceptual critique of Christian Liberalism through close analysis of case studies. This involves deep reading of the three cases involved. The case study approach begins with defining particular and concrete examples. Cases can then prove or disprove social theory, and can lead to broader general reformulations of it.

Bent Flyvbjerg challenges the conventional wisdom around the case study

¹ I elaborate on my use of the singular public sphere, rather than multiple public spheres, in chapter 1.

approach, which posits that it is not a rigorous and generalizable method (2006).

Flyvbjerg argues that common misunderstandings plague the case study approach, including the misconceptions that you cannot form broader generalizations based on particular cases; that cases end up confirming the assumptions of the researcher; and that theories cannot be based upon particular case studies alone.

The case study approach, Flyvbjerg asserts, can produce nuanced, dense, and contradictory information, but this is not necessarily a methodological problem.

Flyvbjerg explains, “[t]hat knowledge cannot be formally generalized does not mean that it cannot enter into the collective process of knowledge accumulation in a given field or in a society” (2006: 227). He also recalls Nietzsche’s statement that in seeking to develop theories of the world, “one should not wish to divest existence of its *rich ambiguity*” (qtd in Flyvbjerg, 2006: 237 emphasis in original). By providing a rich account of the concrete and the particular, case study analysis is closer to lived experience and therefore more reliable as a qualitative method (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 235–238). Via the case study approach I aim to expand the contemporary study of religion and the public sphere, but I do so without making predictive or normative claims. The case studies are descriptive, and highly particular.

In fact, Flyvbjerg argues, the case study *is* generalizable, and is very useful in its ability to present falsifiable information. In this sense the case study can act as a “black swan” disproving conventional wisdom or previous theories:

[Karl] Popper himself used the now famous example 'all swans are white' and proposed that just one observation of a single black swan would falsify that proposition and in this way have general significance and stimulate further investigations and theory building. (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 228)

By providing specific examples, case studies can usefully disprove theories that are otherwise taken for granted. In this sense, the case study is best used for generalization purposes when it functions as a form of falsification (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 227–228). My case studies are useful as counter-examples to conventional models for understanding religion, including secularization and privatization (I elaborate on this in chapter 2). They also, I argue, help to showcase the decidedly Christian orientations and assumptions made by liberalism. As a result they help to disprove the presumption of liberalism’s neutrality.

Flyvbjerg asserts that there are three categories of case study, all of which may overlap. Extreme cases are those which demonstrate a dramatic conclusion; which obviously support or discount a previously established theory (2006: 229). Critical cases are strategically chosen, and persuasively indicate the strengths or weaknesses of a particular theory (2006: 229–230). Finally, paradigmatic cases “highlight more general characteristics of the societies in question” (2006: 232). Cases can be simultaneously extreme, critical, and paradigmatic – providing a uniquely fruitful resource for theory (2006: 233).

In this sense my cases are critical, insofar as they contradict the secularization, privatization, and state neutrality hypotheses. They are also paradigmatic because through their elucidation I seek to develop a new theoretical framework for understanding religion in the contemporary public sphere. From my case studies I develop a general theory of Christian Liberalism, but this generalization does not mean that when religious minorities intervene in the public sphere the results are uniform or predictable. In fact, my emphasis on dissensus and the democratic iteration demonstrates that outcomes vary considerably

in each case. Further, while I underscore the expansive potential of the public sphere, highlighting the ways that minority religious actors engage in the public in order to gain rights and recognition, I also point out that the reverse can occur: rights can be retracted, and recognition can be denied. In this sense the case study approach provides the most flexible method for understanding (but not closing) the debate around religion in the contemporary liberal state.

The case studies themselves have guided my methods of analysis. My case studies are chosen strategically in order to highlight cracks in the edifice of Christian Liberalism. As such, I seek to outline a *reciprocal* relationship between religion and the state: cultural and political context matters in determining the articulation of tradition, while religious actors continually reshape the state (and the public sphere) by intervening in public debate. Following Seyla Benhabib's description of the democratic iteration (2004), I argue that religious expressions are making the liberal democracies of the U.S. and Canada more inclusive. This is a dynamic process of contestation, which is continually fraught with challenges. I develop a critical analytic based on Habermas's concept of the public sphere, Foucault's notion of sayability, and Benhabib and Rancière's ideas around dissensus. I have therefore selected cases where religious minorities have disrupted the workings of the public sphere.

In each case I identify a different location for the public sphere. As a result, each case invokes different media sources within which we can see contestations emerge. My critical analytic guides my orientation towards each case study, but the site where the public sphere emerges around American Mormonism, Québécois Sikhism and Islam, and transnational Atheism is markedly different in each case.

In the case of Mitt Romney and the public sphere, I began by producing research on what Habermas would call the political public sphere – the official channels of political discourse and debate, especially in public venues where Romney debated other Republican candidates for the presidential nomination in 2008 and 2012. However, looking at official political discourse alone does not explain the shifts in public acceptance of Romney in 2012 as compared with 2008. In a class I taught on Religion and Media in the fall of 2014, I discovered that my students were more familiar with Romney and Mormonism via various avenues of popular culture: *The Book of Mormon* on Broadway; *Twilight*, as both book and film franchise; *Big Love* on HBO; a dedicated *South Park* episode on the religion's origins; and the TLC reality series *Sister Wives* all informed their attitudes towards the religion and the political candidate. As a result, I broadened the scope of my research to include these arenas of popular culture, and found a significantly expanded representational repertoire around Mormons and Mormonism specifically in the interim between Romney's two campaigns. As a result, in this chapter I focus heavily on these sites of popular culture discourse – including extra textual material surrounding them, such as the Mormon Church's official responses to some of them. I also include a discussion of the "I'm a Mormon" advertising campaign that the LDS Church released in the interim, which I argue contributed to a broader picture of Mormonism within the public sphere.

In the second case study I look at changing connotations of reasonable accommodation in the Canadian province of Québec. As a result, my sources for this case study are quite different from those in the third chapter. In this case a public sphere was already evident; controversy around reasonable accommodation had been circulating in

the Canadian news media and within the scholarly community for some time. Indeed, the controversy around accommodation practices for religious minorities became so heated that it spurred the creation of the Bouchard-Taylor Commission, a special investigation “in response to public discontent concerning reasonable accommodation,” which I discuss in the chapter (Bouchard and Taylor, 2008: 17). As a result, in this case study I look at the general news coverage of incidents in Québec leading up to and immediately following the Commission’s report, alongside analysis of the report itself. I also examine court cases brought by Sikhs and Muslims asserting their right to religious expression. Here I analyze court transcripts alongside mediated news coverage of these decisions. I also analyze legislation that has attempted to ban various expressions of religious minorities – such as Bill 94, which proposed to ban Muslim women from wearing the full-face covering (*niqab*) in any public service sector in the province. As such, the public sphere that formulated around the concept of reasonable accommodation in Québec is one that took shape within the news media and courts of law; these became my primary sites of media analysis.

In the third case study I look at recent attempts to recast atheism as a church or a creed. This case came to my attention via news headlines like the following: “Meet Calgary’s First Atheist Church,” “Atheist Given Religious Asylum in the U.K.,” and “Sunday Assembly ‘Atheist Church’ Provokes Criticism.” Like chapter four, then, I look primarily at news coverage of attempts to rebrand atheism within the public sphere. In addition, I include an ethnographic analysis through attending an atheist church service. Finally I critically analyze the official website of one major atheist congregation, the Sunday Assembly. I argue that the public sphere around atheism as a church or creed was

constituted in and around news media which propagated the notion. As a result, my critical analytic also looks at atheists who have used news media outlets strategically in order to gain publicity and therefore also ‘converts.’

The media sources used in this dissertation are thus diverse and multi-sited. In the case of Mormonism and Mitt Romney, popular culture formed the most important site of public sphere analysis; in the case of reasonable accommodation practices, legislation was crucial; and in the case of atheism as a church or creed, the news media was integral to forming a public sphere conversation accessible to the wider public. What this demonstrates is that a critical public sphere approach cannot target any one media outlet as primary for constituting the public sphere; a public sphere conversation, including disruptions and contestations, can occur in the realm of the popular, the legalistic, and/or the journalistic, among others. A case study approach demands paying serious attention to the diversity of public sphere materials and following them wherever they may lead.

Theory: A Critical Public Sphere Approach

I have already stated the importance of Habermas and Foucault to this dissertation. In this section I situate my work at the nexus of communication and media studies, religious studies, and political theory. This project is interdisciplinary, as are many of the scholars whose work I rely upon. However, like them, my research is guided by questions of interest that circulate around very specific topics: *media*, *religion*, and *politics*.

While Jürgen Habermas is a philosopher, his work has been taken up by a variety of disciplines, dramatically informing work in political theory, communication, media

studies, sociology, and critical cultural studies. In communication, Habermas's legacy is in developing a theory of communicative action, or a normative framework for producing rational forms of argument (Habermas, 1984). Habermas's work is also significant in communication for his understanding of the public sphere as a space where citizens come together to debate matters of common concern, ultimately fomenting public opinion (Habermas, 1989). Habermas's concept of the public sphere is integral to my critical analytic. As I suggest in the first chapter, the public sphere is a problematic but crucial concept for understanding how citizens engage with the state outside official channels of political action, like voting. Habermas's historical account of the bourgeois public sphere and its normative foundations is useful for understanding the ways that citizens can intervene in public debates. However, his premise of rationality and neutrality in these debates is something that I call into question using Foucault.

I rely on Foucault's critical approach to discourse, power, and the subject in order to broaden Habermas's concept of the public sphere considerably. Foucault's work on discourse and the production of truth claims in particular historical eras is useful for thinking through who has been denied access to the public sphere. The argument that I make is that the liberal democratic public sphere has privileged Christian forms of expression. We must therefore pay attention to the periphery of the public sphere, where those who have been left out of conventional public sphere conversations assert their belongingness. By paying attention to what is 'sayable' within the public sphere, I draw forth the outlines of Christian Liberalism.

This project is primarily a work of communication research. The methods that I employ and the texts that I analyze focus heavily on mediated content, as I have already

explained. Media, and the discourses produced by and through them on the topic of religion, are the primary focus of this dissertation. In this project I seek to expand Habermas's concept of the public sphere to account for the public emergence of an apparently private form of identity: religion. I also, following Nancy Fraser (1990), endeavor to expand the public sphere as a concept that can be democratically fruitful for political change.

Religion is obviously another important subject, but it is not the main character of this dissertation. I study religious minorities in order to get at the entrenched and invisible Christian-centrism of the liberal democratic public sphere. My work in religious studies is informed by Peter Beyer (1990, 1994), Talal Asad (1993, 2003, 2008), and attempts to unpack the secularization thesis by William H. Swatos and Kevin J. Christiano (2000). However, I am less concerned with the religious traditions described in the case studies than with the processes of democratic contestation that they engender.

Critical cultural studies also undergirds my approach to religion. Critical cultural studies, following from the work of Stuart Hall (1997), is interested in the politics of representation and in looking at the popular as a site of serious academic study. Religion is at the intersection of the popular and political, and in this respect is a useful topic for understanding the overlap between these concepts. As I argue in the second chapter, religion exists across both public and private spheres, and it blurs the distinction between them. I draw on cultural theorists who are critically engaged with the concept of the public sphere, including Toby Miller (1993, 2007) and Michael Warner (2002, 2003), both of whom challenge the separation of private and public, or the personal and the political.

Finally, my work takes a number of leads from political theorists. First among these is Seyla Benhabib, whose work on outsiders and democracy informs all of the case studies (1992, 2002, 2004). Benhabib's concept of the democratic iteration points to moments when democracy is reverified through disruption. She focuses on contestations between the state and those who have been excluded from it: immigrants, refugees, and aliens. I also draw on the critiques of liberalism enumerated by Wendy Brown (2006) and Lisa Duggan (2003). Brown and Duggan argue that liberalism is not, and never has been, a neutral political philosophy; it has been culturally encoded by norms of whiteness and maleness. This argument is useful for my own critique of Christian Liberalism. Finally, I rely heavily on the political theory of Jacques Rancière (1992, 2006, 2010b, 2010a, 2011, 2004). He develops a political philosophy centered on the relationship between politics and aesthetics, and he makes the point that the two are interrelated. If the state functions in part through aesthetic categories – through the organization of the populace, and the distribution of sensibility – then any disruption of these categories is a form of political action. He uses the term dissensus to describe this process of redistributing sensibility. Like Benhabib he focuses on those who have been left out of the political community – those who are surplus, or the uncounted. Rancière's approach is thus hugely generative for thinking about the political potential of minority religious groups when they reverify their right to religious expression, especially when this expression is at odds with the Christian Liberalism of the state.

Overview of the Chapters

The first two chapters unpack the critical terminology which is central to the case studies that follow. In chapter 1 I review the concept of the public sphere as it has come to us from Habermas. I also review critiques of the Habermasian public sphere and draw on a paradigm of dissensus in the public sphere that I develop following from Rancière and Benhabib. I use Foucault to expand the scope of public sphere analysis considerably.

In chapter 2 I offer a historical account of the terms liberalism, secularization, and privatization. I develop the concept of Christian Liberalism, which I argue is a form of liberalism which has obfuscated the role of particular religious interests in the North American public sphere via the discourse of tolerance. I briefly discuss the role of religion in the U.S. and Canada, expanding on the notion of a civil religion in each nation.

I then move on to the case studies, where I examine the role that different religious minorities have played in the public sphere. My case studies are drawn from the very unscientific pool of my own observations. However I analyze three cases which have been widely covered in major news media, and thus are indicative of widespread public concern and conversation. In selecting these case studies I have also attempted to focus on the role of both large scale and small scale religious traditions in the U.S. and Canada. The examples chosen relate to traditions like Mormonism, Islam, Sikhism, and Atheism.

In chapter 3 I start with two questions: Why is it that Mitt Romney successfully gained the GOP nomination in 2012 but not in 2008? and, To what extent did his Mormonism influence public attitudes towards his candidacy? I analyze the changing nature of discourse around Mormonism that took place during the period 2008-2012.

While political commentators largely attributed Romney's relative success in 2012 to his reticence to discuss his faith, I argue that the expanded representational repertoire around Mormons and Mormonism that emerged in popular culture during this time directly informed the treatment of Romney as a political candidate. In this chapter I make the argument that popular culture thus influences the public sphere, even in its most official political form. This case study demonstrates the entrenchment of Christian Liberalism in the American political public sphere, and I argue that resistance to this form of Christian Liberalism is most productively executed from the arena of the popular.

In chapter 4 I trace the changing meanings of the term 'reasonable accommodation' in the Canadian province of Québec. By looking at shifting and competing interpretations of the term over the past decade, I argue that we can better understand the contemporary disputes over the public expression of religion in Québec. I argue that Christian Liberalism has shaped the Québécois public sphere insofar as it has asserted a kind of Catholic secularism as the unmarked norm, and all other expressions of religion are treated as exceptions to be accommodated. In this chapter I rely heavily on Benhabib's concept of the democratic iteration and Rancière's notion of dissensus to understand the nature of current ebbs and flows around the concept of religious accommodation. Rather than signifying one meaning, or representing a static understanding of religious rights or freedoms, the changing nature of the term demonstrates the permeable boundaries of Christian Liberalism.

The final case study, in chapter 5, is transnational in scope. However, I focus primarily on iterations of atheist interventions in the Canadian and American public spheres. In recent years atheists have come to request various forms of religious

protection and accommodation from the liberal state, under the mandate of the freedom of religion. I account for this shift, from thinking of atheism in terms of nonbelief to thinking of it in terms of creed or church. I argue that the public distribution of mediated information about atheist churches is in part a provocation aimed at garnering new members; a form of calculated publicity that operates like any other proselytizing movement. The case study demonstrates that these atheist interventions in the public sphere pose a conundrum for the liberal state, which is forced to confront its Christian Liberalism. If the state is religiously neutral, then it should have no problem granting religious freedoms to atheists. However, the case study demonstrates that the lines are not that clear cut and the articulation of what counts as ‘religion’ is not that simple. Atheist interventions in the public sphere help to elucidate the boundaries of Christian Liberalism.

All of the case studies demonstrate the importance of paying attention to religious minorities within the public sphere. Rather than dismissing religion as a matter of private concern, scholars seeking to understand the contemporary role of religion in the state ought to take seriously the public expressions of religion that these individuals and groups are participating in. What’s more, a serious treatment of religion in the public sphere needs to be able to account for the framework of Christian Liberalism which has, and continues to, shape the terms of the debate. My goal in this dissertation is to lay bare this form of Christian Liberalism and highlight the ways that it is being contested, not by scholars of religion or democracy, but by religious people themselves.

Chapter 1: From Habermas to Foucault: Expanding the Public Sphere

There is a fundamental paradox at the heart of liberal democracy. If the people are sovereign, and citizens get to make important political decisions via representational government, then how ought the state to mediate between individuals and groups with markedly different ideas about how those decisions should be made? How should the state proceed when its people disagree with one another? Put another way, how can anything get done if democracy is supposed to allow every diverse voice to be heard? This paradox comes to the fore when matters of religion come up against state-sanctioned neutrality, and are particularly troublesome when the religion in question is held by a minority of the population.

Where does religion fit in the contemporary Western world? How ought we talk about religious expressions and ideas in a way that upholds values of pluralism, tolerance, and diversity, while simultaneously enabling a religiously-neutral state to operate under conditions of democracy? These are the questions that guide the opening of my dissertation. The case studies that follow attempt to answer these questions not through appeal to the state, but rather to the actions of religious minorities themselves who make various attempts at gaining recognition. In so doing, I argue, they intervene in the public sphere in a disruptive but politically productive manner.

In this chapter I introduce key concepts from Jürgen Habermas and Michel Foucault. Habermas elaborates on the concept of the *public sphere*, which I argue is integral to understanding the space in which religious actors intervene into matters of general concern in the state. However, as I will show, the public sphere is not without its limitations, especially as it has been formulated as a normative space of deliberative

communication in the Western liberal context. (I expand more thoroughly on the concept of liberalism in chapter 2.) I highlight feminist and cultural studies critiques of Habermas and draw on the work of Seyla Benhabib and Jacques Rancière to reject the consensus-based paradigm that the public sphere, in its initial formulation, values.

Next I introduce the ideas of Foucault as a critical counterpoint to Habermas, reviewing three key Foucauldian concepts that are useful for expanding our study of the public sphere. Foucault's notions of *discourse*, *power*, and *governmentality* help to refocus our attention towards the boundaries that are drawn around the public sphere itself. Who gets to participate in this space, and what are they allowed to say? Reconfiguring the public sphere as a space of contests for recognition helps to establish a paradigm for studying religion in the liberal democratic state today.

Notions of public and private "spheres" of life are not original to modernity, but they do arise as a self-conscious distinction with the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere. This version of the public sphere is that which Habermas traces in his historical account, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. I begin with a brief discussion of the origins of the relationship between public space and democracy before turning to Habermas.

Democracy and Public Space

In an edited collection of essays on *Public Space and Democracy*, Marcel Hénaff and Tracy Strong begin with the story of Telemachus calling an assembly in the *Odyssey*. They distinguish the public space defined in the assembly from other kinds of space: the private, the sacred, and the common (2001: 2). Nevertheless, the issue that Telemachus

raises in the assembly – around disruptions in his household resulting from his father, Odysseus's, absenteeism – blurs the distinction between public and private realms. Are his concerns merely matters of the private family? How does calling the assembly bring these private concerns into public space? Hénaff and Strong suggest that, “it is noteworthy that this assembly arrives at no solution. [...] Telemachus wants a public resolution to his problems and it unable to attain one. Here we already see a limited version of public space” (2001: 2). They argue that for a space to be properly public it must not be beholden to the demands of any particular individual; public space requires seeing and being seen, hearing and being heard (2001: 7–8). During the medieval period, public space became a location for staging the power of the monarchy (2001: 16). However, “[t]he self-staging of power was an admission that power was subject to judgments, toward an evaluation by public opinion, the support of which was important to secure. The theatrical qualities of power lead necessarily in a politically democratic direction” (2001: 23).

Once power is displaced from the monarch to the people, a fundamental shift occurs that is tied up with access to information. Today, Hénaff and Strong argue, there is a “crisis of public space” tied up with overabundance of this information:

information cancels itself through overinformation. Political public space dissolves into overexposure of the social. Public and private are mixed, as are role and individual, the essential and the anecdotal, major decisions and 'news in brief.' (The very word 'publicity,' which used to refer to debates, has been entirely taken over by the production of that which has become ultimately public - the marketable image.) (2001: 23)

There are two solutions to this problem, according to Hénaff and Strong. One follows the liberal theory of John Rawls and suggests that public space can only include matters that

can be subjected to the rational choice model: affect, emotion, imagination, and creativity – these are all relegated to the realm of the private.

The second solution calls upon Habermas's model of communicative rationality in the public sphere. Habermas outlines a normative framework for public communication based on reasons (Hénaff and Strong, 2001: 24–25). By putting matters of public concern into a common language, public debate may operate as an arena for broadening rationality beyond simply “the assessment of goal-directed actions or propositional assertions” (2001: 25). However, Habermas's notion of public space – the public sphere – also does not provide room for the affectual or imaginary. Hénaff and Strong are suspicious of this separation, seeing the imaginary that produces a sense of social affiliation as foundational to the democratic state. “Indeed,” they explain, “this whole layer of affects, when not recognized and taken into account within the legitimate figures of sociality, is liable to return and be glorified in perverted forms” (2001: 26). Imagination produces both progress as well as populism; civil rights movements along with fascism.

However, the imaginary and the affectual can also veer into the realm of obsession with publicity. If argument is today replaced with a surplus of images, as Hénaff and Strong suggest, then the mass media are responsible for both expanding and narrowing the scope of the public sphere: “[w]hile permitting a vastly expanded audience, [the mass media] also appear to reduce the legitimacy of what is communicated” (2001: 27). These media may also radically reconfigure what is meant by public space, if deliberations over common concerns occur in media forms like the Internet.

Public space requires vision, speech, and theatricality in Hénaff and Strong's assessment. For space to be thoroughly public, individuals must be able to see and be seen by others; they must be able to put their arguments into a common language; and a kind of reciprocal theatricality is required, insofar as putting forth an argument also entails a response from one's audience. Being present and speaking in public space requires some degree of recognition. Importantly, this recognition also carries with it the risk of public scrutiny (2001: 35). However, visibility does not automatically entail democratic debate; the expanding of public space in the virtual world of the Internet demonstrates that more information does not always equal more deliberative discussion (2001: 221).

Habermas's Public Sphere

I now turn to one of the most formative concepts of public space and democracy: Jürgen Habermas's concept of the public sphere. A public sphere is "a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens" (Habermas, 1974: 49). It is the space – literal or metaphorical – where citizens can come together to discuss matters of public concern. It is thus foundational to democracy, and requires a reasoning public with access to information to be able to gather together freely in order to participate in public debate. As a space separate from the economy, the private household, and the government, the public sphere nevertheless mediates between these variously 'public' and 'private' arenas. It is the site where citizens shore up their opinions and attitudes on matters of common interest, and deliberate on the best course of action. While the concept does not originate with

Habermas, he provides the fullest and most influential overview of its historical appearance.

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* Jürgen Habermas traces the historical shifts in Western European society that accompanied modernity (1989). He seeks to elucidate the process by which public opinion has been formed in these social environments. He also provides the historical context for the emergence of the public sphere in its most accessible and deliberative form: as an outgrowth of the bourgeoisie as a self-aware public.

Habermas traces the origins of something we might call the public sphere to ancient Greek and Roman society, although he acknowledges that its form was quite distinct. In the Greek city-state, Habermas explains, there was a sense of the distinction between public and private, and “[t]he public sphere was constituted in discussion (*lexis*), which could also assume the forms of consultation and of sitting in the court of law, as well as in common action (*praxis*), be it the waging of war or competition in athletic games” (1989: 3). But he acknowledges that this space of public deliberation depended both economically and socially upon a private sphere of slavery and unpaid domestic labor (1989: 3).

During the European Middle Ages, Habermas explains, the distinction between public and private was less common, and he finds no institutionalized public sphere at this time (1989: 5–7). Publicity was an indicator of status and nobility rather than a matter of deliberation (1989: 7–8). With the rise of industrial capitalism and the formation of the modern nation-state during the eighteenth century in Western Europe, “for the first time private and public spheres became separate in a specifically modern

sense” (1989: 11). The separation of church from state is significant in this transition:

The status of the Church changed as a result of the Reformation; the anchoring in divine authority that it represented - that is, religion - became a private matter. The so-called freedom of religion historically secured the first sphere of private autonomy; the Church itself continued to exist as one corporate body among others under public law. (1989: 11–12)

From the outset, religion was formative in the establishment of a bourgeois public sphere.

This form of the public sphere depends on the establishment of an independent group – the bourgeoisie – guided by interests that stand outside both the state and the family. For the most part their interests coalesce around economics: the bourgeois public was a mercantilist class invested in trade. Habermas identifies the rise of capitalism and the proliferation of print (journalism) as the two most significant features allowing this transformation (1989: 15). A ‘public’ must be united across space and time, and news helped to establish this coherence (see also Anderson, 1997). This public must also be a *reasoning* public that is free to assemble (Habermas, 1974: 50). Access to information is integral here: a reasoning public requires regular accurate news in order to develop a coherent and educated opinion on matters of public concern.

Habermas also notes the emerging public relevance of the private sphere of domestic life with the rise of the liberal public sphere: “The economic activity that had become private had to be oriented toward a commodity market that had expanded under public direction and supervision” (1989: 19). A new “*public sphere of civil society*” emerged as a self-conscious bourgeois public came into being, distinct from both the interests of the state on the one hand and the family on the other (1989: 23 emphasis in original). However, in the space between these distinct realms a degree of “continuous administrative contact became 'critical' [...] in the sense that it provoked the critical

judgment of a public making use of its reason” (1989: 24). The public sphere thus mediates between private interests and the concerns of state governance.

So in Habermas’s historical account, the public sphere arises with the development of interests that reside outside of, but are related to, both the world of the private family and the state. A reasoning bourgeois public emerges in part in order to guarantee liberty in trade and communication. He sees this declining, however, once that public starts to distinguish separate private interests. At this point Habermas sees the critical function of the public sphere in a state of decline as private interests (especially advertising) come to “invade” the public sphere. When public opinion can no longer be formed through a process of deliberative consensus-building, the public sphere is seriously compromised. The “competition of interests” takes over at this point, and this results in the “‘refeudalization’ of the public sphere” (Habermas, 1974: 54).

This refeudalization results in large part from the changing nature of journalism in the mid-19th century.

Ever since the marketing of the editorial section became interdependent with that of the advertising section, the press (until then an institution of private people insofar as they constituted a public) became an institution of certain participants in the public sphere in their capacity as private individuals; that is, it became the gate through which privileged private interests invaded the public sphere. (Habermas, 1989: 185)

It is important to note here Habermas’s distinction between the interests of business and other “privileged private interests,” the latter being more wholly responsible for the public sphere’s refeudalization (1974). He identifies the rise of public relations (PR) as damaging to the public sphere, because it is invested in the “‘engineering of consent’ ” (1989: 194). If citizens are treated primarily as consumers, the public sphere is seriously

compromised, because all concerns – including serious political ones – must compete for attention (publicity) (1989: 195).

We can see this in Habermas’s treatment of the mass media as it arose during the twentieth century. With the emergence of film, radio, and television, the public sphere becomes seriously compromised according to Habermas. He criticizes these platforms for being privately owned and thus particular in their orientation rather than rational-critical: “[t]he more [the mass media’s] effectiveness in terms of publicity increased, the more they became accessible to the pressure of certain private interests, whether individual or collective” (1989: 188). That is to say that while the mass media expanded the *scope* of the public sphere, they also became increasingly beholden to the particular private interests of conglomerated media ownership. However such an account performs an erasure of the specific private interests of liberalism, which Habermas holds up as both politically and economically neutral (1989: 188). In his history of the public sphere’s decline, Habermas performs a historical obfuscation, suggesting that the interests of the bourgeois, liberal public were somehow not informed by the particularities of whiteness, maleness, or profiteering. Habermas faults the rise of business advertising and the commercialization of the press for the invasion of the public sphere with private interests:

The separation of public and private spheres implied that the competition between private interests was in principle left to the market as a regulating force and was kept outside the conflict of opinions. However, in the measure that the public sphere became a field for business advertising, private people as owners of private property had a direct effect on private people as the public. (1989: 189)

Here he distinguishes between the market as a neutral “regulating force” and the arena of private opinions. My critique of liberalism in the next chapter evaluates this contradiction

more fully by fleshing out the private interests of liberalism. At this point it is important to note that Habermas upholds the liberal marketplace of both economics and ideas as foundational for a truly democratic public sphere.

Habermas's lament around the refeudalization of the public sphere is compelling, and reflects his Marxist influence. He sees the rational-critical function of the public sphere seriously compromised by the rise of private interest groups who vie for publicity (1989: 198–199). He criticizes “the direct exchange of particularist favors and compensations without detouring through institutionalized processes proper to the political public sphere” (1989: 199). I agree with Habermas that the public sphere has transformed to become a space in which different private interests compete for legitimacy, rather than a space of supposedly neutral political debate. But where I disagree with Habermas is whether this in fact weakens the democratic function of the public sphere. Habermas contends that today, “[t]he public sphere becomes the court *before* whose public prestige can be displayed - rather than *in* which public critical debate is carried on” (1989: 201 emphasizes in original). This is absolutely correct, and why I argue that we must reorient study of the public sphere towards this contest for legitimacy. Habermas's history, however, also obfuscates the role of liberalism in managing access to the arena of public debate by presupposing only one proper form of deliberation. Performing “public critical debate” is only one manner in which claims to legitimacy are made; it is also a privileged form of speech that is more available to certain parties than others.

Elsewhere Habermas expands on his theory of communicative action, in which he underscores the importance of rational speech-acts and the development of consensus

(1984). He argues that for communication to be effective it must follow certain rules of rational action; rationality is determined by whether the speaking subject can provide generally understandable, accessible, and testable reasons. He notes that subjective rationales do not count in this formation of rational communication: “[w]e call persons rational who can justify their actions with reference to existing normative contexts” (Habermas, 1984: 19). However, subjective reasons can be given insofar as the speaker “can, with the help of value judgments, explain to a critic his desire for a vacation, his preference for autumn landscapes, his rejection of the military, his jealousy of colleagues” (1984: 16). Reasons must thus be put into a language that is accessible and universally relatable. Likewise, rational statements are criticizable and open to scrutiny by everyone: “[a]n expression satisfies the precondition for rationality if and insofar as it embodies fallible knowledge and therewith has a relation to the objective world (that is, a relation to the facts) and is open to objective judgment” (Habermas, 1984: 9).

Habermas’s model of communicative action thus depends on a highly self-aware subject who can provide clear and universal reasons for their desires, actions, and statements. Matters of art and aesthetics cannot contribute to the world of rationality in this treatment of it. Consensus – or at least the possibility of it – is the goal (Habermas, 1984: 17). According to Habermas, and guided by Weber, this form of hyper-rational discourse emerges historically alongside the “disenchantment of religious-metaphysical worldviews” (1984: 186). Religion is in an ambiguous position in this scheme; while rational statements may be given from a religious point of view, they should be translated into a universal language of reason (Habermas and Ratzinger, 2006). If the sacred authority of religion laid the moral foundations for a normative system in modernity, then

today “the authority of the holy is gradually replaced by the authority of an achieved consensus. This means a freeing of communicative action from sacrally protected normative contexts” (Habermas, 1985: 77). Neither science nor art are cohesive enough to replace the moral framework offered by religion: “only a morality, set communicatively aflow and developed into a discourse ethics, can replace the authority of the sacred *in this respect*” (Habermas, 1985: 92 emphasis in original). Communicative action is thus the heir to the throne of religious authority, promising a mode of conversational integration that can, in theory, lead to social cohesion via consensus.

I will return to the issue of rational communicative action, and the role of religious discourse in this scheme, in the next chapter. At this point it is important to point out the role of rationality in Habermas’s model of the public sphere. Consensus can only be achieved via a discourse based on reasons that are universal and open to scrutiny from other rational actors. This is why Habermas laments the refeudalization of the public sphere, and the emergence of special interest groups who intervene in public debates by putting forth highly local, non-universal arguments. I agree with Habermas that in the refeudalized public sphere special interest groups have much more power than they did in the bourgeois public sphere (1989: 200). However, I disagree that this negatively impacts the critical function of the contemporary public sphere. If its critical function is in mediating between citizens and the state, and in shoring up a terrain for actual democratic participation, then the negotiations between various ‘private’ interests that take place in the public sphere is in fact the fullest realization of that goal. Put another way, if Habermas laments the loss of consensus that the bourgeois public sphere offered, I agree with scholars like Seyla Benhabib (2004), Nancy Fraser (1990), and

Jacques Rancière (2004; 2010; 2011) that the full promise of democracy is realized in this disintegration, via dissensus and antagonism.

Habermas's concept of the public sphere offers the normative foundation for structuring political (and other) forms of talk in contemporary liberal democracies. The ideal of the public sphere constructs it as an accessible space, available to all citizens, where public opinion can be formed. The public sphere is the model for how decisions get made in liberal democracies, and has historically offered a normative framework for keeping supposedly private affiliations – like sexuality, ethnicity, religion, or race – out of public view. In the public sphere citizens from all walks of life can come together to reach consensus on matters of broad public concern, and for this normative premise to succeed apparently differentiating categories like religion, sex, race, and gender must be disavowed. At this point we can see both the promise as well as the problems of the public sphere as Habermas imagines it. I turn now to some important critiques of Habermas which I argue can be used to reform the concept.

Publics and Counterpublics: the Feminist Critique of Habermas

Many feminist scholars have articulated clear and persuasive critiques of Habermas's public sphere. The public sphere is a useful conceptual tool for understanding the space in which public opinion is forged, even if the manner in which that forging takes place looks quite different from the rule-bound, rational debate that Habermas imagines.

Nancy Fraser rethinks the public sphere, arguing that while there are some problems with the concept,

something like Habermas's idea of the public sphere is indispensable to critical social theory and to democratic political practice. I assume that no attempt to understand the limits of actually existing late capitalist democracy can succeed without in some way or another making use of it. (1990: 57)

Fraser sees in the concept of the public sphere a potential to critique the mechanisms of the state and the economy because it is a space located just outside these arenas which nevertheless institutionalizes matters of broad public concern via different forms of talk (1990: 57). However, Fraser also reformulates the public sphere considerably in making use of Habermas's conceptual apparatus.

Fraser's critique rests on the limitations of Habermas's initial formulation, which is entirely bourgeois and therefore also exclusive. While in principle the public sphere is accessible to everyone in a democratic state, in actuality it has been historically accessible to a particular subset of wealthy white men. However, the degree to which women have been excluded from public participation can in part be addressed, according to Fraser, by using the public sphere as a critical concept, rather than simply a historical space. She also points out that while Habermas is quite explicit about writing a history of a very specific, bourgeois form of the public sphere, "Habermas stops short of developing a new, post-bourgeois model of the public sphere" (1990: 58).

Fraser also critiques Habermas for failing to recognize the tension between the accessibility of the public sphere and its actual exclusions based on gender, class, and its ideal form of rational debate (1990: 59). While Habermas spends much time elaborating on the bourgeois public sphere frequented by propertied white men during the Enlightenment period, he also ignores the emergence of concomitant counterpublics, such as those inhabited by women (Fraser, 1990: 60–61). These counterpublics do not

necessarily adhere to the rules of the bourgeois public sphere: they are not always liberal, rational, or constitutive of the majority. In fact, Fraser argues, a variety of counterpublics have existed for as long as a self-consciously defined public sphere. They always existed in distinction from the mainstream public sphere and had an antagonistic relationship with the bourgeois public sphere (Fraser, 1990: 61). The public sphere as a concept is thus useful for elucidating the boundaries of public participation, and the extent to which these boundaries are (always) contested:

the view that women were excluded from the public sphere turns out to be ideological; it rests on a class- and gender-biased notion of publicity, one which accepts at face value the bourgeois public's claim to be *the* public. (Fraser, 1990: 61 emphasis in original)

Fraser sees Habermas's history not only as an account of one particular ideal public sphere that had more hegemonic power than other (non-bourgeois) counterpublics, but also as an ideological formulation producing normative frameworks for the relationship between publics and counterpublics: "[w]e can no longer assume that the bourgeois conception of the public sphere was simply an unrealized utopian ideal; it was also a masculinist ideological notion that functioned to legitimate an emergent form of class rule" (1990: 62). I expand on this in the next chapter when I elucidate the specific cultural norms of liberalism that also helped to obfuscate the very real cultural biases of the bourgeois public sphere. Fraser's argument is that Habermas's ideal public sphere was never as culturally neutral as he presents it, and that its mechanisms of exclusion reproduced a masculinist hegemony. As I will argue in the next chapter, this masculinist public sphere was also a decidedly Christian formation, the legacy of which we continue to feel in contemporary disputes over religion in the public sphere.

Fraser retains the concept of the public sphere, however, because she sees a variety of (antagonistic) counterpublics as the realization of the goals of the bourgeois public sphere. The goals of the public sphere are not realized through rational deliberation followed by consensus, according to Fraser, but through a process of contestation, dissensus, and antagonism. Fraser argues, “in stratified societies, arrangements that accommodate contestation among a plurality of competing publics better promote the ideal of participatory parity than does a single, comprehensive, overarching public” (1990: 66). However these counterpublics must be publicly visible – they cannot be enclaves – in order to intervene in hegemonic systems of exclusion (1990: 67). The public sphere, thus, is a useful concept for understanding the process by which different groups and actors articulate which concerns are *common* or *public*. The public sphere is, and ought to be, a space where different cultural and identity groups assert their concerns *as common concerns*, and argue for their broader relevance. To come into the public sphere with a set of predetermined common concerns is to preempt the very possibilities of deliberation and democracy that the public sphere purportedly produces.

For example, the process by which women intervened in the public sphere to argue for domestic violence as a public, rather than private, concern (Fraser, 1990: 71). In this sense Fraser advocates retention of the concept of the public sphere, to the extent that we examine the debates over participation as a vital part of public sphere ‘talk’: “democratic publicity requires positive guarantees of opportunities for minorities to convince others that what in the past was not public in the sense of being a matter of common concern should now become so” (1990: 71). I argue that this must include the

concerns of *religious* minorities as much as minorities delineated based on gender, class, or sexual identity.

Other scholars have retained the notion of publics and counterpublics to articulate the dynamic process by which minority groups make themselves seen and heard to the majority. Catherine Squires follows the same critique as Fraser, agreeing that Habermas did not adequately theorize exclusion from the public sphere in his initial formulation of the bourgeois model (Squires, 2002: 448–449). Like Fraser, Squires finds value in locating multiple distinct publics, including enclaves, counterpublics, and satellite publics. She focuses on the variety of different black public spheres that have emerged and coexisted in the United States. Squires seeks to introduce nuance into the conversation around a variety of counterpublics in order to account for the ways different publics form and seek to intervene in, engage with, or wholly reject the dominant public sphere. There are thus different degrees of engagement that a public may seek, not all of which employ antagonism or even conversation with dominant public spheres.

Michael Warner forcefully elaborates the value of thinking in terms of publics and counterpublics (2002). He discusses the interventions that various counterpublics of sex and gender have made, especially insofar as they have helped to blur the formal distinction between matters of public and private concern. Like Fraser, Warner acknowledges that the Habermasian version of the public sphere has functioned ideologically to exclude certain concerns relegated to the private sphere. This is especially true of matters of gender and sexuality. He quotes Catherine MacKinnon: “‘feminism has had to explode the private’” and make it publicly relevant (MacKinnon qtd. in Warner, 2002: 33). The disclosure of private sexual information, Warner explains,

can provoke “visceral reactions” on the part of the public which is party to them (2002: 62). For example, New York City passed a series of zoning laws in 1995 which relegated adult businesses (book and video stores, theaters, etc.) to nonresidential areas of the city (Berlant and Warner, 2002: 190). Warner and Lauren Berlant argue that this was an attempt to privatize queer sex, demonstrated by the concomitant resistance put up by various gay, lesbian, anticensorship, and antidiscrimination organizations (2002: 190–191). This resistance, moreover, shored up a queer counterpublic that was otherwise internally diverse and divergent (Berlant and Warner, 2002: 204). In Warner and Berlant’s estimation, any version of public sex is thus also necessarily ‘queer’ because of the work of heteronormativity in rendering sex and intimacy private affairs (2002).

Warner explains that a public, as distinct from other forms of coalition or social formation, is uniquely self-aware and yet anonymous; a public is addressed as a whole, and becomes greater than the sum of its parts. Counterpublics are those which exist in some tension with the dominant public sphere, and which are aware of their own subordination (Warner, 2002).

Warner critiques the public sphere as a bourgeois, historically-specific concept, but retains terminology of publics and counterpublics in order to challenge the rigid distinction between public and private concerns. He highlights the work of the bourgeois public sphere in distancing itself from markings of culture and identity, and points out the unequal distribution of this kind of invisibility:

the rhetorical strategy of personal abstraction is both the utopian moment of the public sphere and a major source of domination. For the ability to abstract oneself in public discussion has always been an unequally available resource. Individuals have to have specific rhetorics of disincorporation; they are not simply rendered bodiless by exercising

reason. And it is only possible to operate a discourse based on the claim to self-abstracting disinterestedness in a culture where such unmarked self-abstracting is a differential resource. The subject who could master this rhetoric in the bourgeois public sphere was implicitly, even explicitly, white, male, literate, and propertied. These traits could go unmarked, even grammatically, while other features of bodies could only be acknowledged in discourse as the humiliating positivity of the particular. (2003: 250–251)

Just as heterosexuals need not “come out” publicly like homosexuals do (Warner, 2002: 52), the liberal public sphere has made certain facets of identity given and unmarked. Warner’s critique of the public sphere surrounds its normalizing claims and the extent to which minority identities have been excluded from participation.

Habermas addresses some of the feminist critiques of the public sphere as a historically excluding space in an edited collection on his treatment of the concept (1992a, 1992b). He does agree that his initial formulation of the concept unduly idealized a version of the public sphere that was only accessible to bourgeois men (1992a). However he does not concede that the public sphere ought to include forms of discourse outside the rational, or rule-bound speech-acts:

Once you invent these universalistic Enlightenment concepts, forms of communication, like court cases, that are meant to settle practical conflicts in terms of mutual understanding and intended agreement manifestly rely on the force of more or less good reasons as the only alternative to overt or covert violence. (1992a: 467)

One purpose of the public sphere is, for Habermas, a way to avoid disagreements erupting into violence (1992a: 479). He also maintains that rational debate is a form of self-correcting discourse that can take into account its mechanisms of historical exclusion (1992a: 478). Habermas ultimately argues that the form of the public sphere is exemplary in this respect.

While I agree with Habermas that the public sphere provides a cogent model for communicative action, and offers the possibility of correcting for its own exclusions, I disagree with his emphasis on rationality. As I will show with the cultural studies critique of the public sphere in the next section, focusing on reason alone excludes a large component of our ‘lifeworld’: affect. Via aesthetics and emotions, individuals come to develop opinions and inhabit subjectivities that go beyond the rational. Religion may be one domain in particular that cannot be subsumed under rational discourse. Yet as the case studies demonstrate, introducing religious ‘talk’ (via rhetoric, or other forms of expression, like clothing) in the public sphere performs some of the corrective function that Habermas highlights.

Finally, while Fraser and Warner think in terms of multiple distinct publics and counterpublics, I think the ideal of the public sphere as a space in which democracy occurs is realized most fruitfully when we speak in terms of *the* public sphere as a site of negotiation between these various publics. For example, one possible approach here would be to consider different religious groups at either the national or local level as different kinds of publics, as Squires does (2002). In this approach we might analyze the degrees of engagement different religious groups exhibit with the state, or with official channels of political conversation. Such an approach would be outside the purview of this study. It would also run the risk of reproducing a discourse of minoritization by re-subordinating counterpublics as necessarily ‘counter’ to some unmarked central public. Indeed, one of the problems with Warner’s discussion of counterpublics of sex and gender is that he does not firmly locate the dominant public: it is heteronormative, certainly, and invested in sex as a private affair, to be sure, but who exactly inhabits this

public? The result of focusing on counterpublics is that we get a full and nuanced sense of subordinated groups but without a clear understanding of how they can intervene in dominant culture.

Further, I think that maintaining the binary between *publics* and *counterpublics* overemphasizes the subordinated status of the latter. While it is true that not all groups participate equally or fairly in public discourse – or can make their concerns appear publicly relevant to the same degree – there is nevertheless the ongoing *possibility* that any member of a society may forcibly intervene in that conversation. This is the premise of democracy. This intervention may take the form of public protest, culture wars, vocal disagreement, or even violence. But as the case studies in this dissertation show, these interventions not only force certain private interests into public view; they also reveal cracks in the edifice of the religiously-neutral, rational public sphere. That is to say that the political promise of the public sphere is realized today in interventions that mark its own undoing. It is for this reason that I continue to employ the term *the public sphere* to signal the space of tension between so-called publics and counterpublics, or religious minorities and the state.

Two Public Spheres: the Cultural Studies Critique

Cultural studies exists in multiple forms, but here I draw on the legacy of British Cultural Studies whose aim was “to democratize our understanding of culture. It therefore encouraged, in effect, the synthesis of what in English can be referred to as 'Culture' with a capital C, on the one hand, and, on the other, lower-case 'culture' as the medium of social communication” (McGuigan, 2010: 2). Jim McGuigan explains that the

most important legacy of this form of cultural studies is its revaluation of the popular as an arena of meaningful study *and* political significance (2010).

It is important to point out that when Habermas describes the public sphere he focuses, for the most part, on conversations that take place in what he calls the *political public sphere* - that is, the arena of public conversation dedicated to matters of concern to the state (Habermas, 1974). The state is distinct from the political public sphere at the same time as it is subordinated to its “democratic demand that information be accessible to the public” (1974: 49). In this sense electoral debates offer a particularly salient example of the political public sphere, subjecting the democratic process to the whims of public spectacle in an effort to produce transparency.

The political public sphere is contrasted, by Habermas, with the public sphere of letters, which McGuigan more fully develops as the *cultural public sphere* (Habermas, 1974: 49; McGuigan, 2005, 2010). The public sphere of letters was the space where literary criticism developed during the 18th and 19th centuries, and where authors could debate ideas “before committing pen to paper” (McGuigan, 2010: 10). The literary public sphere also notably included women. McGuigan argues that the cultural dimensions of the public sphere are broader today, and include entertainment, popular culture, and mass media, all of which help individuals reflect aesthetically and emotionally on “the good life” (2010: 15). He also suggests that thinking of the public sphere as a space for cognitive reflection and sober discussion overlooks the degree to which affective modes of communication, including the aesthetic and emotional, take place in cultural arenas like popular literature and television (2005, 2010). McGuigan notes that,

keen popular engagement in something like a public sphere, when it does

happen, more often than not takes a predominantly affective mode, related to the immediacy of lifeworld concerns, instead of the cognitive mode normally associated with experience of a remote, apparently unfathomable and uncontrollable system. (2010: 15)

For example, watching soap operas may help audiences reflect on their everyday lives (2010: 16). Likewise, reality television programs like *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* propagate neoliberal values like corporate philanthropy, privatized solutions to public problems, and an “ownership society,” all of which engage a particular form of ideal citizenship via popular culture (McMurria, 2008; Ouellette and Hay, 2008). McGuigan cautions that not all pieces of popular culture are inherently politically valuable; nevertheless, dismissing popular culture as an important arena for affective reflection seriously ignores an important component of the public sphere (2010: 16–20).

Peter Dahlgren argues for the importance of television in mediating citizenship via the public sphere. Because televisual programming works on the affective register, and has the potential to unite the populace, it serves a critical political function (Dahlgren, 1995). Dahlgren critiques public sphere theory for overlooking the everyday practices of citizens, which often depend upon popular culture as a site of meaningful conversation (2009). He argues persuasively in favor of including the popular in any understanding of the political: “politics requires passion, in the sense of intense involvement, even if liberal democratic theory tends to cling to visions of pure rationality. [...] [It is] a necessary ingredient for engagement” (2009: 8). The cultural public sphere is thus not parallel to the political public sphere, but intimately intertwined with it; you cannot have politics without an affective relationship to those politics, mediated by culture in its various forms.

Critical cultural studies theorist Toby Miller also argues that culture is an important arena for public sphere talk (Miller, 1993). Miller spends much time unpacking the formation of cultural citizenship, or the cultural requirements for belonging (Miller, 2007). He points out the cultural prerequisites of citizenship in the American context:

The model liberal citizen is a clear-headed, cool subject who knows when to set aside individual and sectarian preferences in search of the greater good. This sounds acultural and neutral, even neutered. But historically, it has frequently corresponded, in both rhetorical and legal terms, to male, property owning subjects protecting their interests from the general population by requiring the public renunciation of other loyalties, an unquestioning embrace of national ideologies, and an apparent self-control over personal desire. This has caused the U.S. government, a putatively culture-free zone, to have profoundly cultural qualifications for citizenship. (Miller, 2007: 52)

The promise of free speech depends on the premise that we all speak the same language (Miller, 2007: 52).

Miller also references the Christian cultural requirements for American citizenship (2007: 57–58). He argues that the confluence of conservative, right wing politics with Protestantism has created “an organic link [...] between apparent logocentric opposites – new churches and new markets” (2007: 58). Religion thus plays a key role in defining neoliberal forms of citizenship. Further, the government’s supposed religious neutrality is contradicted by its support for various Christian organizations (Miller, 2007: 59).

In *The Well-Tempered Self* Miller argues that,

the human subject is a critical component in the formation of a discourse of ‘the public’ and of distinct ‘publics.’ This discourse is not to be found in the domain of an ideal sphere of rationality, or in pure representativeness, or in the marks of class power. It is to be found and explicated in particular technologies of cultural governance. (1993: xxi)

But we cannot bracket out culture from politics, much more than we can isolate the political from the cultural investments of religious institutions or particular religious actors. In fact it is this assumption which has enabled the systematic exclusion of some parties from the public sphere. When particular identity groups are singled out for their private interests, this reminoritizes their claims to agency within the state. It also obfuscates the privileged status of some religious groups over others when it comes to public sphere talk. This is perhaps clearest in the case of American civil religion, a discourse that presents nondenominational Protestantism as ‘merely cultural’ (rather than theological), allowing religious discourse to permeate both American culture as well as American politics.

I draw on both the cultural and political public spheres throughout this dissertation, suggesting that religion, as a cultural matter, is often quite relevant to political discourse. Habermas’ concept of *the public sphere* is broader in scope than the political public sphere alone, and for this reason I find it more useful than talking in terms of political versus cultural interests. As we will see, religion exists at the nexus of these concerns, and cannot be easily relegated to either.

There is also considerable overlap between the cultural and political public spheres, best exemplified in popular programs like *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* (Jones, 2010). Habermas recognized some of this overlap insofar as he argued that the public sphere must mediate between the divergent demands of various private interest groups in the social welfare state (1974: 54). He lamented this refeudalization of the public sphere, but this is where I disagree with Habermas. It is precisely in invoking private interests in public, and in making those interests ‘count’ as common concerns,

that the political goals of a democracy are achieved. Rather than representing the overtaking of the public sphere with private interests, these interventions point out that there never was a normative public sphere outside the field of contested private concerns. The struggle over legitimacy is, I argue, the public sphere in its most vital form.

So the concept of the *public sphere* is useful for its broadness, and for including matters of both political and cultural concern. Just as I find the term useful in its singular sense for locating a space where publics and counterpublics meet and negotiate the parameters of common interest, I also find the term's broad encapsulation of cultural matters and political issues germane to understanding the role of religion in the state. Religion is equally a matter of cultural and political concern, and bracketing off one for the other is as absurd as it is critically suspect.

Rethinking Democracy as Dissensus

I now draw on the work of two scholars who think about the nuances of democracy as it is forged in liberal states. Political theorist Seyla Benhabib offers the concept of the *democratic iteration*, which I use to think about how minority religious actors contest Christian Liberalism. Philosopher Jacques Rancière offers a model of democratic *dissensus* which directly challenges the consensus-based model of Habermas. The work of both Benhabib and Rancière, I argue, can help us expand the concept of the public sphere by focusing on disruptions rather than harmony. If Habermas laments the refeudalization of the public sphere for including all manner of private interests in public space, then Benhabib and Rancière help us see the political promise of making these private affairs publicly relevant.

Benhabib draws attention to the increasingly globalized context for the liberal democratic state. In *The Claims of Culture*, she argues that,

The claims of diverse groups engaged in the name of this or that aspect of their cultural identity have become contestants in the public sphere of capitalist democracies and are embroiled in characteristic struggles for redistribution and recognition. (2002: 1)

Benhabib rejects what she calls the reductionist sociology of culture, which equates population groups with cultures and ignores their internal variations (2002: 4). This approach has resulted in “strong” or “mosaic multiculturalism,” which values cultures primarily as static homogenous entities to be protected for their own sake, without acknowledging variation and internal dispute. This approach also pits ‘cultural’ concerns – like Muslim girls wearing headscarves in a French school – in inevitable opposition to modern norms, like gender equality.

Benhabib draws on social constructivism in order to counteract the reductionist approach, and treats cultures not as static homogenous units but rather as the dynamic outcome of internal and external narratives. She also advocates that the public sphere should be a site where the impartial “recognition of cultural differences and the contestation for cultural narratives can take place without domination” (2002: 8). In this sense attempts to gain recognition are the ultimate expression of democratic equality over and against “‘otherness,’ insofar as otherness is taken to entail disrespect, domination, and inequality” (2002: 8). Benhabib proposes defending cultural groups based on a concept of justice and freedom, rather than cultural preservation for its own sake (2002: 8).

Benhabib lays out three approaches to public space which have dominated

Western theory: the Arendtian approach, also known as the ‘agonistic’ view; the liberal approach, which she calls the ‘legalistic’ view; and the Habermasian approach, which she describes as the ‘discourse model’ (1992). She critiques the Arendtian model for its overly pessimistic view of modern society in the wake of institutional differentiation (1992: 74–75). If Arendt shares with Habermas some of the dissatisfaction of the contemporary public sphere as a space of consumption, then Benhabib points out that Habermas’s formulation at least recognizes the sociological reality of modernity in which various oppressed groups have in fact intervened in the public sphere by putting into question the terms of ‘common’ concern (1992: 95). Benhabib critiques the liberal model for its emphasis on neutrality, while instituting a normative model for dialogic conversation that is not neutral at all, but rather “presupposes a moral and political epistemology” which presumes that certain issues are up for public debate while others are inherently private, and therefore outside the parameters of justice (1992: 82, 92). Women’s and civil rights groups have had to intervene in the public sphere by making their supposedly private claims publicly relevant (Benhabib, 1992: 84).

Neither Arendt nor the liberal model fully accounts for this struggle for recognition, in Benhabib’s estimation. Instead,

The discourse model is the only one that is compatible both with the general social trends of our societies and with the emancipatory aspirations of new social movements, like the woman's movement. The radical proceduralism of this model is a powerful criterion for demystifying discourses of power and their implicit agendas. (1992: 95)

The strength of Habermas’s public sphere model, then, lies in its own ability to self-correct. Benhabib continues to use this version of the public sphere, even as she argues that it must be expanded to account for the feminist critiques of the public/private

dichotomy.

Benhabib also argues for a Habermasian approach to multiculturalism, upholding deliberative discourse ethics as a more egalitarian model than the liberal goal of achieving consensus. For Benhabib, discourses “are procedures of *recursive validation* through which abstract norms and principles are concretized and legitimized” (2002: 12 emphasis in original). However, she rejects the idea that cultural concerns need to be translated isomorphically into comprehensible language in the public sphere (2002: 137). She values the contributions of social movements and other “unofficial processes of civil society” as they engage with formal legislative and bureaucratic institutions of the state (2002: 121). However she also maintains that all minorities are required to participate in the public sphere using the language of “good reasons” (2002: 118).

In *The Rights of Others* Benhabib continues to argue in favor of discourse ethics, but she more explicitly explains what happens when cultural concerns contravene one another (2004). She develops the concept of the *democratic iteration*, which she sees as a useful alternative to liberalism’s emphasis on consensus. She explains:

Democratic iterations are complex processes of public argument, deliberation, and learning through which universalist right claims are contested and contextualized, invoked and revoked, throughout legal and political institutions as well as in the public sphere of liberal democracies. (2004: 19)

Benhabib retains the premise of the public sphere as a space in which this takes place, but she values disagreement and contestation over consensus and harmony. She argues that through the processes of democratic iterations, “the democratic people shows itself to be not only the *subject* but also the *author of its laws*” (2004: 19–20 emphases in original). She focuses on outsiders – people who have been left out from state protections or whose

migratory status renders them vulnerable to transnational uncertainties. She draws on the concept of the iterative from Derrida, suggesting that each instance of exhibiting citizen rights is also simultaneously a reworking of those rights: “every repetition is a form of variation. Every iteration transforms meaning” (2004: 179).

Benhabib draws on the example of the scarf affair in France in order to make her argument. The issue began in 1989 when three Muslim girls were expelled from a French public school for refusing to remove their headscarves, followed by the exclusion of 23 more Muslim girls in 1996 (Benhabib, 2004: 185). In response to the girls’ refusal, the French Supreme Court declared that secularism and religious liberty were not necessarily in conflict, but that such liberty could not extend to cases “which would disturb proper order in the establishment or the normal functioning of public service” (qtd in Benhabib, 2004: 189). The decision effectively allowed school authorities to decide whether the headscarf – or any other public expression of faith – would be allowed in particular schools. A national debate followed, with a concomitant expansion and contraction of rights each time Muslim women refused to abide by the banning of the headscarf in French public spaces (2004: 189–198). The result was an ensuing “series of democratic iterations” (2004: 197). Benhabib argues that the girls, “[i]ronically, [...] used the freedom given to them by French society and French political traditions [...] to transpose an aspect of their private identity into the public sphere” (2004: 187). I will revisit this case, and Benhabib’s concept of the democratic iteration, more fully in chapter 4. It is significant, however, that Benhabib retains the notion of the public sphere, and of

discourse ethics, while allowing for disharmony to produce more democratic outcomes.²

French philosopher Jacques Rancière also focuses on disruption rather than consensus in his model of democracy. He is suspicious of the concept of the general will, or public opinion, because by its very nature it “cannot be divided” (2006: 298). Indeed, Rancière sees the public sphere not as a space of egalitarian deliberation, but rather as the site where politics comes up against the police: “the natural government of social competence and the government of anyone, meet and conflict” (2006: 299). If the police orders and organizes the social body, then politics is the means of calling into question that “distribution of the sensible.” Politics is always disruptive, and therefore transformative. As a result, Rancière argues that democracy is “the process of enlarging the public sphere” against a framework that necessarily excludes some from participation (2006: 299). He thus begins from a presumption of equality, and names as politics the process by which those who have been denied this equality reverify it (1992: 58).

He calls this a process of *dissensus*. In his book *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, Rancière defines the term as “the demonstration (*manifestation*) of a gap in the sensible itself. Political demonstration makes visible that which had no reason to be seen; it places one world in another” (2010: 38 emphasis in original). By staging sit-ins, for example, the surplus communities of a state articulate their own belongingness, their own political agency, as well as challenging the distribution of ‘common sense’ racist segregation policies (2006: 302). By questioning the parameters of the public sphere

² Habermas maintains his position on consensus in a response to Benhabib’s critique: “I think that the ground rules for public debate are only attempts to give a context-bound and historically specific articulation of an idea that is more widely shared, actually intuitively shared, by everybody who uses a natural language in one way, namely to come to a certain understanding with somebody else about something in the world. What does that mean if not to use the same terms with the same meaning?” (Habermas, 1992a: 477)

itself, acts of dissensus actually remake the state in more democratic fashion.

Rancière also advocates for a broader understanding of politics. He sees politics and aesthetics as intimately intertwined, to the extent that politics is aesthetic and aesthetics political. The two are related, but their boundaries are also blurred:

there is politics when there is a disagreement about what is politics, when the boundary separating the political from the social or the public from the domestic is put into question. Politics is a way of re-partitioning the political from the non-political. This is why it generally occurs 'out of place', in a place which was not supposed to be political. (2011: 4)

In his estimation, then, politics is about putting private concerns into public view, and thus about the distribution and display of democratic life. Politics is fundamentally aesthetic because it is about this distribution of common sense; the distribution of ways of seeing, doing and being, are all aesthetic categorizations. This also entails for Rancière a concomitant understanding of the historical emergence of particular art forms alongside the political. Thus, he remarks that, “[i]t is not a mere coincidence that made the art museum emerge at the time of the French Revolution” (2011: 8). To consider politics without its aesthetic dimension is to ignore its organization and mode of classification. I would argue that this also entails serious consideration of the role of *culture* in forming the parameters of legibility, or the distribution of the sensible.

Politics is the articulation of who and what counts, “a specific form of experience in which some things appear to be political objects, some questions political issues or argumentations and some agents political subjects” (Rancière, 2011: 7). In this sense Rancière’s focus is different from Habermas’s: while Habermas looks at the space of democratic deliberation, Rancière is attuned to the process by which individuals and groups argue for inclusion in that space. In contrast to politics, Rancière argues, stands

the police: the mechanism of state governance that orders the populace, that produces common sense understandings (the distribution of sensibility) of who ‘counts,’ and that necessarily omits some as surplus. Disagreement is important, according to Rancière, because to start from the premise that achieving commonality or consensus is an illusion: people are not in common when only some of them are understood to be speaking legibly (2004: 5). As a historical example,

Traditionally, it had been enough not to hear what came out of the mouths of the majority of human beings - slaves, women, workers, colonised peoples, etc. - as language, and instead to hear only cries of hunger, rage, or hysteria, in order to deny them the quality of being political animals. (2004: 5)

The only way that these people have been able to achieve the status of legible speech is through conflict, through forcing their way into the public sphere.

I agree with Benhabib and Rancière that Habermas overemphasizes the role of achieving consensus and downplays the political potential of disharmony. Like Benhabib and Rancière I focus on moments when those who have been excluded from the public sphere advocate for recognition; moments when the distribution of social order and public deliberation are called seriously into question. This does not invalidate the concept of the public sphere, but rather expands it to fit the terrain of actually occurring democracy as always in a state of flux. Further, Benhabib and Rancière emphasize the acquisition of rights within the liberal context. Their arguments about disagreement and disruption are not challenges to the state and democracy per se, but rather ways of reworking the democratic state in order to better fulfill its promise of universal equality.

In order to better understand how religious minorities are already embroiled in disputes over recognition and legitimacy, I turn now to the work of Foucault to help

further expand the notion of the public sphere. Foucault helps us shift our attention towards the moment of forcing the issue: to the moment of particular democratic iterations when some citizens use the rights guaranteed to them by the state in order to assert their private religious concerns as publicly relevant. His concepts of *discourse*, *power*, and *governmentality* help us to see the reciprocal relationship between religious minorities and the state.

Foucault as Counterpoint to Habermas

Dana R. Villa traces a variety of postmodern objections to the public sphere, including the Foucauldian, Lyotardian, and Deleuzian critiques. He locates public sphere theory in the work of Habermas and Hannah Arendt, although he is careful to distinguish the different forms of public sphere that each elaborates. While Arendt foregrounds the role of the social in introducing so-called ‘private’ concerns into public discourse, “[f]or Habermas, modernity is essentially an epoch of rationalization, as Weber described it” (Villa, 1992: 712).

He explains that the Foucauldian objection to the public sphere is a critique of its proscriptions. It is worth quoting Villa at length here:

By setting aside the fundamental liberal distinction between legitimate and illegitimate power, Foucault brings to light the ‘local, continuous, productive, capillary and exhaustive’ character of modern power (Fraser 1989, 32; see Foucault 1980b, 93-108, 119). Power’s ‘tightly knit grid of material coercions’—its various microtechniques for the production of docile bodies and self-surveilling subjects—remain invisible so long as we treat it as sovereignty (Foucault 1980b, 105). Yet it is just this anachronistic model of state power based on contract and intended for the preservation of rights that liberal theory asserts again and again by its imposition of the legitimacy problematic. In so doing, the liberal paradigm—the ‘juridical apparatus’—conceals the increasingly insidious

forms of modern discipline and domination (Foucault 1980a, 81-91).
(1992: 714)

The Foucauldian critique thus entails not a complete abandonment of the concept of the public sphere but rather a diversion in terms of its focus. Rather than assuming that the space of the public is an accessible and free one, we need to interrogate the process by which consensus (in the form of public opinion) is reached. Villa explains the problem of locating consensus as the normative goal of the public sphere:

The criterion of consensus is too blunt an instrument for this task, since it leaves unexamined the self-surveillance of the civically virtuous citizen (who has internalized the hegemonic conception of the public good) or communicatively rational agent (who has internalized the hegemonic conception of what constitutes ‘the better argument’). (1992: 715)

However, rather than ignoring the workings of power in the process of achieving consensus, I argue that we can employ the Foucauldian critique of the public sphere in order to better understand the process by which this occurs. That is to say, rejecting the normative foundations of the public sphere does not in any way eliminate its real-world unfoldings in discourse, or in Habermasian terms, “communicative action” (Habermas, 1984).

It is for this reason that Villa prefers the public sphere model of Arendt, which he sees as less consensus-oriented. He suggest that “[o]nce we see Arendt’s public realm as a space for agonistic action denatured by the normalizing power of the social, we can make suggestive connections to the Foucauldian story about the take-off of disciplinary power in the modern age” (1992: 718). In this sense, Villa argues that Arendt’s conception of the social is paralleled by Foucault’s notion of disciplinary power, and his idea of the public realm is more open to agonistic speech than Habermas’s (1992: 718). Villa reads

Arendt's theory of the public sphere as one that emphasizes "plurality, difference, spontaneity, and initiation" over and above the liberal goal of achieving consensus (1992: 719). However Villa acknowledges that this is a particular reading of Arendt that aligns her especially with Foucault (1992: 719). Other interpretations see Arendt's theory as nearly indistinguishable from Habermas's (1992: 714). Indeed, Habermas himself reads Arendt's theory, according to Villa, "as a prefiguration of his own 'ideal speech situation' – the counterfactual elucidation of the formal conditions of coercion-free communication, abstracted (so he claims) from the very structure of communicative action" (Villa, 1992: 713). Whether Arendt's theory is wholly compatible with the Foucauldian critique is nevertheless undermined by the fact that her historical account, like Habermas's, laments the loss of a genuine public sphere with the coming of modernity. For Arendt this occurs via the emergence of the social, which obfuscates the clear distinction between public and private realms.

While Villa's is a compelling argument, I would argue that Arendt's emphasis on the social obfuscates the role of liberalism in constructing parameters of inclusion and exclusion within the public sphere (see also Benhabib, 1992). That is to say, whether we agree with the normative foundations of the public sphere or not, it is very materially felt by minority religious actors who seek to make their claims public, visible, and legible to the state. Emphasizing the role of the social in blurring the public/private boundary is, I would argue, to re-privatize religious claims. Religion is easily categorized as a matter of domestic concern in an Arendtian framework, wherein the "public sphere is 'devoured' by 'household' concerns – the maintenance of life and economic reproduction – and politics is reduced to the function of 'household administration,' a function fulfilled by

the state” (Villa, 1992: 712). As a result I find value in retaining the Habermasian conception of the public sphere, if only to understand the ways in which religious actors disrupt and remake it.

Now I turn to three concepts from Foucault that help to expand the idea of the public sphere: *discourse*, *power*, and *governmentality*. I examine each of these as they appear in Foucault’s work and apply them to the study of religion in the public sphere.

Foucault and Discourse

Foucault is useful for understanding how certain ideas are put into discourse, and how the framing of the debate reflects relations of power. The delineation of different kinds of publics, including counterpublics invested in engaging the dominant public sphere(s), can be better understood through a careful consideration of the role of discourse. Who may speak – and who is heard – relies on a formulation of power that is diffuse and rooted in language. In particular, what counts as a matter of ‘common’ concern determines not only what gets talked about in the public sphere, but also who gets to speak (Fraser, 1990; Rancière, 2011).

Foucault’s notion of discourse as the primary arena in which power is staged is helpful to address the exclusionary dimensions of the public sphere. If Habermas idealizes a version of the public sphere which is purportedly accessible to everyone but in practice demands a kind of cultural participation in the norms of whiteness, maleness, and rationality then Foucault provides a way of understanding how those parameters of participation in the public sphere come into being.

In describing the process whereby some forms of information are archived by a given society and others are abandoned, Foucault elaborates on the notion of the “sayable” (1991: 59). He asks, “What is it possible to speak of? What is the constituted domain of discourse?” (1991: 59). Likewise, what utterances are not permitted, or are quickly forgotten, or are rarely repeated (1991: 59–60)? Further, what is conserved by a given society, given value, as historical memory, and who has access to that memory (1991: 59–60)? Foucault seeks to understand how particular discourses become individualized: how the boundaries of a discourse are drawn in a way that affirms certain common-sense ideas. However, he also leaves room for discourses to shift over time: “[e]ach discourse undergoes constant change as new utterances (*énoncés*) are added to it” (1991: 54). As I will show in the next chapter, ways of talking about the relationship between religion and the state has indeed changed over time, alternately being framed by the discourses of secularization, privatization, and public religions. I argue that these discourses are also actively contested by particular iterations of democratic disruption enacted by religious minorities. The case studies reveal various attempts to put religious expressions into public view, thereby challenging discursive frameworks that would otherwise say religion is a matter of private concern. Like Foucault, I am interested in the conditions of possibility that bring some religious expressions into the public sphere as legible statements: “[t]he question which I ask is not about codes but about events: the law of *existence* of statements, that which rendered them possible - them and none other in their place” (Foucault, 1991: 59 emphasis in original).

Foucault’s critical analytic for understanding discourse and power, both historically and in the present, is well suited to contemporary formations of the public

sphere. As Fraser advocates, we can interrogate the public sphere as a space in which matters of public concern are justified *as public* – that is, relevant to all, rather than rejected for being the private interests of a particular identity group.

For Foucault, it is through discourse that things are brought into being (Foucault, 1971a, 1971b, 1979a, 1979b). Discourse produces subjects as well as truth; existing outside the parameters of the sayable is to not exist at all. This is particularly applicable to various struggles between religious minorities and the state. If the process of putting into discourse is dynamic, and takes place in the space of the public sphere as I am suggesting (rather than coming top-down from the state), then religious minorities are both subjectivized in these conversations at the same time as they have the agency to intervene in the terms of the debate. According to Foucault, discourses arise in particular institutional contexts, and I argue that the contestations we see in the case studies that follow are remaking very particular sites of knowledge related to tolerance, pluralism, and accommodation.

For example, the discourse of *reasonable accommodation* has shifted over time in the Canadian province of Québec (chapter 5). The different meanings which have been attached to this discourse have alternately framed it as a matter of cultural negotiation, tension and confrontation, or an immutable right of citizens. In each of these discursive constructions different ideas of religious minorities get constructed which inform the general attitudes of the public. What's more, as I show, the interventions of particular religious actors in this discourse – especially Muslim women who wear a variety of head-coverings – have been integral in shifting this discursive construction from the realm of the negotiable (a kind of privilege) to the non-negotiable (a rights-based claim). As I

argue in this case, religious minorities also expand the terrain of speech: the act of adorning ‘controversial’ religious garb, like the Islamic full-face covering, is disruptive in and of itself. In this sense I employ Foucauldian discourse analysis but treat discourse as a category of communication much broader than speech. In fact, Foucault himself conceives of discourse as inherently material (1971a: 8; Hook, 2007).

In a lecture on “Orders of Discourse” at the *Collège de France* in 1970, Foucault confirms that a series of prohibitions have shaped the emergence of various historical discourses (1971a). Among these prohibitions is the distinction between “reason” and “folly,” which has allowed many utterances to be dismissed as irrational expressions of madness (or, in some cases during the Middle Ages, held up as embodying a hidden truth) (1971a: 9). The focus on the distinction between rational and irrational statements is a useful intervention into Habermas’s public sphere: we can bring this historical observation into contemporary discussions on religion when certain religious expressions are precluded as irrational (say, a woman wearing an Islamic head covering in the Québécois public service sector) while others are allowed as rational speech (i.e., Protestantism in the context of American civil religion). It is by turning our attention to the process by which some statements are produced as discourses – as knowledge – and others are omitted that we can better understand the formation of the contemporary public sphere.

It is also true that there is considerable theoretical overlap in the social models offered by Habermas and Foucault. Habermas’s take on the concept of the *lifeworld* is particularly relevant to a Foucauldian understanding of how particular ideas and attitudes become given under particular historical circumstances. The lifeworld is the arena in

which a subject is socialized; their worldview is formed within its linguistic and cultural systems, and its assumptions appear common sense, or obvious (Habermas, 1985: 118–134). However, the lifeworld is not the only domain in which subjects engage in society; systems also structure the interplay between different culturally formed lifeworlds (Habermas, 1985: 118–119). Habermas argues that, “the lifeworld - as the horizon within which communicative actions are 'always already' moving - is in turn limited and changed by the structural transformation of society as a whole” (1985: 119). The interaction between lifeworld and system determines the relative sayability of different statements: “[t]he lifeworld is the intuitively present, in this sense familiar and transparent, and at the same time vast and incalculable web of presuppositions that have to be satisfied if an actual utterance is to be at all meaningful, that is, valid *or* invalid” (Habermas, 1985: 131). In this sense engagement in the public sphere involves the meeting of various lifeworlds, various competing visions of what counts as a sayable (or legible) statement. Where Habermas is interested in the content that arises in the space of the public sphere, and how best to develop a rational consensus, Foucault turns our attention to the conditions of possibility which bring the public sphere into being in its various forms.

Foucault and Power

Both Habermas and Foucault trace the same historical shift in Western Europe, focusing on the rise of the bourgeoisie and the decline of the sovereign as the central location of state power. Habermas sees the rise of the bourgeoisie producing a new form

of civic engagement in the public sphere; Foucault sees it resulting in a “new type of power” that is diffuse, disaggregated, and divested from a sovereign (1980: 105).

For Foucault, power is productive. Power is not effective in the negative sense:

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression. (1980: 119)

Throughout his work, Foucault seeks to understand how certain ideas come into being during different historical moments. That is, how is truth produced via language? How does talking about something also usher in its historical relevance? In *The Order of Things* Foucault traces the archeology of scientific knowledge, arguing that facts come into being primarily via discourse (1971b). Truth is the product of speech: “ ‘Truth’ is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements” (Foucault, 1980: 133). Power operates by producing particular effects, and especially by producing certain statements as ‘truthful.’ I will argue that the discourse of Christian Liberalism has succeeded as a mechanism of power, regulating what is sayable in the public sphere by producing some religious groups as religious and others as merely cultural. As we will see in my critique of the secularization thesis in the next chapter, thinking of power in terms of repression is not particularly useful to the contemporary study of religion. Religion has been relegated to the private sphere according to a particular version of secularization, but that relegation has been incomplete and partial. Further, the discourse of privatization – the idea that religion is a private affair and ought not to be discussed in the public sphere – has helped

to hide the workings of Christian Liberalism as an ongoing productive discourse within the liberal democratic state. This discourse has generated certain religious statements as matters of unmarked tradition rather than particularity (such as the American motto, “In God We Trust”).

Foucault’s understanding of power offers a useful counterpoint to Habermas. Foucault argues that power is diffuse and both produces as well as originates from individual subjects. “The individual is an effect of power, and at the same time, or precisely to the extent to which it is that effect, it is the element of its articulation. The individual which power has constituted is at the same time its vehicle” (Foucault, 1980: 98). He critiques a version of power which sees it as an object that can be possessed by an individual or a particular ruling class: rather than suggesting that the bourgeoisie had power over the insane, Foucault argues that various “micro-mechanisms of power” produced the concept of insanity (1980: 101). At a particular historical juncture it became politically and economically useful for the bourgeoisie to be able to employ mechanisms of population control and exclusion, resulting in the articulation of certain subsets of the population as mad or insane (1980: 101–102). The exclusion of the insane, Foucault argues, is incidental to the employment of the techniques of power of interest to this class at a particular moment.

So while for Habermas the bourgeois public sphere is free from the influences of power and domination, Foucault would ask to what extent that version of the public sphere has come into being as a persuasive narrative. What hypothesis has been assumed to be true, and how has this assumption obfuscated the circulations of power throughout the realm of discourse (Foucault, 1979b)? Rather than assuming that there is a sphere

than can be isolated outside the interests of power, Foucault urges us to assume that all subjects are formed in power and use power in their operations (1980). Power involves the circulation of discourses which compete for legitimacy ('Truth'): "power, when it is exercised through these subtle mechanisms, cannot but evolve, organise and put into circulation a knowledge, or rather apparatuses of knowledge, which are not ideological constructs" (1980: 102). In this line of inquiry it is important to understand the interests of particular groups in specific historical moments in order to grasp the material functioning of power throughout the social body. Who is benefiting from a particular discourse, and in what ways do counter-discourses come into being? If Habermas takes as the object of his inquiry the bourgeois as a self-conscious public, then Foucault advocates paying attention to what is omitted from this designation of a normative public sphere supposedly free from the influence of an omni-circulating network of power. As I will show in the case studies, the performance of religious identity is one way that citizen-subjects intervene in the circulation of a discourse of a secular or neutral public sphere.

Foucault and Governmentality

Foucault's work on governmentality also provides a useful way to understand how power circulates throughout the Habermasian public sphere. Foucault describes governmentality as a set of practices arising with the modern state that enable new forms of regulation, enumeration, and control through self-discipline of each citizen-subject.

Nikolas Rose, one of the foremost scholars of Foucault's work, has further elaborated on the concept of governmentality. Rose explains that with the emergence of the modern state, the focus of governance shifts from the individual to the population as a

whole (1990, 2005). In this way studying governmentality means examining “a particular ‘stratum’ of knowing and acting” and one or more “regimes of truth” rather than looking at relations of rule or force (Rose, 2005: 19). How do subjects come into being as subjects under different conditions of knowledge production? How does the self come to understand itself? In part this is a process resulting from attempts to manage large populations and in so doing enumerate the relevant demographic information about citizens of the state. In order to maximize efficiency, Rose suggests, the modern state seeks to glean information about its population’s health and illness, death and procreation, thereby properly managing each individual from cradle to grave. Rose explains that this produces a new relationship between science, the state, and the individual: “the new vocabularies provided by the sciences of the psyche enable the aspirations of government to be articulated in terms of the knowledgeable management of the depths of the human soul” (1990: 7). Once subjectivity is put into quantifiable data, in the form of psychiatric evaluations, diagnosis, and the IQ test, governmentality of the “citizen subject” becomes that much easier. Various techniques of the self allow subjects to conform to a vision of the good life, that is, the vision of life that is good according to the state (1990: 7, 10).

The public sphere is not an immediately quantifiable arena. Nevertheless, it is a space where regimes of truth determine the relative sayability of different kinds of statements; where the circulation of knowledge depends on the legibility of the subjects participating in the conversations that take place in the public sphere in the first place. The normative public sphere as Habermas describes it has a strong governmentalizing function. This is not Rose’s argument, but my own. The regime of truth undergirding

liberalism has privileged Christian forms of religious expression, demonstrated by the contradiction between treating all religious groups equally in the state and the bare fact that some religious groups are treated more equally than others. The goals of the Habermasian public sphere, which include reaching consensus and forming public opinion, encourage subjects to express themselves using the language of secular rationality and deliberative debate, and to keep religion out of the conversation. However, this contradicts a critical function of democracy as an antagonistic form of government. As Rancière describes it, democracy is “a movement to affirm the belonging of everyone and anyone to [an] incessantly privatized public sphere” (2006: 300). Equality and access stand in contradiction to the normative prerequisites for public sphere talk.

Foucault’s concept of governmentality allows us to critique the normative public sphere as a space without cultural investments or orientations. It also allows us to see that the premise of neutrality is an impossible one. Put another way, the public sphere itself is entangled in the network of power that Foucault describes as permeating modern forms of self-assessment and self-regulation. The extent to which subjects opt in to participate in the public sphere – or are excluded from participation because their statements are considered illegible or ineligible – cannot be separated from the governmentalizing features of the space that allows such conversations to take place.

Further, the liberal public sphere is a Christian public sphere. Christianity has operated as the effective governmentalizing force shaping public sphere conversations. This is why the government of Québec can try to prevent Sikhs from carrying *kirpans*, or Muslims from covering their faces, but continues to meet in the National Assembly under a large Catholic crucifix. The contradiction is erased through an appeal to Francophone

culture and tradition. Likewise, the verification that “In God We Trust” is the national motto of the United States is described as an anti-Communist political expression, rather than a reflection of specifically Christian theology. In both cases, Christianity is obfuscated for its structuring role in defining the boundaries of legible political statements. But, as the case studies will show, this does not preclude resistance. Rather, because power operates through subjects, when minority groups raise objections in the public sphere – objections which cannot be erased or ignored because of their very publicity – the public sphere itself is reverified as an accessible space. Each time minorities argue for rights or acceptance on par with the Christianity embedded in the liberal state, the fact of Christian Liberalism is exposed, which also helps to explain the marked resistance with which such arguments are often met.

In this sense, the public sphere can also help us see past criticisms of Foucault that claim that he denies subjects any agency at all. Rather, thinking of the relationship between the public sphere and governmentality exposes that there is no “getting outside” of the circulations of power, but that subjects can disrupt the workings of the public sphere in order to expand rights and acceptability. As Fraser points out, the public sphere as a concept has been used to exclude particular identity groups (like women) from full participation in public life. At the same time, however, women and other disenfranchised populations can intervene in the public sphere by staging disruptions that point out the cultural orientations of that space. For example, if domestic violence was maintained as an issue of private, domestic concern (and therefore prohibited from inclusion in public sphere ‘talk’), that is not to say that women did not slowly, over time, redefine domestic violence as an issue of public concern. The dynamic tensions between what Fraser calls

the “official public sphere” (1990) or what Warner would describe as the “dominant public” (2002) and various counterpublics is the space where democracy is in fact fully realized as a process of disruption, antagonism, and contestation rather than consensus. The concept of governmentality can help us see the mechanisms by which the state is invested in the formation of particular kinds of (Christian) subjects, and why such interventions by religious minorities thus provoke such visceral reactions.

Conclusion: Habermas and Foucault

I have argued that the public sphere is a problematic but necessary concept for understanding how liberal democracy functions. Even if public space is more ambiguous today than ever before (Hénaff and Strong, 2001), and even if the lines have been blurred between proper ‘public’ and ‘private’ concerns, the idea and ideal of a site where citizens can come together in open conversation outside the bounds of the official state remains integral for the democratic process. Foucault urges us to rethink our point of focus, from the conversations that take place within the public sphere to the periphery of it, where distinct and dynamic cultural groups assert claims for recognition. Like Benhabib and Rancière I acknowledge that these interventions – which redraw the boundaries of the public sphere each time they occur – are disruptive rather than harmonious, and produce tension and dissensus. However, that is not necessarily a political problem. If Habermas argues that the only alternative to extremely rational discourse is violence (1992a: 467), then I agree with his critics that there is much more space in between these two extremes than he gives citizens credit for.

As I show in the next chapter, the problem with the public sphere in its material

manifestation has been the disconnect between its premise of neutrality and its actual cultural orientations of masculinity, whiteness, and Christianity. Moments when diverse groups – including religious minorities – make a claim on public space and in public view, the cultural prerequisites of the public sphere become clearer. In the next chapter I argue that these prerequisites have largely encouraged and legitimized various forms of mainline Christianity in the United States and Canada. This has resulted in a form of Christian Liberalism which has played a major role in structuring the Western public sphere. However, as the case studies that follow demonstrate, the parameters of Christian Liberalism are neither static nor unalterable. The work of minority religious groups is significant in remaking the public sphere in broad, antagonistic, and ultimately more democratic fashion.

Chapter 2: Secularization and Christian Liberalism

In this chapter I focus on the history of the role of religion in the Western liberal democratic state. I explain the concept of secularization, critiquing it for its obfuscation of the very real influence of Christian discourses in the North American public sphere. I outline the three case studies that follow and set the terms of what I call Christian Liberalism: the Christian-inflected brand of liberalism that has so far defined the relationship that minority religious actors have to the state. I also argue, here and in the chapters that follow, that there is room to contest Christian Liberalism and remake the state in more democratic fashion.

I structure the first part of the chapter around three guiding questions: What is liberalism?; What is religion?; and, What is secularization? After reviewing these three terms I examine some practical solutions to the problem of how to deal with religion in the contemporary public sphere. These solutions include relegating religion to the private sphere; the translation of religious terms into secular equivalences; and the deployment of a rhetoric of tolerance to manage competing religious and secular claims. I argue that none of these sufficiently accounts for the manifold ways that religion is always already embedded in the liberal public sphere in the U.S. and Canada. I briefly review the role of religion in American and Canadian society, determining that in each context a particular form of civil religion has shaped the terms of the public sphere. The civil religions of American Protestantism and Québécois Catholicism are concrete examples of Christian Liberalism today. However, as I suggest at the end of the chapter and in the case studies that follow, the parameters of Christian Liberalism are neither static nor absolute, and

they are constantly being challenged by religious minorities like Mormons, Muslims, and atheists.

What is Liberalism?

Liberalism is a political philosophy that emerged in Western Europe in the late 17th century. Liberalism offers a framework for how to organize life under capitalism, alongside the emergence of the modern nation-state. It is premised on the rhetorical separation of public from private life, and as Lisa Duggan forcefully demonstrates, it is therefore dependent on categories of identity like whiteness and maleness (2003: 4–6). She explains that while “[d]ifferent forms of Liberalism define the categories somewhat differently and assign publicness and privateness to them in varying ways [...] the most public site of collective life under Liberalism is always the state, the ‘proper’ location of publicness, while the most private site is the family” (2003: 4). This distinction is a necessary precondition for capitalism, and in particular for property ownership. Proponents of liberalism are invested in defining the limits to the state’s ability to regulate and control elements of private life, especially those concerning private property. In this version of liberalism, some people are identified as subjects capable of ownership, and therefore participation in public life, while others (women, slaves) are treated as property, their unequal status “understood as ‘natural,’ and bracketed away from consideration in the ‘public’ life of the state” (Duggan, 2003: 5). Liberalism is invested in liberty, but only the liberty of those identified as capable of participating in the circulation of capital. However, as Duggan points out, the rhetorical premise of liberalism

could never fully account for “the real, complex interrelations of forms of collective life” (2003: 6).

John Locke articulates an early version of liberalism based on the ideal of property ownership. Every man (and indeed, as Duggan points out, the premise of liberalism is only available to men at this time) has ownership over his own body, and the labor that it is capable of producing (Locke, 1823: 115–118). This is the original definition of liberty: men are born free, in the sense that they have autonomy over their own body and its self-determination (Locke, 1823: 106). Through one’s labor the common goods produced in nature can be transformed into private property. However, in order to ensure the sanctity of this private property, including the sanctity of one’s own bodily autonomy, men come together to form political communities (Locke, 1823: 146). Liberty, then, entails the freedom to accumulate goods and wealth, alongside the freedom of bodily autonomy. Men are also born equal in Locke’s version of liberalism (1823: 106). In order to maintain equality and liberty, men join together to form political communities invested in protecting private property, but in doing so they also submit to the will of the majority (Locke, 1823: 146). Liberalism entails, then, compromising some elements of self-determination in order to protect one’s property.

The concept of liberty is developed further by John Stuart Mill, who expands on this contradiction. Originally published in 1859, *On Liberty* outlines the parameters of representational democracy and warns against the dangers of tyranny of the majority (1989: 8). Liberty, in Mill’s estimation, has shifted from the freedom *from* the coercive apparatus of tyrannical governments to the freedom *to* contribute to the machine of government itself. His vision of liberty is what we might describe as libertarian today:

“the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others” (1989: 13). For Mill the prerequisite terms for true liberty include freedom of conscience and opinion (freedom of speech), freedom of taste and pursuits, and freedom of assembly (1989: 15–16). Liberty, for Mill, entails not only the freedom from tyranny and oppression, but the freedom to act in so long as it does not harm others in society. However, he also cautions that the “will of the people” can quickly become the “tyranny of the majority” when it comes to representational democracy (1989: 8). As we have seen with Habermas and his dissenters, this is the basic problem of the public sphere model.

In order to ensure liberty, Mill argues, a given society must enable to the fullest extent the individuality of each of its members; this is what may counteract the potential for tyrannical majority (1989: 59–64). Diversity breeds individuality according to Mill, and conformity is the major impediment to a properly functioning liberal democracy. In this sense, Habermas’s guiding principle of the bourgeois public sphere – to achieve consensus – is a fundamentally illiberal goal.

From the outset, religion is in a complicated position in relation to the liberal state. Given the features that Mill describes, it would seem that the role of religion in the liberal state is not as an overarching framework but as a feature of individual lives and motivations. It is, as I will show later in this chapter, assumed to be a private affair. Religion should not be hampered or inhibited, but it also ought not to be imposed. However, when the private concerns of one’s faith compel public expression, as in proselytizing, wearing religious garb, or arguing in a public forum using religious rhetoric, the liberal promise of respect comes up against this tendency towards

privatization. Religion stands at the nexus between *private* individual affiliation (the preferred liberal stance) and *public* expression (a mandate of many religious claims). Put another way, a fundamental claim of this dissertation is that religion disrupts the neat separation of public and private spheres, and attempts to render it wholly private are necessarily exercises in disrespect and oppression, or what Mill might call tyranny.

I argue throughout this dissertation that the work of minority religious actors in intervening in the public sphere upholds the liberal promise of equal rights. Like Rancière, I begin with the premise of equality and demonstrate via the case studies that arguments to achieve rights are also reverifications of that equality. However, how can the liberal public sphere accommodate dissensus without chaos, liberty without the tyranny of the majority? In other words, how can the liberal state guarantee religious liberty without encroaching on the liberty of its non-religious subjects? This is the basic tension embodied in the state's guarantees of the freedom *of* religion and the freedom *to* religion. I will argue that one way the state has approached this dilemma is via the marginalization of minority religious claims and the crafting of a particular brand of tolerance I call Christian Liberalism. However, as the case studies demonstrate, Christian Liberalism – because it is liberal at heart, and includes a public sphere as Habermas describes it – is open to mutability and contestation, which can ultimately produce more democratic outcomes.

Before I elaborate on the concept of Christian Liberalism, however, it is important to do some definitional work. Next I explain the concepts of religion, secularization, and privatization before returning to the contradictions inherent in liberalism.

What is Religion?

What we find throughout the history of the secularization discussion is that the ‘secular’ is always defined in relation to some understanding of the ‘religious’ (Swatos and Christiano, 2000: 5) – a term notoriously difficult to define in the social scientific study of religion. And so it is important to indicate at the outset what I mean by the term ‘religion.’ I am less interested in what religion *is* than in what religion *does*, and so my alliances tend toward the functional definitions offered in the tradition of Durkheim (Durkheim, 2001).

For Durkheim, religion is a social phenomenon. In fact, religion does not exist outside of sociality, and religious veneration is in fact the veneration of the social group; divinity is nothing more (or less) than society symbolically configured. He looks to the Totemic origins of religion in what he calls ‘primitive’ societies, and while his teleology is not particularly productive, his emphasis on how religion functions as a communicative tool and as a method of social cohesion is particularly relevant to my project (Durkheim, 2001).

Throughout this dissertation I will rely on a concept of religion as a *form of communication*, which I draw from Peter Beyer (1994). Instead of relying on distinctions like sacred/profane or natural/supernatural, Beyer suggests that immanence/transcendence forms the central religious dialectic:

The central religious paradox lies in the fact that the transcendent can only be communicated in immanent terms, and this by definition: communication on the basis of meaning is always immanent, even when the subject of communication is the transcendent. Religion, therefore, operates with sacred symbols, ones which always point radically beyond themselves. It deals simultaneously with the immanent and the transcendent. (1994: 5)

As a way of communicating with the sacred, religiosity puts the believer into social relation with the transcendent; this communication may be through prayer, ritual activities, moral codes, etc. While the terminology of sacred and profane compels one to draw the distinction between religious and nonreligious objects or acts (which is a kind of theological distinction), the mutually implicated immanent/transcendent polarity means that the stuff of religion must be translated into everyday experience in order to make sense, and it is this everyday religiosity that we are able to study as scholars of religion. This way of thinking about religion is significantly broader than content-based definitions of the term which inevitably exclude some traditions we might like to call ‘religious.’³

While I am less concerned with whether all religious traditions must have a transcendent referent in order to ‘count,’ I retain Beyer’s notion of religion as a mode of communication, and in this sense as a meaning-making activity. This understanding locates religion intersubjectively. This conception of religion as communicative process enables us to pay attention to the activities of religious persons and especially the role of religious rhetoric rather than debating the truth-claims of particular religious groups. It also situates the current project as one at the nexus of communication, critical cultural studies, and religious studies.

Thinking of religion as a mode of communication also allows us to examine its discursive repercussions; religious intolerance can often be understood as a problem of communication. Religions can also be understood in terms of the discourses that they

³ An example of a content-based definition of religion is the gods paradigm, which suggests that religions can be identified based on whether they have one or more deities. This definition excludes Eastern traditions like Buddhism and has largely been rejected in the social scientific study of religion.

produce, and how these discourses may come into conflict with those of supposedly 'secular' states. Ultimately my goal is to interrogate what is sayable in public – what kind of religious rhetoric is permissible in North America, and what this permission says about the influence of specific religious beliefs in the supposedly secular public sphere.

Conceiving of religion as a communicative action emphasizes not only its discursive component, but also its performative dimension. In both cases, if religion is a form of communication then its social aspects are emphasized. Indeed, I am not interested in the content or truth-claims of particular religious groups, nor in debating their theological merits. Rather, I am interested in investigating the way that religion, as a communicative intervention sometimes made public, challenges attempts to keep it in the private sphere.

I situate religion as a part of human culture and ideological systems, and do not think that it should be analyzed using separate or special theoretical frameworks exclusive to religion (Arnal, 2000). In this respect I reject the claim that religion is *sui generis* and needs to be investigated as such, siding instead with scholars of religion like Russell T. McCutcheon, Willi Braun, and Talal Asad, who argue that religion is a concept embedded in culture and politics, rather than distinct from it (Asad, 1993; Braun, 2000; Braun and McCutcheon, 2000). As Asad points out, attempts to study religion as a self-evident category, both a transcultural and transhistorical phenomenon, obfuscate the relationship between religion and power, and reifies the Christian hegemony embedded in *sui generis* concepts of 'religion' (1993). Instead, religion is constructed in attempts to study it as a cultural object. Many of these attempts have been Western and Christian-centric, suggesting that the term 'religion' is neither neutral nor universal.

Any person or group who contests the secularization of the state through the public expression of personal religious tradition and beliefs can be said to be ‘doing religion,’ in my estimation. Because I am emphasizing the communicative dimension of religion, the production of discourses that challenge the secular state are of the most interest to me. My examples include both large-scale traditions (like Islam) as well as much smaller religious groups (Mormonism; atheism). A minority religious group refers here to any religious affiliation that is not held by the majority of a national population.

What is Secularization?

On the one hand, secularization refers to a general discourse about the current state of religion in Western society. On the other hand, ‘the secularization thesis’ refers to a set of claims and normative assumptions made by a group of sociologists of religion during the mid-20th century. I will start by examining the intellectual history of the thesis, suggesting that even though it was eventually rejected in the academic world as a set of predictive claims it continues to inform attitudes about whether, and to what extent, religion should be included in the public sphere. Moreover, the sociology of religion continues to retain the terminology of secularization but uses it to refer to institutional differentiation (Dobbelaere, 2002; Smith, 2003). This terminological confusion is in part one element of the problem of using the language of secularization.

The term ‘secularization’ was popularized by Emile Durkheim and taken up by a variety of European social scientists in the mid-20th century. During the 1960s, a group of European sociologists began writing about the imminent and inevitable decline of religion throughout the world, and “by the early 1970s, secularization was the reigning

dogma in the field” (Swatos and Christiano, 2000: 2). Relying mainly on church attendance figures, scholars like Brian Wilson (1969), Peter Berger (1969), and Thomas Luckmann (1967) argued that religion was in the process of dying out completely. In 1968, sociologist Peter Berger declared that, “by ‘the 21st century, religious believers are likely to be found only in small sects, huddled together to resist a worldwide secular culture’” (qtd. in Stark, 2000: 42). Berger’s claim was neither unique nor extraordinary at the time, but it was important because of the attention it gained, and because he rejected the theory himself almost 30 years later.

The secularization thesis developed with a particular history of modernity in mind. According to proponents of the thesis, the European enlightenment ushered in a new epistemological era in which the tenets of empiricism, rationalism, and modernization displaced older outdated models of knowledge production based on irrational religious belief (Stark, 2000: 43). Immanuel Kant’s answer to the question, “What is Enlightenment?” is important for the intellectual trajectory of the secularization thesis’ historical claims. While Kant does not reject religion completely, he does replace the transcendence of God with that of man: “to renounce such enlightenment completely, whether for his own person or even more so for later generations, means violating and trampling underfoot the sacred rights of mankind” (2003: 48). He describes enlightenment as a gradual process whereby individuals take personal responsibility for their use of reason, even in matters of religion, which must be subject to questioning. Kant accounts for the centralization of religion in his enlightenment program when he says that, “religious immaturity is the most pernicious and dishonourable variety of all” (2003: 48).

The instruments of modernity – namely, modern science, rationalism, capitalism, and institutional differentiation – are cited as the historical predecessors for contemporaneous shifts in religious adherence (Casanova, 1994: 6, 24; Stark, 2000; Warner, 2010: 32). In this account, while science and rationalism undermine the epistemological framework of Christianity, the rise of modern capitalism emphasizes the choices available to the religious “consumer” (Berger, 1969; Casanova, 1994: 9; Wilson, 1969: 167). Once the logic of the capitalist market invades the domain of social life, religious affiliation becomes one individual choice among many that the religious ‘consumer’ may choose. Religion is no longer a coercive apparatus of the state, but becomes a matter of individual choice. Social services once provided by the overarching framework of a religious institution are now differentiated, provided by the state or by various private organizations. For example, many universities and hospitals in the West began under the purview of Catholic, Jesuit, Presbyterian, and other traditions and today are formally disaggregated from these traditions.

Another way to articulate this modern transformation is to say that we are no longer under the singular ‘sacred canopy’ of one theological worldview (Berger, 1969). Peter Berger was one of the leading proponents of secularization theory and explained the historical changes undergoing religions in the era of modernity. For Berger, secularization is not only an institutional process, but also a psychological one: it invades the psyche of the modern individual and sends the new religious consumer into a sea of religious doubt. Without a singular, overarching religious worldview (i.e., Western European Christianity), religious structures become subject to processes of rationalization

as groups compete for attention in the free market of ideas (Berger, 1969: 139). Wilson concurs, outlining the danger of this transformation:

Denominational diversity [...] has in itself promoted a process of secularization, in providing for the uncommitted a diversity of religious choice, in creating institutionalized expression of social differences and divisions, and in the very circumstance which, in extending choice, allows some to make no choice at all. (Wilson, 1969: 51)

In accounts like these, the historical trajectory of the enlightenment leads to the inevitable and eventual disappearance of religion from many aspects of secular modern life, and religion retreats to the private sphere. This narrative of secularization reproduces two kinds of Eurocentrism which are important to acknowledge. First, proponents of the secularization thesis rely on the teleology of modernization as a singular, linear process whose logical endpoint is the secular, ‘developed’ West. However, there is no reason to believe that modernization happens in the same or even similar ways across disparate contexts.⁴ There are instead multiple variant *modernities*, some of which even implicate religion and religious belief in the process of development. For example, the ‘modernization’ of India took place in large part under the rubric of a distinctly Hindu nationalism. Specifically, the modern practices of enumeration and bureaucracy initiated by the British⁵ and continued in nationalist programs were culturally Hindu (Chakrabarty, 2002).

⁴ This is also true of the European enlightenment, which as Thomas Munck shows, happened in quite divergent ways in different national contexts (2000: 3–20).

⁵ “From surveys of land and crop output to prospecting for minerals, from measuring Indian brains (on behalf of the false science of phrenology) to measuring Indian bodies, diets, and life spans (thus laying the foundations of physical anthropology and modern medicine in India), the British had the length and breadth of India, its history, culture, and society, mapped, classified, and quantified in detail that was nothing but precise even when it was wrongheaded.” (Chakrabarty, 2002: 83–84)

Second, accounts like Berger's invoke a Eurocentric definition of religion, one that is specifically Christian. Because Christianity appeared to be in decline in Western Europe, "the demise of religion was [deemed] sociologically determined and culturally inevitable" (Warner, 2010: 2). As previously mentioned, secularization theorists relied primarily on Church attendance data gathered from Western Europe. However, religion was never shown to be in the same kind of decline when it came to other traditions, even those in the West. The United States presented the glaring contradiction of a Western, predominantly Christian nation which did not exhibit declining church attendance numbers during the early 20th century. Secularization theorist Bryan Wilson recognizes the exception of America, and accounts for it by claiming that religious groups have had to become more dedifferentiated in order to survive in America (Wilson, 1969: 109–122). He still calls this a form of secularization, arguing that in the US, "the vacuousness of popular religious ideas has also increased" (Wilson, 1969: 122). Many secularization theorists cited increasing religious pluralism as a *cause* of secularization proper (see for example Berger, 1969: 139; Wilson, 1969: 47, 51). As Rodney Stark elegantly puts it, while the secularization thesis purported to explain and predict religious trends the world over, "no one has bothered to explain this to Muslims" (2000: 45).

Challenges to the Secularization Thesis

In 1997, Peter Berger recanted his previous ideas about secularization theory and admitted its predictive failure:

I think what I and most other sociologists of religion wrote in the 1960s about secularization was a mistake. Our underlying argument was that secularization and modernity go hand in hand. With more modernization

comes more secularization. It wasn't a crazy theory. There was some evidence for it. But I think it's basically wrong. Most of the world today is certainly not secular. It's very religious. (qtd. in Stark, 2000: 62)

Contemporary sociologist of religion Rodney Stark declares secularization a dead concept, titling his overview of the theory's development "Secularization, R.I.P." (2000).

Stark has been one of the most virulent opponents of the secularization thesis. One of his major challenges to the thesis relates to the claim, made by proponents of secularization like Berger and Wilson, that society used to be 'more religious' than it is today (Stark, 2000; Swatos and Christiano, 2000: 11–12). Stark argues from historical data to undermine the idea of a 'golden age of faith'. He points out that church attendance was actually very low during the middle ages, and that "clerical ignorance" ran rampant throughout the Catholic Church at this time (2000: 47–49). For example, Catholic priests were not well educated, and often uttered nonsensical mumbles in place of the Latin mass (Stark, 2000: 48). While determining the relative level of piety for any society is extremely difficult, Christianity did not necessarily have a stronger hold on the lives of individuals in the past than it does today.

No manner of institutional ties between the Church and state has ever been a historically effective guarantor of personal conviction. One example is the key figure of Carlo Ginzburg's micro history, *The Cheese and the Worms* (1980). In this text one minor, ordinary 16th century figure, Menocchio, is described as being put to death for his strange cosmology; Menocchio believes that the world was formed like cheese, and that the earth's creatures are like worms in that cheese. Even despite maintaining allegiance to Catholicism, Menocchio's public heresy eventually gets him killed. Ginzburg's recounting of the tale is less an example of the radical beliefs held by one individual than

an example of the heterogeneity of belief, even in a system of intense institutional alignment between church and state. This example helps to clarify the fact that religion has always been a matter of choice, even in circumstances of extreme coercion. However, examples like this still stand in contrast to heavy tomes on secularization like Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* (2007), in which Taylor maintains that in 1500 it was nearly impossible *not* to believe in orthodox Christianity.

Religion did not die out, and its supposed decline is challenged by the growing global resurgence of religious pluralism and various religious fundamentalisms (Juergensmeyer, 2003). If Christianity does not veil Western society in a unified sacred canopy (and as Stark points out, it is unclear whether it ever did), alternative sacred scarves have contributed to the tapestry of Western religious life, including New Religious Movements and Eastern traditions like Islam, Chinese religious practices, Hinduism and Buddhism. Indeed, the global migration of peoples, along with their cultural and religious traditions, are increasing rather than decreasing the religious diversity of the West (Benhabib, 2004; Bramadat, 2005). Finally, in the U.S. in particular, the existence of a dedifferentiated yet decidedly Protestant "civil religion" (Bellah, 1967; Tocqueville, 1969) raises the question of new forms of sacred canopy contouring popular and political discourse. I will return to the concept of civil religion later in this chapter, but first it is important to explain another popular discourse on religion, which states that it is allowable in the liberal democratic state so long as it remains private.

Secularization Reformulated as Privatization

One popular reformulation of the secularization thesis suggests that while religion will not die out as a result of modernization, belief has nevertheless become a private affair. This is consistent with the liberal premise that individuals are free to worship and assemble as they please (Mill, 1989: 15–16). Tariq Modood explains in a recent volume on secularism, multiculturalism, and citizenship that, “[a]t the heart of secularism is a distinction between the public realm of citizens and policies, and the private realm of belief and worship” (Modood, 2009: 177). He means that the definition of ‘secularism’ is contingent upon a predetermined idea of public and private, with an understanding that religion is part of the private sphere.

For social scientists who rejected the predictive element of secularization but wished to account for contemporary religious changes in the late 1960s, privatization became a popular concept because it maintained that religion stood in opposition to elements of modern life without making grandiose claims about its disappearance. The idea that religion is a private affair continues to hold sway in popular culture, from Rick Santorum’s laments about religion being disallowed in American political debate to French, German, and Canadian legislation that bans Islamic dress in public spaces. Religion is visible in a variety of ways in public spaces, and denying this or attempting to remove it from public view only underscores the limitations of conceiving of belief as a private affiliation. I will argue here that the privatization thesis conflates two definitions of ‘the private’ and in so doing does not accurately account for the contemporary religious situation. Those who argue that religion has become a private affair have used privatization, in the economic sense, to argue that the ‘free marketplace of religious ideas’ has resulted in faith becoming a private and personal choice. This is consistent

with the sociology of religion's version of secularization as institutional differentiation. This line of argument has also been used to uphold the normative assumption that religion *should* be neither seen nor heard in public. As a result, when religion does emerge in public view – be it in the discourse of politicians during an American federal election campaign, or in a French classroom when a teacher refuses to remove her *niqab* – it poses a problem for the supposedly secular state, which is ill equipped to deal with it. What's more, these moments of public religiosity confuse rather than clarify the neat separation of public from private.

Historically, the distinction of public and private spheres has only emerged within the past 200 years. 'Privacy' comes from the term 'deprivation' and the notion originally referred to being deprived from being in public. Since the 18th century, however, privacy has taken on a positive connotation, as the private sphere became defined as the space of the family, site of rejuvenation. Nevertheless the public sphere continued to be the politically important domain. European coffeehouses and salons served as the ideal location of the public sphere in action, where men and women would put aside their private interests and debate matters of political concern.⁶

Habermas's public sphere presupposes a neat separation between public and private spheres of influence, at least in the context of its bourgeois form. The emergence of the bourgeois public sphere is historically dependent on the relegation of religion to the private sphere, where the church becomes one institution among many (Habermas, 1974: 51). However, that institutional differentiation also results in free market

⁶ While many scholars have criticized Habermas's idealist vision of the public sphere as an exclusionary space that was only for privileged white men, many salons were actually run by women.

competition, which Habermas sees as contributing to the refeudalization of the public sphere – that is, it is made captive to the interests of a select few (1974, 1989).

Habermas's history of the public sphere traces a change in religious life from public to private realms, and his concern with refeudalization foreshadows concerns about the role of religious institutions in contemporary public life and political decisions.

A number of sociologists of religion argued that while religion was not about to disappear, it had nevertheless become a private affair by the mid-20th century. This 'privatization thesis' emerged around the same time as the secularization thesis, and was part of the same intellectual discourse (Beyer, 1994: 70). It was put forth by scholars who are considered part of the secularization canon, most notably Berger and Luckmann.

According to the privatization thesis, once religion became disaggregated from the state, and became a matter of individual choice, it "lost much of its 'public' relevance" (Beyer, 1994: 70). In this sense for religion to be 'made private' correlated with its disaggregation from formal institutional power; economic privatization applied to social forms. Furthermore, the rise of religious pluralism challenged the hegemony of Christianity, establishing it as one religious choice among many. In Western Europe, the declining institutional power of the Christian churches meant that they lost much of the public and political sway they once held under a unified sacred canopy (Berger, 1969; Warner, 2010: 13).

Thomas Luckmann's *The Invisible Religion* (1967) serves as an example of the privatization thesis, and I will discuss it here briefly. Luckmann explains secularization, perhaps counterintuitively, in terms of the birth of a new form of religion. He identifies institutional differentiation and religious pluralism as two important factors in the

development of this new religious form, which privileges individual experience over a social or institutional form of religion. Luckmann declares that in his contemporary moment (the late 1960s),

The sacred cosmos is mediated neither through a specialized domain of religious institutions nor through other primary public institutions. It is the direct accessibility of the sacred cosmos, more precisely, of an assortment of religious themes, which makes religion today essentially a phenomenon of the ‘private sphere.’ (1967: 103)

The ‘invisible religion’ is the private religiosity of individuals, and it is not visible in the public domain. It privileges autonomy and enables the religious consumer to construct his or her own personal religious experience (Luckmann, 1967: 97–99). While the invisible religion gains popularity, in Luckmann’s estimation, traditional hierarchical religion – like the Catholic Church – remains in decline. Luckmann neither favors nor disparages the privatization of religion, but he does assert that it is the most fundamental aspect of secularization as a process being undertaken in modern societies.⁷ His contribution also expands the breadth of the term ‘religion’ considerably, encapsulating cultural behaviors like sports.

What Luckmann, and other proponents of the privatization thesis, overlook is the way that an individualized religiosity can be asserted in public and political ways. Making religion the purview of the individual rather than the Church or the state does not mean that it is banished eternally from public life. In particular, my argument is that when religious actors affirm their private beliefs in the public domain – be it by appealing to religious ‘reasons’ in political argument, or by wearing a headscarf in a public school –

⁷ Although he does consider it a challenge, as the original German title of his book shows: *The Problem of Religion in Modern Society*.

the ‘privatization’ of religion is challenged as a given. This also undermines the liberal presupposition of a clear-cut distinction between public and private spheres.

The privatization argument has held considerable sway in the social scientific study of religion (Beyer, 1994: 70). Peter Beyer suggests that while globalization favors religious privatization, it does not necessarily *prevent* religion from being public or political (Beyer, 1994: 71, 94). Jose Casanova persuasively argues that institutional differentiation does not necessarily lead to religious privatization (1994: 19). He claims that since the 1980s religion has in fact undergone a process of *deprivatization*, re-entering the public sphere and gaining a renewed kind of publicity. He gives examples such as the increasing public presence of both Evangelical Christians as well as Catholics in the American political sphere.⁸

It is important to point out that Casanova’s case studies are all Christian examples, and are overwhelmingly Catholic; nevertheless his argument about modern public religions can be applied to non-Christian and non-Western traditions. For example, recently there have been many debates in Germany and France over the public display of *hijab* and *niqab*, two versions of head covering employed by some Islamic women. As women have argued for the right to wear religious garb in public places like school rooms, they have asserted a supposedly private affiliation in a very public way (Benhabib, 2004). Thus, even when religion becomes a matter of choice rather than a coercive state apparatus it does not necessarily become a completely private affair. In

⁸ For example, when Christian fundamentalism arose in the U.S. during the early 20th century it embraced a self-imposed withdrawal from public life. During the 1970s evangelical Christians re-emerged in public, aligning with “anti-establishment conservatives,” when it appeared that their enclave would be threatened by religious pluralism and the rise of secular humanism (Horwitz, 2013).

particular, these are not ‘anti-modern’ expressions coming to the fore in an increasingly refeudalized public sphere (El-Tayeb, 2011). Rather, I think, they are an integral part of the modern public sphere and help to reconstitute this public sphere in an accommodating and pluralist fashion.

In fact, religious groups may become more publicly vocal and politically active when they must compete in the ‘marketplace of ideas’ suggested by Berger (1969) and Luckmann (1967). In a comparative study of the character of abortion discourse in Germany and the U.S., Myra Ferree, William Gamson, Jürgen Gerhards and Dieter Rucht argue that religious actors make claims in the public domain by presenting a religious frame, or sacred canopy of symbolic meaning (2002: 155). However, because the sacred canopy offered is only one among many, it is in the interest of anti-abortion groups to mobilize using dedifferentiated religious claims: “[I]ike U.S. political parties, the sacred canopy that works best is a big tent” (2002: 177). As a result, Christian Right attacks against secular humanism get downplayed in abortion discourse in the interests of broadening support especially among other religious adherents (2002: 177–178). In this example religious actors reenter the public domain in a vocal and vociferous way, but find it in their interest to downplay specific theological claims in favor of dedifferentiated Christian rhetoric.

Claiming that religion is a private affair diverts attention from its public uses, and does not allow scholars to account for what happens to religious traditions when they are made part of public life. In this sense the institutional differentiation thesis so popular amongst sociologists still does not account for secularization as a macrosocial process (Smith, 2003: 29). The privatization thesis continues to be a popular way to discuss the

religious marketplace of ideas as available to individuals but invisible to the public at large. However the assumption that economic privatization – essentially, the proliferation of a variety of religious choices in the form of pluralism – leads to religion’s declining public significance is misguided. Indeed, over a century ago Max Weber described the intertwining of the emergence of Protestantism and the corresponding development of economic market-driven rational calculations (Weber, 2008). What Weber highlighted was not the decline of religion in the modern world, but the process by which religion, alongside other cultural forms, was becoming increasingly rationalized in the modern era. What’s more, the particular brand of rational capitalism that Weber saw emerging in the West he attributed to the Protestant ethics of hard work, asceticism, and self-denial (2008). Various forms of Christianity continue to be politically aligned with free market ideologies in the U.S. today (Horwitz, 2013). However, the privatization thesis continues to provide the intellectual foundation for a number of debates over whether, or to what extent, religious sentiments should be allowed in public political discussion.

Should Religion Be Allowed in Public Debate?

If religion has become a private matter, then presumably it has no place in public debate. The public sphere should be a secular space without the sway of private interests. As we have seen, however, it is not the case that religion is bracketed off from public political discourse. In fact, religious language – and Christian rhetoric in particular – is always already invoked in moral issues concerning the state, such as the abortion debates. The question is: should extra measures be taken to exclude or limit this kind of participation on the part of religious actors? Where should the line be drawn on the issue

of religious language in public debate? In this section I review two examples of this debate, which I argue is the result of some of the misunderstandings related to secularization outlined above. While I take no position in this debate, I argue that the debate as a whole is premised on the assumption that religious discourses can be extracted from or translated into secular ones. I review these normative claims and put them in conversation with some of the empirical data outlined above.

Philosophers Robert Audi and Nicholas Wolterstorff articulate a nuanced version of this debate (1997). Audi argues that every legitimate religious conviction has a corresponding secular ‘reason’ that can be used in public debate. Moreover, he suggests that secular arguments are superior because they are fallible – that is, they are testable and can be verified empirically (Audi and Wolterstorff, 1997: 15). Because religious beliefs arouse more ‘passion’ than other kinds of dogmatic beliefs, according to Audi, they are especially dangerous in political debate and when used to uphold coercive laws.

Audi privileges the rational, self-aware citizen. He believes that all citizens should be able to discern and articulate their reasons for supporting or condemning the issue at hand (Audi and Wolterstorff, 1997: 50). While he does not suggest that religious citizens need to disavow their religious convictions in order to participate in deliberative debate, he does argue that secular reasons must be presented in public debate, and are especially important for undergirding coercive legislation. He espouses neutrality as commendable achievement of liberalism, suggesting that liberal democratic states are able, in theory, to produce consensus through rational debate.

As a counterpoint to Audi’s position, Wolterstorff uses the terms of a liberal democratic regime in order to argue on behalf of the inclusion of religious convictions in

political discussion. Wolterstorff argues that excluding religious reasons is discriminatory, which goes against the inclusive principles of an ideal democratic public sphere. He also highlights the impossibility of extracting the religious from the secular, or divesting them within the individual. Who is to say when a reason given is secular or religious in origin? He also critiques the premise that liberal democracies can achieve consensus when in practice they operate according to majority rule (Audi and Wolterstorff, 1997: 154–155).

Ultimately Wolterstorff concedes that even though religious reasons should be allowed in politics, for the purposes of persuasion religious actors might find it more politically useful to articulate secular versions of their argument:

if the religious person wants to persuade the non-religious person, of the person of another religion, of his position, he will have to do more than offer his own idiosyncratic religious reasons. But that is a requirement of strategy, not a requirement embodied in the ethic of the citizen in a liberal democracy. (Audi and Wolterstorff, 1997: 164)

The point for Wolterstorff is that religious reasons cannot be excluded by virtue of their being religious.

Habermas conducts a similar debate with Joseph Ratzinger, then-Cardinal and current Roman Catholic *Pope Emeritus*, in *Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion* (2006). Habermas reaffirms that religion is a private affair, although he does not go so far as to exclude it from public discourse. Rather he suggests that contemporary Western society is “postsecular” insofar as it has not seen the decline or demise of religion (Habermas, 2008; Habermas and Ratzinger, 2006: 46). Nevertheless he describes ‘secularization’ as the process of translating formerly theological concepts into normative

secular frameworks (such as the liberal human rights discourse) (Habermas and Ratzinger, 2006: 45). He concludes (and concedes?) that,

In the postsecular society, there is an increasing consensus that certain phases of the ‘modernization of the public consciousness’ involve the assimilation and the reflexive transformation of both religious and secular mentalities. (Habermas and Ratzinger, 2006: 46–47)

Finally, Habermas concludes his essay in *Dialectics of Secularization* with a call to continue this process, wherein “secularized citizens” respect the right of “religious citizens” to contribute to public debate, even using religious rhetoric, helping to “translate relevant contributions from the religious language into a language that is accessible to the public as a whole” (Habermas and Ratzinger, 2006: 51–52). While Habermas does not elaborate on this process of translation, it does not sound unlike Audi’s call for citizens to develop secular reasons for their religious convictions (see Habermas, 2008). Likewise Habermas’ insistence on the presence of “secularized citizens” echoes Wolterstorff’s critique of Audi for conceiving of a citizenry that can be divided into ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ components.

While Ratzinger largely agrees with Habermas’ call for a dialogue between religious and secular voices, he also spends much time emphasizing what he sees to be the larger problem of the ethical failings of science and rationality. While he agrees that religion can, and should, be ‘rationalized’ he also argues that reason must also be corrected using religious moral imperatives (Habermas and Ratzinger, 2006: 77). “Pathologies of reason” include human embryo research and the atomic bomb, incidents which cannot be corrected from outside of a theologically-grounded human rights regime. Without religion (Christianity), the normative basis for liberal democracy would falter.

Ultimately, then, both Habermas and Ratzinger agree that religious rhetoric should be allowed in public debate, although for different reasons and to different ends. Habermas allows religious language with the caveat that an attempt be made to ‘translate’ it into secular (or perhaps simply non-specific) terms, while Ratzinger sees no need for translation and calls for such debate to be thoroughly “intercultural,” including the language of all religions. However, he also acknowledges that the two main parties at the debate are “the Christian faith” on the one hand and the proponents of “Western secular rationality” on the other (Habermas and Ratzinger, 2006: 79).

Habermas suggests that religion is private in modernity as a result of institutional differentiation (1974), but he also clearly acknowledges the ongoing relevance of religion in public debate. The notion that we are in fact living in a ‘postsecular’ society is compelling, and helps to complicate the privatization thesis. However, it also raises the question of what exactly preceded the current era: if we are postsecular today, when were we ever fully ‘secular’?

I return to Casanova and his emphasis on the presence of public religions. He writes, “it is only by questioning the liberal private-public distinction as it relates to religion, and by elaborating alternative conceptualizations of the public sphere, that one can disentangle the thesis of privatization from the thesis of differentiation” (Casanova, 1994: 39). Even when institutional differentiation first occurred, it is not clear that it corresponded to the privatization of religion. In this sense we were never ‘secular’ as the term is used in relation to religion’s relegation to the private sphere. The debates between Audi and Wolterstorff and Habermas and Ratzinger help elucidate the problem of separating public from private in such a straightforward manner. Even if philosophers

agree that, in theory, religion should be banished from (or limited in) public discourse, it is unlikely that religious actors would oblige. If the issue is where to draw the line, this is a red herring distracting from the fact that religion is already deeply embedded in the institutions of American politics. Furthermore, the premises that liberalism is neutral and that citizens within a liberal democracy are capable of fully self-aware rational thinking are both overly idealist convictions. While neutrality may be an admirable goal for liberal democratic states, it is not a given, and historically not a fact. The construction of the citizen as a highly rational, fully informed philosopher is likewise the product of particular cultural concerns that privilege whiteness, maleness, and, notably, Protestantism (Audi and Wolterstorff, 1997: 80, 154; Duggan, 2003). The problem is not whether religion can be allowed in public debate, but to what extent religion's role in public life has been only narrowly explained using the language of secularization and privatization.

As an example, the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) released the results of its 2011 "American Values Survey" in anticipation of the 2012 federal election. The survey indicated that 67% of Americans said it was important to have a presidential candidate with "strong religious beliefs" (Jones and Cox, 2011: 4). However, 42% of respondents reported discomfort with the idea of a Mormon president (53% reported feeling "somewhat comfortable" with the idea). Only 28% reported feeling discomfort around the idea of an evangelical Christian president, while 64% expressed discomfort around the idea of a Muslim president. The majority of respondents (67%) reported discomfort with the idea of an Atheist president – the affiliation with the strongest degree of discomfort (Jones and Cox, 2011: 5–6). What this indicates is that religion continues to

have a relevant role in the American political landscape, even despite the official separation of church and state. Further, the PRRI poll demonstrates that degrees of comfort vary widely in relation to different religious affiliations. That most American presidents – and presidential candidates – have been Protestant Christians is not an accident; it is a reflection of the entrenchment of Christian Liberalism, and the degree to which citizens are comfortable with religious affiliations proximate to the ones that they themselves hold. Rather than being a matter confined to the public sphere, then, religious affiliation is an important factor in shaping public attitudes towards political candidates.

Religion's continued public presence, and the challenges it poses for political philosophers and religionists alike, makes clear that religion is not a purely private affair. Debates over whether religious language should be allowed in public discourse, and if so, to what degree it should be translated in secular terms, point out that it *already is* a part of these public conversations, whether we like it or not. Abortion debates in the United States; the human embryo debate that Ratzinger highlights; ongoing disputes over the public acceptability of *hijab* in schools in France and Québec – all these debates highlight the fact that theological legitimation is *always already being invoked* in the course of political deliberation. In this sense it does not much matter whether we agree that, philosophically, religion should be banned from public life. Practically it is part of these conversations, and it will continue to assert itself in ways that scholars of political philosophy and religion alike need to account for beyond the language of 'public' and 'private' – or even 'political' and 'cultural.' Moreover, the shorthand of secularization contributes to the ongoing production of public and private as separate and distinct spheres of life, even when these notions lose their conceptual clarity the more we apply

them to particular situations. What I am interested in is the relative ‘speakability’ of different kinds of religious statements: which statements are sayable (socially acceptable and generally allowed in the debate) and which are not (Foucault, 1991: 59–60)? To put it another way, *whose religion is allowed to be public?*

I should be clear here that I am not advocating that theological argumentation take place in public discussion; rather, I am pointing to the fact that certain kinds of religious statements become sayable in public, while others do not, banished from public discussion because they are a private matter. In this sense, some people with minority religious beliefs are said to ‘have religion’ much in the same way that non-white people are said to ‘have race,’ while often mainline Protestantism, like hegemonic whiteness, remains unmarked. Because this rhetorical attack does not apply equally to all religions, it must be interrogated.

Christian Liberalism, Tolerance Talk, and the Obfuscation of Christianity

At this point I return to my discussion of liberalism. I review John Locke’s formative vision of liberalism in order to better understand how a particular version of liberalism I am calling Christian Liberalism came to reign supreme in the liberal democracies of the U.S. and Canada. I argue that Locke’s emphasis on tolerance has enabled liberalism to privilege mainline Christian modes of expression while minoritizing alternative religious expressions. Via the discourse of tolerance, Christianity has been enshrined as the normative, cultural foundation of the Western liberal state. As the only religious tradition that exists outside the parameters of tolerance – it need not be tolerated because it is so deeply engrained in Western modes of life and historical memory –

Christianity has attained the status of the invisible center. Because it so often goes unmarked as a category of affiliation, its public expressions appear culturally neutral. However, as I show here and in the case studies that follow, the public interventions of minority religious actors showcase the Christian inflections of contemporary liberalism.

Liberalism can find its philosophical origins in the work of John Locke, who articulates that the central figure of liberal democracy is not the magistrate or the king but rather the autonomous individual, ruled only by his⁹ own conscience and guaranteed freedom in every sense of the word by the state. He is guaranteed freedom of conscience and expression, sentiments that get later adopted in the American Constitution but also in other liberal democratic forms like the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Chief among these freedoms, for Locke, is the freedom of religious belief, which he expounds on more extensively in “A Letter Concerning Toleration” (1796).

In this essay Locke explains that tolerance must undergird the social organization of society, so that no religion rules over any other, and each individual subject is able to choose freely amongst the diverse opinions they may be confronted with. Locke foreshadowed concerns over religious pluralism by admonishing those who would pinpoint religious diversity as a cause of strife: “It is not the diversity of opinions, (which cannot be avoided) but the refusal of toleration to those that are of different opinions, (which might have been granted) that has produced all the bustles and wars that have been in the Christian world upon account of religion” (Locke, 1796: 63).

Locke argues that it is less important what the citizen of the state believes in; what is important is that he *believes* (in God). The atheist is the primary figure excluded from

⁹ This central figure is presumed to be male.

his mandate of tolerance (1796: 56), alongside the citizen with allegiance to another state (1796: 55) or practices that contradict the laws otherwise mandated by the state, producing, for example, harm to other citizens (1796: 39–40).

Locke espouses the idea that the liberal society ought to treat religion as a private affair, separate in all instances from the political operations of the state. The church and the commonwealth are distinct entities with very different concerns, for Locke; the former concerned with the salvation of souls and the latter with the organization of this-worldly affairs (Locke, 1796: 63–64). However he also recognizes that religious meetings are essentially public encounters, and must conform to the basic rules and regulations that other public spaces - like the marketplace - are subject to (1796: 60–61). Religion, he acknowledges, has a fundamentally public dimension insofar as all traditions which he recognizes (Islam, Paganism, Judaism, and the various Christian sects), teach “that God ought to be publicly worshipped” (Locke, 1796: 34). Even public rituals must be tolerated by the state, writes Locke, because they are so essential to proper religious worship that to prohibit or interrupt them would be to “command [the practitioners] to offend God” (1796: 35). In Locke's ideal vision of liberalism, religion remains separate from the state because it has no interest in worldly affairs; he envisions a religiosity that is Protestant, private, and focused on soteriology, rather than one that is all-encompassing, worldly, or political. At the same time, the interests of the state must be primary: “[n]o opinions contrary to human society, or to those moral rules which are necessary to the preservation of civil society, are to be tolerated by the magistrate” (1796: 53). He emphasizes the public good throughout.

Part of the reason that religion is a fundamentally private affair, for Locke, is due

to the fact that reason itself is private, the purview of the individual and his or her consciousness. The primacy of reason and the ability to choose freely amongst all available opinions and options - a fundamentally Kantian understanding of modern, enlightened man (Kant, 2003) - removes religion from the spheres of ethnicity or culture, and treats all traditions as equally viable alternatives which the citizen may opt into. Freedom of conscience, then, must be the absolute highest priority; religion cannot be coerced any more than other matters of internal, private belief.

While Locke maintains the religious neutrality of the state (while allowing that the magistrate might have his or her own private beliefs), he also constructs a model of liberalism around a central Protestant logic where belief in God is a necessary requirement for toleration. He describes the fundamentals of human nature in decidedly Christian language:

Every man has an immortal soul, capable of eternal happiness or misery; whose happiness depending upon his believing and doing those things in this life, which are necessary to obtaining God's favour, and are prescribed by God to that end. (Locke, 1796: 49)

He premises many of his arguments in favor of religious freedom on the essential tenets of the Christian gospel (1796: 20, 62).

In some ways Locke is an optimist, suggesting that the church and the state have no reason to become intermingled and are very rarely at odds with one another. He is speaking from a time of intensely high alignment between the institutions of government and the hegemony of Christianity throughout Western Europe. This is part of the reason that he uses a Christian understanding of liberty to articulate a vision of the good life. Insofar as he cannot foresee the institutional differentiation of society, Locke argues that

religion is more likely to be affected by the state than vice-versa (1796: 32).

Wendy Brown critiques Locke's understanding of tolerance, and the way that it has affected contemporary tolerance talk. In *Regulating Aversion*, she argues that because Locke's proposition satisfied no one at the time - it was at odds with the ideas of both the religious majority, which influenced the state, and religious minorities - "tolerance was initially embraced not as a moral or principled conviction but as a practical solution to an impossible impasse" (2006: 32). She recognizes that Locke's piece provides the foundation for the idea that religion ought to remain separate from the affairs of the state; "[t]his sharp attenuation of the bearing of religion on everyday civil and political life enables Locke in the same gesture to privatize religious belief, to render it an individual rather than common matter" (Brown, 2006: 31). Brown also argues that Locke is able to make this gesture towards diversity and religious pluralism because he emphasizes the apolitical dimension of religion; belief is permitted so long as it has "no public importance" (2006: 32). She argues that Locke's vision of toleration is the one that has come to fruition most often in liberal states, a vision of tolerance "that radically individualizes and privatizes religion, and therefore is also most closely fitted to Protestantism" (2006: 34). It is also a vision of tolerance that, in practice, is condescending.

Wendy Brown critiques Locke, and liberalism more generally, for presenting itself as an acultural form, and then using this premise of secular neutrality to exclude 'cultural' or 'religious' forms from public discussion and debate. Throughout *Regulating Aversion* Brown challenges the unqualified value of tolerance by pointing out the ways in which it always invokes a power relation and conceives of the tolerator in a position of

authority over the tolerated. In this sense tolerating minority religious traditions is a way that the state recapitulates its own noncultural origins and heralds itself for being a rational, reasonable body capable of tolerance. Tolerance is a guise that obfuscates that liberalism is a culture, with its own sets of values and norms. What's more, that culture is decidedly Christian. As I will show next in my discussion of civil religion in the U.S. and Canada, the particular inflections of Christian Liberalism are distinct in different Western liberal democracies. Both countries, however, practice the discourse of tolerance talk as Brown describes it.

Brown draws on Foucault's work on governmentality, alongside *The History of Sexuality Vol. I*, to rethink the unconditional heralding of tolerance as the chief virtue of liberal societies. Tolerance as a discourse of power, she argues, reveals the way in which the term carries with it the attempt to neuter alterity; to render difference sanitized through assimilation and normalization (2006: 26). In this sense, she suggests, tolerance acts as a weapon of biopower, a term that Foucault uses to designate the power to regulate, rather than terminate, life. The intolerable, she suggests throughout the book, is that which is identified as barbaric, ruled primarily by culture or religion, rather than rationality. In chapter 6 of the book, she examines "how and why liberalism conceives of itself as unique in its capacity to be culturally neutral and culturally tolerant, and conceives of nonliberal 'cultures' as disposed toward barbarism" (2006: 151). She explains how it is that George W. Bush is allowed to make religious statements in a way that upholds liberalism as a neutral political force, while simultaneously disavowing Arab states for their overreliance on religious beliefs (2006: 153–154). The paradox affirms the Christian underpinnings of liberalism as a formation, but also reveals the way in which

the term 'religion' can be deployed in order to exclude particular statements or expressions as non-rational, non-liberal, or at odds with the political decrees of America. If, as Brown suggests, "[t]he closest liberals generally come to the notion of a publicly shared culture is 'national culture,'" (2006: 168) then it is perhaps unsurprising that American civil religion has been described as the national culture of the United States at once completely aligned with free market capitalism. Liberalism has taken up Locke's understanding of the proper role of religion within one's life; that is to say, a Protestant understanding of the private role belief plays in guiding moral decision-making, separate and distinct from the political decisions of the state. As a result, "[c]ulture, family, and religion are all formulated as 'havens in a heartless world' rather than as sites of power, politics, subject production, and norms" (Brown, 2006: 170).

In this formulation, liberalism is acultural and anti-cultural: it has no culture; is not a culture. Wars of American imperialism, including the War in Iraq, get legitimated through tolerance talk which heralds bringing civilization and democracy to the Middle East, while simultaneously rendering barbaric societies 'intolerable,' and therefore in need of intervention from the West. 'They' need to be taught tolerance, and the only way 'we' can teach them is through force (Brown, 2006). Wearing the Islamic headscarf signals barbarism and the oppression of women in this line of discourse, while the rhetoric of choice that permeates liberalism in the U.S. overlooks the governmentalizing work of beauty norms, surgical procedures, and other gender constructions that limit the choices women have in America (Brown, 2006: 188–189, 196–197).

Brown's assessment of tolerance as a strategy of governmentality elucidates the role of religion in the contemporary public sphere:

Through its routine privatization of sites of difference [...] the call for tolerance aims to reduce encounters with difference in the public sphere - that is, to reduce public engagement with difference and, by this means, to reduce the very problem of difference as an expressly political problem, referring it instead to 'culture' or 'nature' and thereby depoliticizing its sources and solutions. (2006: 88)

Religion has been depoliticized through its privatization, and when religion is named as such it is often invoked in the name of the neutral, secular authority presuming to tolerate or accommodate these nonrational forms of belief. As Brown explains, the tolerated is always in a relation of power to the tolerator; while the latter has the authority to tolerate, the capacious generosity to withstand difference, the former is the abject object of tolerance: "[t]olerance as a political practice is always conferred by the dominant" (2006: 178).

This helps to explain why various Christian groups argue for the inclusion of their religious beliefs within the public sphere under the rubric of freedom of religion, while simultaneously disregarding the beliefs of non-Christians. Tolerance talk, as a discourse on religion, obscures the role of Christianity in producing a liberal subject focused on autonomy and freedom, and upholds the power relation in which Christians 'tolerate' non-Christians. This is why discussions of religious accommodation in Canada, for example, almost never refer to the practices of Christians within the country (i.e., no one talks about 'accommodating' employees who wear crucifixes, or want Christmas day off, because those practices are enshrined within the hegemonic norm and therefore need not be tolerated). Rather, religious accommodation, as a form of tolerance talk, allows the state to engage with religious difference in a way that sanitizes it and removes it from serious political consideration; reduced to 'culture' and matters of accommodation like

days off for observation of religious holidays, religion is rendered a safe, non-communal, non-political site of identity. As I show in the case studies, there are a number of ways in which religious minorities are challenging this discourse and asserting religious identity *as* political identity and *using the structures of politics* to do so. What is important here is the ways that tolerance talk has functioned as a discourse on religion, one that reaffirms the hegemony of Christian Liberalism.

As Brown argues, liberalism's culture is Protestantism, at the same time as it uses the language of neutrality and secularism to appear rational, acultural, and progressive. Likewise Lisa Duggan reveals how *neoliberalism* has offered itself as a noncultural, free market economic system while simultaneously organizing itself according to very specific class, gender, and racial categories (2003). Neoliberalism, as the pure economic form of liberalism's attention to individual wealth and prosperity, helps obscure the role of religion and other identity categories in shaping the ideal liberal subject. Nevertheless the mandates of public and private spheres, of individual autonomy and the rational choice model, and of the supremacy of individual reason, necessarily exclude claims that are made on the basis of communal rights and concerns. For this reason religion is often excluded from the public sphere, and offered instead as a matter of private choice. The problem with this is that it has not been secularism but rather the *specific cultural interests of liberal Protestantism* that has dominated public sphere talk. In both Canada as well as America, liberalism and its concomitant discourse of secularism obfuscates the role Christianity has played in excluding various forms of religious discourse from the public sphere, while privileging others.

As I noted in the previous chapter, I retain some of the idealism of the public

sphere model, and believe that it can be a space for positive change. Indeed, my dissertation is not a list of the ways that religious minorities have been oppressed by liberal democratic state policies on accommodation or tolerance. Rather, I am interested in the ways that various religious actors are using the terrain of the public sphere in order to challenge the supposed secularism and religious neutrality of the state. Moments when this comes closest into the foreground include the expanding representational repertoire of Mormons in the American public sphere; legislative challenges from Muslims to wear *niqab* in Québec public service sectors; and attempts by atheists to argue for protection under the liberal mandate of freedom of religion. In each of these cases, I argue that religious actors are using the available legislation in order to remake the state as a more inclusive, democratic space. In doing so they are also revealing the machinery of Christian Liberalism which has historically allowed the public sphere to operate.

Canada and the U.S. are both liberal democracies. One of the main arguments I make has to do with the hypocritical stance of liberalism as accordingly pluralist and inclusive, and effectively Christian and excluding. I ask to what degree religion has been mobilized in debates over citizenship and explore the challenges that religious identity poses for ‘religiously neutral’ states like the U.S. and Canada. The purpose of this dissertation is to highlight some of the hypocrisies of liberalism in these two nations, both of which value diversity, tolerance and accommodation but which in practice privilege certain kinds of religious expressions over others. Rather than arguing for or against the notion that religion ought to be part of public conversations, I suggest that liberal democracies must be more self-aware about when and how religion *already* permeates the political and cultural institutions that undergird it. Christian Liberalism already

determines the parameters of public sphere debate; we must acknowledge the interventions of religious minorities in order to counterbalance this state of affairs. To do otherwise is to reinforce Christian Liberalism as simply ‘tradition’ and to obfuscate the role of minority religious actors in challenging the state to be *more* inclusive, *more* democratic, and *more* progressive than it already is.

Religion in the Canadian and American Constitutions

In Canada there is no official separation of church and state, and the de facto dominance of mainline Christianity has permeated much of Canadian civic life. In the Canadian Constitution – also known as the British North America Act – religion is only mentioned in terms of education (1867). Section 93 of the Constitution lays out that each province may establish a separate school system in order to serve a Protestant or Catholic minority, depending on the context. This mandate only applies to Protestant and Roman Catholic schools, and was meant to protect the minority populations in English- and French-speaking Canada from one another. Otherwise the Constitution makes no mention of religiosity, and individual rights are for the most part left up to the determination of the provinces.

The 1982 Charter of Rights and Freedoms explicitly expanded constitutionally-protected religious liberty (1982). Amongst the “Fundamental Freedoms” listed in the Charter are the freedom of conscience and religion, and freedom of thought, belief, opinion, and expression. The Charter also enshrines the cultural value of the multicultural ‘mosaic’ by guaranteeing religious accommodation so long as no “undue hardship” is done to the state in the process of making accommodations. This is called the principle of

reasonable accommodation. It is this concept and its shifting connotations that I trace in chapter 4 of the dissertation.

The Canadian public sphere has historically been marked by a proliferation of mainline Christian ideals and values while simultaneously allowing for alternative religious identities to be accommodated, even if such public inclusion is decidedly awkward (Bramadat, 2005: 5). Paul Bramadat, in the introduction to his co-edited volume on *Religion and Ethnicity in Canada*, suggests that despite the longstanding historical dominance of mainline Christianity, a number of religious changes have occurred during the past 100 years in Canada:

over the 20th century, not only have the Canadian churches lost much of their assumed and formal social control, but the Canadian state itself has also increasingly distanced itself from a simple endorsement of Christian values and beliefs. In a classic example of Canadian cautiousness, a tacit agreement seems to have been reached within a variety of levels of society to confine religion (not just Christianity) to the private sphere. (2005: 4–5)

This is of course consistent with the privatization thesis, and yet stands in direct contrast to the numerous ways in which religion has become a vocal part of public discourse in recent years (Bramadat, 2005: 2, 6–7). At the same time, such an emphasis on privatization continues the legacy of Christian-centric discourse on religion in the public sphere, and ignores the way challenges to secularizing legislation have been made by adherents of many non-Christian traditions in Canada (Bramadat, 2005; Bramadat and Seljak, 2005).

The American Constitution legislates the twin values of neutral religious accommodation and the distinct separation of the Christian churches from political life. The First Amendment of the Bill of Rights accomplishes both of these tasks in one fell

swoop: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof” (United States Bill of Rights, 1791). Thus, like Habermas’s normative public sphere, the space of public political discourse is to remain free of particular religious influences, while the private affiliations of citizens within the state remains of no interest to the government. Religious liberty thus entails both the freedom *to* religion as well as the freedom *from* religion. The tension between these freedoms comes to the forefront in my discussion of state protections for atheism, in chapter 5.

Of course, some traditions are more accepted in American public discourse than others. Even in the late 1970s Richard Sennett pointed out that American political figures were largely evaluated for their private character and affiliations (including, I would add, religious affiliation) rather than for their public acts or political values (1977: 4, 265). We can see this in the case of Mitt Romney – the focus of chapter 3 – whose 2008 and 2012 Republican campaigns took decidedly different approaches in addressing his Mormon faith. As this case shows, despite the official separation of church and state, American civil society is clearly not uniformly secular.

Civil Religion in the U.S. and Canada

Having thus briefly reviewed the role of religion in both Canada and the United States, I would like to turn now to the role that the discourse of civil religion has played in both countries. According to Robert Bellah, who popularized the term, civil religion emerges during the early modern and modern eras when “a distinct set of religious symbols and practices may arise that address issues of political legitimacy and political

ethics but that are not fused with either church or state” (Bellah and Hammond, 1980: xi). Civil religion is the articulation of a national way of life that invokes particular sacred symbols, rituals, and values. Civil religion is more clearly instituted in the United States than in Canada, but the Canadian province of Québec has a decidedly *Catholic* civil religion as well. In both cases civil religion operates as a tool of Christian Liberalism, to privilege certain hegemonic religious expressions over others.

The discourse of American civil religion is not only a kind of religious rhetoric that is permitted in American politics and popular culture, but also a strong governmentalizing force in disallowing other forms of religious talk from taking place. The tradition of American civil religion goes back to the sociological observations made by Alexis de Tocqueville during the early years of the American union. In *Democracy in America* (1969) Tocqueville asks what makes the U.S. distinct, and finds that religion plays a special role in American civic life that is contemporaneously lacking in Europe. He remarks, “I have said earlier that I considered mores to be one of the great general causes responsible for the maintenance of a democratic republic in the United States. [...] [By ‘mores’ I mean] the whole moral and intellectual state of a people” (1969: 287). Christianity is able to influence these mores, in Tocqueville’s estimation, precisely because of the constitutional separation of church from state. The indirect effect of religion is to manipulate the private behaviors of American citizens, in a way that would be much less effective if it were rooted in constitutional mandate and legislative coercion.

Tocqueville also recognizes that the major religious traditions in America - namely Protestantism, but also Catholicism - are aligned with “democratic and republican institutions. All the clergy there speak the same language; opinions are in harmony with

the laws, and there is, so to say, only one mental current” (1969: 289). Tocqueville also suggests that in America denominational differences are less important than a generalized Christian belief-system: “what is most important for it [society] is not that all citizens should profess the true religion but that they should profess religion” (1969: 290).

Agnosticism and atheism are not acceptable in Tocqueville’s analysis of 1835 America.

The religion that Tocqueville saw dominating the American landscape was a dedifferentiated Christianity, one which rhetorically united religious belief with the idea of freedom: “For the Americans the ideas of Christianity and liberty are so completely mingled that it is almost impossible to get them to conceive of the one without the other” (1969: 293). Freedom of religion is of the utmost importance in a state which privileges no specific denomination or sect. And so, Tocqueville remarks, “patriotism continually adds fuel to the fires of religious zeal” (1969: 293), perhaps further strengthened by the narrative of oppressed religious minorities moving to the New World in order to freely practice their belief system. Tocqueville also suggests that by avoiding direct political power, Christianity has conquered the moral landscape of the nation:

When a religion seeks to found its sway only on the longing for immortality equally tormenting every human heart, it can aspire to universality; but when it comes to uniting itself with a government, it must adopt maxims which apply only to certain nations. Therefore, by allying itself with any political power, religion increases its strength over some but forfeits the hope of reigning over all. (1969: 297)

He sees this as a dramatic reversal of religion’s role in Europe, where various Christian sects have become allied with political powers. Once those political powers fall into decline, however, so too do its religious allies (1969: 300).

Robert Bellah further advances the idea that America bears special relationship to

a nonspecific form of Christianity which is intimately tied to its political institutions.

Bellah describes what has become formative in the sociological understanding of

American civil religion:

The words and acts of the founding fathers, especially the first few presidents, shaped the form and tone of the civil religion as it has been maintained ever since. Though much is selectively derived from Christianity, this religion is clearly not itself Christianity. For one thing, neither Washington nor Adams nor Jefferson mentions Christ in his inaugural address; nor do any of the subsequent presidents, although not one of them fails to mention God. The God of the civil religion is not only rather 'unitarian,' he is also on the austere side, much more related to order, law, and right than to salvation and love. Even though he is somewhat deist in cast, he is by no means simply a watchmaker God. He is actively interested and involved in history, with a special concern for America. (1967: 5)

America, Bellah argues, has a set of beliefs, rituals and symbols which are routinized in the same way as any religion (1967: 5). For example, the official holidays of the nation (Thanksgiving, Memorial Day, Presidents' Day and the Fourth of July) solidify family ties and local community (1967: 7–8). Public schools, he says, operate “as a particularly important context for the cultic celebration of the civil rituals” relating to these holidays (1967: 8).

American civil religion nevertheless also borrows heavily from Christianity in a way that supports, rather than contradicts, tenets of national belief. As such, “civil religion was able to build up without any bitter struggle with the church powerful symbols of national solidarity and to mobilize deep levels of personal motivation for the attainment of national goals” (1967: 8). American civil religion is not the worship of the nation as if it were a divine figure, but a way to interpret and understand “the American experience in the light of ultimate and universal reality” (1967: 12). Bellah rereads the

history of American development in terms of biblical narrative form, outlining three “times of trial” for the nation experienced by independence, slavery, and growing inequities on the global economic scale (1967: 10).

And so, the American civil religion elaborated by Bellah, but first described by Tocqueville, is one that is nonspecific but grounded in adherence to a deity; values freedom; and sees the progress of the nation as a matter of spiritual, as well as material, concern. Indeed, using vague, non-specific Christian terminology is the most successful tactic in American politics, especially in gaining support for socially conservative issues like abortion (Ferree et al., 2002). In a comparative study of the character of abortion discourse in Germany and the U.S., Myra Ferree, William Gamson, Jürgen Gerhards and Dieter Rucht explain that in America, “[l]ike U.S. political parties, the sacred canopy that works best is a big tent” (2002: 177).

More cynical than Tocqueville and Bellah, historian David Sehat points to the influence of a specific brand of Protestantism which has colonized the political terrain of the nation from its inception. Sehat argues that one of the key myths about American history is that the country has fostered an inclusionary religious pluralism. Instead, he argues, ‘religious freedom’ has obscured the reality of religious tyranny. Sehat highlights the laws against blasphemy which have been used as part of a “coercive religious regime” which has only been made visible when liberal dissenters have argued against it (2011: 287). While Bellah’s argument suggests a kind of homogenous uniformity amongst the de-differentiated Protestant Christians of America, Sehat’s argument is that this kind of uniformity never existed and instead that the illusion of consensus obfuscates the fact that

a minority of Protestants used coercive legal tactics to institutionalize a very particular moral code throughout the nation (Bellah, 1967; Sehat, 2011: 284).

Historian Kevin M. Kruse argues against the notion that the United States is, and always has been, a Christian nation. Instead, he carefully lays out the ways that this myth of Christian America was produced and propagated by an alliance between businessmen and Christians in the early and mid twentieth century (Kruse, 2015). Capitalists were able to shore up Christian resistance to the New Deal in the 1930s, and against the threat of Communism during the 1950s. The establishment of “In God We Trust” as the national motto during the height of the Communist scare (and reaffirmed by the House of Representatives in 2011 despite no actual contestation) is further proof of Kruse’s claim that the notion of a Christian America was a late invention.

Whether American civil religion is indeed a relatively recent invention, as Kruse argues, or a much older form of entrenched political discourse, as Sehat suggests, it is clear that the contemporary American public sphere privileges certain forms of non-specific Christian rhetoric. As further verification for this we need look no further than the State of the Union address, which would be unimaginable without the president’s closing aphorism, “God bless America.” The discourse of American civil religion not only allows for but actually encourages a non-specific form of Christian rhetoric to be incorporated into political discussion, so long as it is vague enough to avoid evoking denominational differences.

Bellah argues that no such civil religion exists in Canada (qtd in Kim, 1993: 257). Andrew Kim tests this hypothesis, outlining the historical conditions which have made the formation of a single and unitary civil religion impossible in Canada. First, he argues,

regionalism has prohibited the expression of a national sense of identity or affiliation, due to the large (and sparsely-populated) territorial expanse of Canada along with the distinct historical and cultural experiences in each region (1993: 259). It is also true that Canada has one of the most decentralized systems of government in the Western world, giving overwhelming power to the individual provinces (Kim, 1993: 260). There is thus no coherent sense of national affiliation in Canada.

Second, Kim suggests, biculturalism has defined Canada in terms of two national identities, rather than one. The distinction between Québec and the rest of Canada has found expression in two competing cultures, languages, educational and media systems, and interpretations of national symbols related to “the land, peoplehood, national anthem, and flag” (1993: 261). Symbols which hold potential for defining the Canadian cultural imaginary – such as the maple leaf, the beaver, or a general concept of ‘northernness’ – are all resistant to sacralization (or transcendent meaning), according to Kim (1993: 262). Others, like the Queen or the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, are directly linked to a history of British imperialism and thus are alienating to French Canadians (1993: 265). While Canada has often been described in terms of a cultural mosaic (in contradistinction to the American ‘melting pot’ metaphor of assimilation), even this framework has divided English from French Canada: the former are more accepting of the mosaic than the latter, who have a “suspicion that the mosaic model is an indirect way of denying the French equal state” (1993: 264). Kim ultimately argues that, “the basic rift in Canadian identity owes more to religious differences than those of ethnicity” (1993: 267). The distinct Protestant and Roman Catholic groups that colonized the nation continue to inform two different senses of what it means to be Canadian.

Kim explains that if there is no single pan-Canadian civil religion, then perhaps there are two: one for French Canadians, and one for everyone else (1993: 270). Indeed, “French-Canadians in the province of Quebec have their own distinctive set of beliefs, values, symbols and other cultural attributes that serves as a form of civil religion” there (1993: 258). While English Canada includes a greater diversity in terms of cultural identities and orientations, and has had to deal with the influx of American media, French Canada has remained unusually separate (1993: 268). Kim argues that this is the result of language, but also a fact of the particular alignment of minority identity, Catholicism, and secularism in Québec:

In effect, the quasi-established moral monopoly of the Roman Catholic church has been decisive in laying down both the institutional infrastructure and cultural climate in which secular, separatist ‘nation-building’ can occur. (1993: 267)

Civil religion, then, need not be nationally unifying, as Bellah suggests (Kim, 1993: 271).

David Seljak applies Casanova’s thesis about the deprivatization of religion to the case of Québec. He argues that before 1960, “Catholicism provided the basic elements of French Quebecers’ ‘civil religion’” (2006: 40). He elaborates that the Church had effective control of education, health care, and social services for French Québécois in the province. The Catholic Church had a distinct role in public life: “Quebec culture and nationalism legitimated this semi-established status and public presence by uniting a conservative Catholicism with French-Canadian ethnic identity” (2006: 40). After the 1960s, however, the Church became dedifferentiated from the state, and the social services it provided were given over to secular institutions. This period of de-Catholicization is known as the Quiet Revolution, which I expand upon in chapter 4.

Rather than retreating to the private sphere during the Quiet Revolution, the Catholic Church reemerged as a public religion with an important role in mediating between federal and provincial state politics and regional concerns. Rather than assuming an institutional role, the Church took on the role of framing the Québécois public sphere. The Church was important during the debates over Québécois sovereignty surrounding the provincial referenda of 1980 and 1995 (Seljak, 2006: 49). Seljak also traces the role of one Catholic publication, *Maintenant*, as it redefined a public role for the Catholic Church in Quebec after 1960 (2001). Even after the Dominican Order that founded the publication divested from *Maintenant*, it continued to play an integral role in defining a Catholic sense of what it meant to be Québécois. The journal openly supported the Parti Québécois (PQ) once it formed in 1968, heralding it as “as the true heir of the Quiet Revolution’s promise to make French Canadians ‘maîtres chez nous’” (Seljak, 2001: 267). In the Québécois public sphere, then, Catholicism has offered a moral and cultural framework for understanding the place of the French within the larger territorial and political expanse of the nation.

Perhaps the most compelling example of the continued relevance of Catholicism within the Canadian public sphere is in the education system. Education is under the mandate of the provinces in Canada, but Section 93 of the Constitution allows for a separate (publicly funded) school system for Protestants in Québec and Catholics elsewhere. As a result, in Ontario there exists both a *public* (secular) school system alongside a *separate* (Roman Catholic) school system for children aged 4-18. This dual public system is a reflection of the Catholic cultural demands of the French minority in Ontario. Interestingly, the education system in Québec was deconfessionalized between

1997-2008, and today there are no publicly funded religious schools in the province, but the separate system continues in Ontario. However, as I will show in chapter 4, Christian Liberalism continues to shape what is permissible in Québécois schools. Even though official secularization has occurred, Catholicism continues to have a privileged status in the education system in Québec.

Civil religion can be seen as the way that Christian Liberalism continues to inflect the public sphere, whether at the national or local level. American civil religion is broad and nondenominational, but thoroughly Protestant, shaping the parameters of legible religious expressions in the U.S. Canadian civil religions are more heavily regionalized and in the case of Québec, distinctly Roman Catholic. In both cases the religious framework seriously influences whether and to what extent religious minorities may participate in public debates. In the case studies that follow I trace the tensions that arise when these minorities intervene in the public sphere. One consequence of this intervention is to lay bare the foundations of Christian Liberalism that otherwise remain invisible under the rubrics of secularism and tolerance.

Conclusion: Case Studies

The elaboration of Christian Liberalism via the discourses of American and Québécois civil religion help to explain why some statements are more sayable than others. Take, for example, the difference between Mitt Romney's campaign strategies for talking about religion in 2008 and 2012. As I show in chapter 3, there was a marked change in Romney's use of religious rhetoric between these two campaigns. While in 2008 he awkwardly talked about his Mormonism, by 2012 he downplayed its relevance

and particularity. However, alongside Romney's changing rhetorical strategy was a shift in the arena of popular culture during this period. More diverse representations of Mormons and Mormonism entered the public sphere via television, theater, and film, setting the stage for a more receptive voting public to seriously consider a Mormon presidential candidate. What this demonstrates is that while Christian Liberalism is a strong governmentalizing force in terms of determining the parameters of sayability in the public sphere, there is room for maneuverability, especially in the realm of culture. This also confirms my argument that the public sphere encompasses both cultural and political forms of discourse, and is broader than Habermas would have it. Cultural discourse can produce real political shifts, as Romney's relative success in 2012 compared to 2008 demonstrates.

In chapter 4 I examine the changing connotations of *religious accommodation* in the Canadian public sphere, where I make a similar argument around sayability and Christian Liberalism. While the terms of Canada's liberalism are distinct from the American context, in the province of Québec the role of Catholicism has been so strong as to produce a version of Christian Liberalism that might also be called Catholic secularism. This version of secularism purports to be rigorously non-religious, attempting to strip the Québécois public sphere of any and all signs of religiosity. However, in practice, as I show in this chapter, Catholicism continues to be privileged as a form of non-religious, 'cultural' discourse – aligned with a discourse of traditionalism and heritage. While the Church is one institution among many, it has also been redefined as a significant part of the Francophone way of life currently perceived as under threat. Again, however, the shifting meanings associated with reasonable accommodation in this

province demonstrate that there is room for minority religious actors to contest Christian Liberalism and remake the state in more democratic fashion.

Finally, in chapter 5 I evaluate the ways that some atheists are using the language of Christian Liberalism – redefining atheism as a ‘church’ or ‘creed’ – in order to gain state-sanctioned protections. In this case minority religious actors are employing the format of religiosity in order to more fully participate in the public sphere. In so doing, however, they also point out the Christian biases of the liberal state, which is predisposed to recognizing certain forms of religiosity over others.

In each of the case studies the tension between Christian Liberalism and the democratic potential of the public sphere is generative of increasing recognition for alternative forms of religiosity and citizenship. When minority religious actors intervene in the public sphere – whether that intervention takes place in the arenas of popular culture, courts of law, or the institution of journalism – the Christian component of Christian Liberalism is made increasingly visible. While Christian Liberalism retains its hegemonic form today, the changing nature of public sphere discourse around religion also helps to demonstrate the lengthy process by which that hegemony can be contested. Ways of talking about religion in public are shaped thus by the structure of the public sphere as well as by disruptions of that space. It is to those disruptions that I now turn.

Chapter 3: Mitt Romney, Mormonism, and the Media: How Culture Matters in the Public Sphere

On January 25th 2015, the *New York Times* published a piece considering the role Mitt Romney's faith might play in a third presidential campaign (Parker and Thompson, 2015). In the article, Ashley Parker and Alex Thompson describe Romney's 2012 approach to his Mormonism as "tortured," describing his "strategy of awkward reluctance and studied avoidance" which "helped doom his campaign." Any consideration of a third run, Parker and Thompson suggest, would be rooted in Romney's particular confluence of faith and public service. Persistence and patriotic duty, they argue, are specific features of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) that would support a third attempt at the presidency. A few days after the piece was published, Romney declared he was not going to run in 2016.

Romney, as a political figure, is discussed in terms of his faith more than most other political candidates (Baker and Campbell, 2010; Pew Research Center's Journalism Project, 2012). Both his 2008 and 2012 campaigns were framed in terms of his Mormonism in the press, even despite the fact that Romney himself took very different approaches to talking about his faith during each run. The common academic discourse around Romney is that his 2008 presidential campaign failed, in large part, due to his awkward discussion of his faith. In this analysis, Romney's approach in 2012 - in which he ignored questions about his Mormonism, and downplayed the significance and particularity of his faith - was much more successful at gaining public support for the politician.

However, I will argue that this approach to understanding Romney's campaigns

treats politics - and the political public sphere - as a domain isolated from popular culture, ignoring the various (mostly positive) representations of Mormonism that accompanied Romney's second campaign. I want to suggest that the broader, more diverse articulations of Mormonism in the Broadway show *The Book of Mormon*, *Twilight*, and other contemporaneous pop culture forms, helped to prime the American political audience for a Mormon presidential run in 2012. What this reveals is that paying attention solely to the political public sphere - to the exclusion of the cultural public sphere - ignores the role of religion in straddling these spheres. The overlap between cultural and political public spheres is important to recognize for understanding the role of religion in politics today.

If we take as given that the public sphere as Habermas describes it is both a useful concept but a highly exclusionary one requiring reform (Fraser, 1990), and that separating out the political public sphere from the cultural public sphere ignores the overlap between these domains (McGuigan, 2005; Warner, 2002), then religion becomes an especially relevant way to rethink participation in the public sphere. Like gender, race, and class, religion is a domain that is ideally kept out of public sphere conversations: as a matter of personal identity, religion has been relegated to the private sphere within liberal and secular understandings of modernity (Audi and Wolterstorff, 1997; Beyer, 1990; Swatos and Christiano, 2000).

However this theoretical bracketing off of religion to the private sphere has been challenged practically by the reluctance of religious actors to keep their 'private' faith out of the realm of politics. In the United States, religious actors have participated openly and vocally in public sphere conversations centered on abortion (Ferree et al., 2002), reproductive genetic technologies (Evans, 2010), education, and other issues relevant to

their faith (Fowler, 2014). The American public sphere has never been areligious, and from the nation's origins religious constituents (specifically, Protestants) have played a major role in participating in public conversations, shoring up large voting blocs, and shutting down alternative minority voices through mechanisms like blasphemy laws (Fowler, 2014; Marty, 1986; Sehat, 2011). According to the Public Religion Research Institute, Americans consistently favor presidential candidates with strong religious beliefs over those who are atheist (Jones and Cox, 2011). Religion is not as distinct from politics as Habermas would like to have it.

Mormons in the American Public Sphere

Mormons have participated in the American public sphere since the origins of the LDS Church in the early 19th century. Joseph Smith was not only the first Mormon; he was also the first Mormon candidate for president. However, Mormons are frequently labeled as the most persecuted religious minority in early American history (Arrington and Bitton, 1992: xi), and in 2007 were favored as presidential candidates only above atheists and Muslims, according to a Pew Center Report (Keeter and Smith, 2007). The early Church's position on plural marriage, combined with insular community bonds based on a faith that evangelicals often describe as non-Christian made 19th century persecutions a feature of everyday life for members of the LDS Church (Arrington and Bitton, 1992: 53, 161–62). The Mormon migration west was precipitated by these persecutions, and it was only once the Church outlawed the practice of polygamy in 1890 that Utah was allowed to enter American statehood (Arrington and Bitton, 1992: 184). W. Paul Reeve argues that the minoritization of Mormons in the American context was also

highly racialized, configuring adherents to the faith as non-white during the 19th (and into the early 20th) century (2015).

These persecutions have not dissuaded Mormon participation in American politics. There has been consistent Mormon representation in Congress since 1851, when John Milton Bernhisel was the Utah territorial delegate (King and King, 2000). Brigham H. Roberts was elected to Congress in 1898, but was prevented from being seated by the House of Representatives because he practiced polygamy. In 1907 Senator Reed Smoot, a Mormon representing Utah made a Senate speech denying the role of his faith in contradicting his loyalty to serving the United States (Baker and Campbell, 2010). His speech attempted to address the concerns of the Senate around the secretive practices of the LDS Church. Although like Roberts there was a prolonged attempt to unseat him, Smoot held his Senate seat for 30 years (Baker and Campbell, 2010). Mormons have intervened in politics on several occasions, most recently by helping to pass Proposition 8 in California, which banned same-sex marriage (Mckinley and Johnson, 2008). Today, there are 16 Mormon members of Congress (Sandstrom, 2015), which amounts to 2.99% of the Senate and the House of Representatives combined. In 2007, members of the LDS Church constituted 1.7% of the adult population of the U.S. (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2008). There is thus an over-representation of Mormons in Congress.

However, only a handful of Mormons have run for president. Joseph Smith was killed during the course of his campaign (Wright, 2012). Mitt Romney's father George was Governor of Michigan (1963-1969) and unsuccessfully ran against Richard Nixon for the GOP presidential nomination in 1968. Other unsuccessful bids were made by Mo Udall in 1976 and Orrin Hatch in 2000 (Wright, 2012). Alongside Mitt Romney, Mormon

(and distant relative) John Huntsman ran for the GOP nomination in 2012, eventually endorsing Romney when he left the race. Romney is the only Mormon to successfully gain a major party's nomination.

Romney's Campaigns

Campbell et al (2012) argue that there is still a "stained glass ceiling" when it comes to being a Mormon politician - a barrier to the presidency determined primarily by strong anti-Mormon sentiment. They suggest that Romney's inability to break this ceiling during his 2008 campaign was in part due to the continuing unpopularity of Mormonism, and the relatively low amount of meaningful social contact non-Mormons have with members of the LDS Church.

The general consensus among analysts of the 2008 campaign attribute some degree of Romney's failure to his awkward discussion of his faith (Powell and Hickson, 2013). According to scholars and news reporters, Romney's loss of the GOP nomination in early 2008 was at least in part due to the mixed reviews he received as result of his "Faith in America" speech in late 2007, in which he openly talked about his faith.

If I am fortunate to become your president, I will serve no one religion, no one group, no one cause, and no one interest. A president must serve only the common cause of the people of the United States.

There are some for whom these commitments are not enough. They would prefer it if I would simply distance myself from my religion, say that it is more a tradition than my personal conviction, or disavow one or another of its precepts. That I will not do. I believe in my Mormon faith and I endeavor to live by it. My faith is the faith of my fathers – I will be true to them and to my beliefs. [...]

There is one fundamental question about which I often am asked. What do I believe about Jesus Christ? I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son

of God and the Savior of mankind. My church's beliefs about Christ may not all be the same as those of other faiths. Each religion has its own unique doctrines and history. These are not bases for criticism but rather a test of our tolerance. Religious tolerance would be a shallow principle indeed if it were reserved only for faiths with which we agree. (Transcript: Mitt Romney's Faith Speech, 2007)

Romney appeals to religious freedom in his speech, calling on the American public to practice tolerance while simultaneously declaring that he "will serve no one religion" as president. He also uses theological language in talking about Jesus. Romney calls for the inclusion of religion in the public sphere, condoning public nativity scenes, the use of God-language on American currency and in the Pledge of Allegiance, and religion in schools. However he couches these within generalized Christian language, suggesting that these practices "are not unique to any one denomination." He invokes American civil religion as the underlying moral framework for the nation.

Romney also recalls a similar speech made by John F. Kennedy during his 1960 presidential campaign:

Almost 50 years ago another candidate from Massachusetts explained that he was an American running for president, not a Catholic running for president. Like him, I am an American running for president. I do not define my candidacy by my religion. A person should not be elected because of his faith nor should he be rejected because of his faith. (Transcript: Mitt Romney's Faith Speech, 2007)

During Kennedy's speech he downplayed the role his Catholicism would play in his political decision-making as president. He invokes the separation of church and state, as Romney does, and underscores the value of religious freedom in the United States.

I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute, where no Catholic prelate would tell the president (should he be Catholic) how to act, and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners

for whom to vote; where no church or church school is granted any public funds or political preference; and where no man is denied public office merely because his religion differs from the president who might appoint him or the people who might elect him. (Transcript: JFK's Speech on His Religion, 2007)

Kennedy's direct approach to the issue largely assuaged voter concerns about a Catholic in the White House (Massa, 1997). He does not use specific theological language (he does not talk about Jesus for example) and unlike Romney he does not support the public expression of religion under this rubric of religious freedom. He describes his faith in purely private terms (Massa, 1997).

To be sure, the different faiths of Romney and Kennedy play a large factor in public perception of these speeches, along with the different cultural climates that accompanied them both. Catholicism and Mormonism have very different histories in the United States – although both have been the target of specific persecutions – and the idea of secularizing politics had a lot of purchase in the cultural climate of 1960 (Massa, 1997). Indeed, Romney's support for 'public religion' seems antithetical to Kennedy's declaration of the separation of church from state (Medhurst, 2009: 201). While Kennedy's speech was well received, Romney's speech was met with mixed reviews, and within two months he left the race. The dominant narrative attributes Romney's declining popularity (at least in part) to his Mormonism (Baker and Campbell, 2010; Campbell et al., 2012; Medhurst, 2009; Powell and Hickson, 2013). Rather than assuaging voter concerns, Romney's Faith in America speech elicited uncertainty.

Powell and Hickson attribute Romney's failure to what they call the "Pharisee effect," which is, "voter backlash, toward candidates who overuse religion as the basis of a political argument [...] Pharisees, as was argued, were so openly religious that they

were subject to charges of insincerity and hypocrisy” (2013: 88). Powell and Hickson argue that during his Faith in America speech Romney refused to fully divest himself from his faith (2013: 90) in the way that Kennedy did. However, Martin J. Medhurst argues that while political commentators and journalists declared the speech a failure, general public support for Romney actually increased after the address (2009: 210).

In contrast to his 2008 campaign, in 2012 Romney’s approach was much more subdued. Powell and Hickson suggest that, “Romney’s answer for handling the issue in 2012 was simply not to talk about his religion. That seemed to work; he was able to capture the Republican nomination. And, while he did not win the presidency, his loss did not seem to be a result of his religious belief” (2013: 98). Hawley agrees that Romney’s loss to Obama during the federal election was not primarily due to his Mormonism, although he acknowledges that his faith did play some role (2015). Many others describe Romney’s Mormonism as a “non-issue” in 2012 (Guth, 2012; Powell, 2012; Powell and Hickson, 2013; Smietana, 2012; Turner, 2012) because of his reluctance to openly discuss it and the relative absence of religious debate during the election cycle (Guth and Bradberry, 2013). While this may be true, the fact that these commentators insist that Romney’s religion is peripheral to his candidacy demonstrates that it is nearly impossible to discuss the politician without some reference to the LDS Church.

The predominant narrative surrounding Mitt Romney’s two presidential campaigns - in 2008 and 2012 - thus brings his Mormonism to the fore. There is a general consensus that Romney’s downplaying of his religious specificity in 2012 allowed him to gain a larger GOP support base (especially amongst evangelicals, who were reluctant to

support a Mormon candidate) than in 2008, securing him the Republican nomination (Guth, 2012; Powell, 2012). During the course of the 2012 campaign, Romney consistently answered questions about his faith in nonspecific, general Christian terms, and he avoided the topic of Mormonism.

After becoming the de facto winner of the nomination, Romney slowly introduced the topic of his faith, although in a taciturn fashion. He invited reporters to church and attacked the so-called ‘war on religion’ and critiqued the extent of the current separation between church and state (Guth, 2012: 16–17). His choice of social conservative and devout Catholic Paul Ryan as running mate allowed topics of religious concern to reemerge in the campaign (Guth, 2012: 18–19). Nevertheless, Romney continued to downplay his personal faith and it was difficult for him to gain widespread support amongst Santorum’s constituency (evangelical Christians), even after Santorum left the race.

However, Romney’s own discussion of his faith (or lack thereof) is not the only factor in shaping public opinion. In particular, the rising number of diverse representations of Mormons in popular entertainment media accompanied Romney’s 2012 run, helping to explain his relative success. Most political analyses focus only on the political public sphere - the domain of public conversation centered on the rhetoric of politicians, pundits, and political reporting. However, as I will show in the remainder of this chapter, political analysis must also take into account the role of entertainment media in producing a cultural climate that is ‘warm’ to particular religious affiliations and ‘cold’ to others.

Mormons and the Media

Mormons have a unique relationship with American media, and have both participated in media production and been subject to stereotypical media representations. Early media portrayals of Mormons were in line with their persecuted status within the American religious landscape. In Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton's *The Mormon Experience* about early Mormon life in America, they write that,

Early-twentieth-century anti-Mormon diatribes, both in printed form and in the newer medium, motion pictures, showed handsome but licentious Mormon missionaries winning converts through the evil eye of hypnotism, then whisking them off bodily to their lairs in the American West (1992: 22; Baker and Campbell, 2010)

By the mid-twentieth century the popular depictions of Mormonism were more favorable to adherents, represented under the media frames of family values, education, success, hard work, health, loyalty, and cultural interests (Baker and Campbell, 2010). However, this positive image was soon supplanted by the negative image of Mormons within the civil rights movement, as a faction of the American public somehow at odds with equal rights (Baker and Campbell, 2010). In this sense Mormons moved from being ambiguously white to “too white” within a short period of time (Reeve, 2015: 12). In popular culture the Osmonds introduced the American public to a Mormon family in the 1970s. By the 1980s, however, the Osmonds “had become identified with an idealized image of family life that after the 1970s became a target of parody” (Duffy, 2012: 101).

Chiung Hwang Chen and Ethan Yorgason argue that when positive portrayals of Mormons have been presented in the American media, they have conformed to a “model minority discourse” which simultaneously venerates and marginalizes Mormons (1999). Chen and Yorgason explain that journalistic descriptions of Mormons that emphasize

success, self-reliance, and loyalty present a double-edged sword that underscores the possible threat this growing minority may present to the dominant American public. These representations also reaffirm the neoliberal ideal of economic self-reliance at the same time as they present Mormons as ahistorical and static (Chen and Yorgason, 1999). Chen argues that this discourse was also evident in the journalistic coverage of Mormons during the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City (2003).

This model minority discourse accompanied Romney's two runs. During the 2012 campaign,

Michael Kinsley concluded, 'this year's crop of Republican candidates has been especially odd. . . . Of the four who remain viable, only Mitt Romney can even pass as normal—and he has the eerie, Stepford-wife quality of being so normal it's weird.' (qtd in Powell, 2012: 41)

Romney's gaffes (like his comment about having “binders full of women” available for hire) established him as an awkward but not undesirable candidate for conservatives. However, there were also shifting representations models of Mormons being presented in the cultural public sphere during this period. While Chen and Yorgason emphasize the role of journalism in framing Mormons as alien Others, they ignore the role of popular culture in either affirming or challenging these discourses.

Mormonism in the Cultural Public Sphere, 2000-2012

The period from 2000-2012 saw a large expansion in diverse representations of Mormonism in American popular culture. In 2000, Brigham Young University student Julie Stoffer appeared on MTV's *The Real World*, ultimately leading to her suspension from the school (Duffy, 2012). In 2003 *South Park* dedicated an entire episode to a

retelling of Mormon history (“All About Mormons”). From 2006-2011 HBO aired the controversial and popular series *Big Love*, which told the fictional story of the Henrickson family, a Fundamentalist Mormon family still practicing polygamy long after the mainstream LDS Church abolished the practice. Beginning in 2010, a reality-show called *Sister Wives* purported to follow a real-life family participating in polygamy and part of the Fundamentalist LDS Church. In 2005 Stephanie Meyer’s *Twilight* was published, followed shortly by the first installment of the hugely popular film franchise in 2008. And Trey Parker, Matt Stone, and Robert Lopez’s Broadway show *The Book of Mormon* debuted to rave reviews in 2011.

In 2011 Walter Kirn wrote about this shifting representational terrain, describing mid-2011 in terms of a “Mormon Moment.” His cover story for *Newsweek* highlights the major cultural changes which have allowed Mormons to make inroads in many facets of non-political culture. However, Kirn suggests that Mormon politicians like John Huntsman and Mitt Romney have not taken advantage of this Mormon zeitgeist: instead they have downplayed the specificity of their beliefs, emphasizing the normalness of being Mormon. But as Kirn argues, Mormons are not ordinary, they are distinctive, and, “it is their distinctiveness that is influencing the broader culture” in popular media. Politics has yet to catch up, in Kirn’s assessment (2011). Political analysts have also failed to catch up, insofar as they have only used material from the political public sphere in order to understand the role of Mormonism during Romney’s two presidential campaigns. These representations are particularly relevant when it comes to talking about Mormons because the LDS Church is particularly insular, and exhibits low levels of meaningful social contact with non-Mormons outside of proselytizing (Campbell et al.,

2012).

The Pew Center reported a marked change in public attitudes towards Mormons and Mormonism from 2011 to 2012. While a Pew Report from 2007 suggested that Mormons were largely disfavored as presidential candidates (one in four respondents would not vote for a Mormon), by 2012 there was a “warming of attitudes towards Mormonism” (Keeter and Smith, 2007; Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2012). People reported learning little factual information about the LDS Church during the 2012 campaign, but they also reported having more favorable attitudes towards Mormonism than ever before. Respondents were slightly less likely to view Mormonism as an alien religion, and described it as more similar to their own belief system (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2012). While the negative terminology surrounding Mormonism in 2007 predominantly underscored plural marriage, by 2012 negative sentiment was centered on terms like “cult.” This shifting nature of negative stereotypes of Mormons is significant in and of itself, as it suggests a more nuanced understanding of LDS and FLDS practices (or, perhaps, a more favorable attitude towards plural marriage). Twenty-four per cent of respondents chose positive descriptions of Mormons when asked to describe the faith in one word, in contrast to 18% in 2011 (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2012). While this does not suggest that Mormonism is unilaterally accepted at the ‘republican banquet’ of American religious pluralism (Marty, 1986), it does suggest a shifting of attitudes and a generally more hospitable cultural climate. I argue that this shift is at least in part due to the proliferation of representations of Mormons and Mormonism within popular culture from the period 2008-2012.

It is not only the case that more representations of Mormons and Mormonism

emerged during the early 21st century; it is also true that these representations have been more diverse than earlier understandings of the LDS Church. In 2003 *South Park* aired an episode entirely dedicated to explaining (and poking fun at) the origins of the Mormon faith. In “All About Mormons” Joseph Smith is turned into a cartoon and lambasted by the show’s creators, who repeat the refrain throughout, “dumb, dumb, dumb, dumb, dumb” when eccentricities of the faith are revealed. The origin story is also set within the framework of a Mormon family coming to live in South Park, and their son, Gary, attempting to befriend Stan. The episode ends with Gary defending his faith in an earnest speech to the boys of South Park:

The truth is, I don’t care if Joseph Smith made it all up, because what the Church teaches now is loving your family, being nice and helping people. And even though people in *this* town might think that’s stupid, I still choose to believe in it.

In this parody of Mormonism’s origins the creators of *South Park* do not completely lambast participation in the contemporary LDS Church. Trey Parker and Matt Stone have consistently maintained their admiration for Mormons (Fletcher Stack, 2011; Rodman, 2013).

In December 2007, when Romney gave his Faith in America Speech, the former president of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (FLDS Church), Warren Jeffs, had just been sentenced to 10 years to life in prison, convicted in two counts of rape as an accomplice. Jeffs has been the target of a heavily-publicized FBI manhunt in 2006 (Duffy, 2012: 109). Jeffs was the leader of the FLDS Yearning for Zion Ranch, which was raided by Texas authorities in 2008. News media showed images of children being removed from the compound amidst allegations of physical and sexual

abuse. These images stood alongside HBO show *Big Love*, another depiction of FLDS culture, but in the framework of a ‘normal’ American family. *Big Love* was harshly criticized by the Mormon Church, not least for the use of the term “Mormon” in reference to Fundamentalist Latter-day Saints who continue to practice polygamy (Duffy, 2012: 109). The LDS Church also objected to the show’s display of secret Mormon rituals (Duffy, 2012: 109). As I mentioned above, a Pew Report from 2007 found that a majority of people polled who recalled a negative descriptor of Mormonism used a word related to plural marriage (Keeter and Smith, 2007). This should not be surprising given the proliferation of representations of members of the FLDS practicing polygamy, and the relative invisibility of mainstream Mormon (non-polygamous) culture (Medhurst, 2009: 196).

Comparing these representations to those that surrounded Romney’s 2012 campaign sheds light on the role of entertainment media in alleviating anti-Mormon prejudice. Stephanie Meyer’s *Twilight* was published in 2005 and the first film came out November 21, 2008 - after the election. A larger conversation around the franchise’s Mormon themes emerged around 2010 (Aleiss, 2010; Grossman, 2010). Articles appeared in the *Huffington Post* (Aleiss, 2010) and *USA Today* (Grossman, 2010), and later in *The Atlantic* (Fetters, 2012). Academic articles on Mormon themes within the book series also appeared after the first film was released (Schwartzman, 2010; Sutton and Harry, 2011; Toscano, 2010). The discourse around *Twilight* as a quasi-Mormon text, then, emerged after Romney’s first campaign run but before his second.

These discussions elaborate some of the specific nuances of Mormon belief and situate them within the *Twilight* franchise. One blogger argues that Edward Cullen, the

vampire and love interest of the protagonist, literalizes a very Mormon theme of choosing to overcome one's natural instincts on a daily basis, in order to strive to be better and more holy (Grossman, 2010). On the heels of the third *Twilight* film's release, Angela Aleiss argues that whether it is intentional or not, the franchise reproduces a number of Mormon tenets: the protagonist, Bella, "avoids coffee, tea, alcohol, and tobacco – not unlike the Mormons' 'Word of Wisdom' health code" and she practices traditionally female roles for Mormons, including fervent cooking and cleaning (2010). The vampires in the series are described similarly to Mormon angels, and echo Mormon sentiments around immortality and perfection. The character of Jacob, a Quileute Indian, references some of the Mormon beliefs about Jesus visiting Native America and uniting American populations with the Israelites. The relationship between Edward and Bella is consistent with Mormon concepts of marriage (being "sealed" for eternity with a spouse) and reproduction (quick procreation, followed by optional abortion if the mother's life is threatened, and the acceptability of artificial insemination) (Aleiss, 2010; Sutton and Harry, 2011).

The academic discussions of Mormon themes are more careful to situate author Stephanie Meyer's Mormonism as one factor in her writing, rather than the underlying framework for the media franchise. In general the academic treatment of *Twilight* as a Mormon text raises a host of contradictions around what it means to be a good, dutiful member of the LDS Church (Schwartzman, 2010; Sutton and Harry, 2011; Toscano, 2010). For example, Margaret M. Toscano writes that,

In her work, Meyer reveals her core allegiance to Mormon beliefs and practices, but this allegiance is seldom straightforward and never quite pure; superficially, it informs her characters' temptation-resisting choices,

while masking elements of her narrative that challenge some of LDS culture. (Toscano, 2010: 21)

Toscano argues that *Twilight* subtly subverts Mormon norms by foregrounding love over obedience and encouraging some degree of engagement with the morally dangerous. Even though the academic consensus is that we cannot label *Twilight* as overtly and unambiguously Mormon, the proliferation of books and articles engaging in this debate (alongside the less-ambiguous claims of bloggers and popular journalists) demonstrates the purchase such a conversation has in the popular domain. At the very least, these conversations – popular and academic alike – helped to bring LDS norms around gender, sexuality, marriage, and the afterlife into the domain of the public sphere.

Also in the interim, *Big Love* aired its finale in 2011, and the TLC reality series based on the daily activities of the FLDS polygamous Brown family began in 2010. Both of these series attempt to normalize suburban polygamy, distinguishing it on the one hand from the hegemony of the LDS Church and on the other from the “prairie dress” depictions of FLDS rural compounds, like that of Warren Jeffs (Zuk, 2014). Tanya D. Zuk argues that *Big Love* provides a nuanced representation of this third category of Mormon subculture by painting complex portraits of the Henrickson family. From the very beginning *Big Love* depicts Bill Henrickson’s polygamous family in normalizing fashion nevertheless at odds with the mainstream Mormon Church (Zuk, 2014: 96). It distinguishes Henrickson’s suburban family from the dreary and unsettling depiction of Juniper Creek, a polygamous compound which mirrors Jeffs’s (Zuk, 2014: 95). Further, by foregrounding an FLDS family, the TV show actually underscores the normality of the mainstream LDS Mormon Church. Because it is represented as “the dominant oppressive

culture” against which Henrickson and his family struggle, “*Big Love* presumes the Mormon Church is assimilated into modern American culture” (Zuk, 2014: 95).

Zuk also points out that the content of *Big Love* mirrors contemporaneous struggles between the LDS Church and its FLDS offshoot (2014: 97). Bill Henrickson runs for state senate two years after Mitt Romney, and while the LDS Church attempted to distance itself from the TV show, Henrickson himself also argues with the LDS Church about whether and to what extent he can call himself a Mormon (Zuk, 2014: 98, 100–101). Zuk characterizes this as a contest between the interests of four competing brands:

The brands that intersect in the program are HBO’s industrial brand of quality; *Big Love*’s branding of transgressive television and the American Dream; the LDS Mormon normalization branding campaign; and the post-Mormon counter-campaign focusing on theological difference. Each branding campaign has contributed toward the popular memory surrounding the official Mormon Church and the FLDS polygamists, particularly bringing to light the modern suburban polygamist subculture. (2014: 100)

Indeed, Zuk argues that the “I’m a Mormon” advertising campaign by the LDS Church was in part spurred on by the representation of plural marriage in *Big Love*. She also highlights the role of a parody campaign, “And I’m an ex-Mormon,” which pokes fun at the attempt to diversify and normalize Mormons while very seriously underscoring reasons to leave the church. It is in the arena of popular culture, Zuk asserts, that “minority religions and subcultures can change the mainstream popular memory by creating positive, complex, and relatable media representations” (2014: 102). All of the competing representations represented in the example of *Big Love* create a complicated picture of contemporary Mormon life, whether in the LDS or FLDS context.

“With *Big Love* concluded,” Zuk explains, “*Sister Wives* (2009-present) on TLC picks up the suburban polygamist torch in the fight for equality” (2014: 102). *Sister Wives* shows the trials and tribulations of daily life for a family of four wives, one husband, and seventeen children. It is a normalizing portrayal of polygamy, even as it differentiates between Mormon and FLDS affiliations. The family was forced to leave their home state of Utah after the first season aired; the state attempted to prosecute them for violating anti-polygamy laws. The Browns do not reference Mormonism and are situated outside the framework of mainstream Utah Mormon culture. Nevertheless, the show has helped to expand the representational repertoire of suburban polygamists and members of the FLDS Church and to some extent has helped to normalize the LDS Church as non-polygamous.

Another significant representation of Mormons in the public sphere came with the 2011 Broadway debut of *The Book of Mormon*. While the musical presents a tongue-in-cheek, parodic depiction of Mormon missionizing, the Church has also taken the opportunity to use the musical as a way to teach the public about the faith. Missionaries hand out scripture outside theater doors, and the LDS Church has even taken out ad space in the show’s playbook. While the Church does not condone all the content of the musical, interviews with Mormons who have seen the show report generally positive appraisal (Berson, 2013; Fletcher Stack, 2011; Paquette, 2012; Rodman, 2013; Tumminio, 2013; Walker, 2013). The musical follows young Mormon missionaries, and while it pokes fun at their beliefs and enthusiasm, it also does not reference plural marriage (Fletcher Stack, 2011). Mormons have praised it for its diverse representations of the faith (Fletcher Stack, 2011). As the editor of *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon*

Thought said in a *Seattle Times* article, “ ‘I do think the fact that you can make fun of Mormons now, and some Mormons are able to laugh at that, is evidence of a growing maturity and assimilation into American culture’ ” (Berson, 2013).

During the interim between Romney’s campaigns, The LDS Church also engaged more heavily in media campaigning. In 2010-2011, the Church issued the “I’m a Mormon” ad campaign emphasizing the ordinariness of Mormon Americans. In the *New York Times*, Laurie Goodstein acknowledged that the campaign “could prove to be a pivotal factor in the race for the presidency. The Mormon image problem is a problem not only for the church, but also for Mr. Romney” (Goodstein, 2011). These ads upend the homogenous representations of Mormons as white and middle-class, attempting to showcase the variety of Mormon experiences that make up the LDS family. They also situate the LDS Church within the framework of ordinary American life, highlighting Mormons like “a Hawaiian longboard surfing champion, a fashion designer and single father in New York City and a Haitian-American woman who is mayor of a small Utah city” (Goodstein, 2011). Goodstein explains that, “Mr. Romney and Mr. Huntsman embody the Mormon archetype: clean-cut, Republican American family men. The church’s campaign is designed to introduce a rainbow of Mormon faces who counter the stereotype” (2011). Mormonism is branded as diverse and exceptional, but not completely outside the parameters of normal Americanism (Einstein, 2013). For example, the campaign prominently emphasized the Mormon belief in Jesus on Mormon.org (Einstein, 2013: 137). The website also encouraged participatory advertising, calling on ordinary Mormons to create profiles documenting their stories. In turn, non-Mormons can visit Mormon.org and, using a series of pull-down menus, select characteristics (age,

gender, ethnicity, former religion) of a Mormon they might like to meet (Einstein, 2013: 137). Mara Einstein argues that this form of social media engagement replaces traditional door-to-door proselytizing (2013: 137).

Are the Mormons still positioned as a model minority? Perhaps. These newer depictions of Mormons underscore the positive attributes that Chen and Yorgason critique (1999): insularity; success and self-reliance; loyalty to a fault. However, representations like *The Book of Mormon* and the “I’m a Mormon” campaign also veer away from identifying the LDS Church with polygamy and in many ways normalize Mormons as ordinary American citizens. Depictions of suburban FLDS families further complicate the popular picture of Mormonism and bring awareness to the theological differences between LDS and FLDS membership. *The Book of Mormon* underscores some of the religion’s flaws, offering a counterbalance to the model minority discourse. And *Twilight* provides a platform for discussing the nuances of LDS theology within the context of teen romance and the supernatural. Expanding the representational territory of Mormons within the American public sphere can only help to challenge the model minority discourse by revealing a variety of Mormon experiences. As Zuk explains, the “methodology of religious acceptance and assimilation into mainstream American culture through popular public media is successful” (2014: 102).

Mitt Romney himself affirmed these nuanced characteristics of Mormonism during his two runs, allowing the American public a glimpse at the private faith of a very public political figure. Even as he tried to avoid the topic of his faith in 2012, the public sphere was rife with discussion about Romney’s Mormonism. The Pew Research Center’s Journalism Project reported that the “level of religion coverage [during the 2012

campaign] was about the same as in 2008,” even though the candidate rarely talked about religion, and “Romney received twice as much religion coverage as Obama” (2012).

While religion was largely dismissed as a “non-issue” during the 2012 campaign (Guth and Bradberry, 2013; Smietana, 2012; Turner, 2012), the fact remains that news coverage continued to frame Romney in terms of his faith. As Foucault has shown in *History of Sexuality Volume 1*, continuous assertions that a topic is a non-issue signals its importance (1979b). Describing Mitt Romney’s faith as a non-issue still puts Mormonism “into discourse” (Foucault, 1979b: 11) as a significant feature of his candidacy.

Ultimately, the proliferation of popular depictions of Mormons and Mormonism helped to create a cultural and political climate more welcoming to an LDS candidate in 2012 than in 2008.

Conclusion

There is no singular factor to explain the different Romney campaigns in 2008 and 2012. In fact, I have argued that a confluence of factors in both the political and cultural public spheres need to be taken into account in order to fully understand the differences in his two presidential campaigns. Situating Romney’s runs historically (by reflecting on the history of Mormons in American politics) and culturally (by examining the representations of Mormonism that accompanied each campaign) helps us to glean a fuller picture. We can now better understand why Romney was met with resistance when he spoke openly about his faith in 2007. His Faith in America speech not only echoed Kennedy in 1960; it also echoed Reed Smoot’s Senate speech 100 years before (Baker and Campbell, 2010). The cultural climate was ‘colder’ towards Mormonism in 2007-

2008 than it was in 2011-2012. By 2012 the public had greater exposure to diverse representations of Mormonism. While only 39% of the population was aware that Romney was a Mormon in late 2011, after the election in 2012 that number was up to 65% (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2012).

However, this is not to say that the success of Romney's campaign hung on popular culture alone. To be sure, his own gaffes and awkward discussion of women and minorities contributed to his failure to win the federal election in 2012. While representations in popular culture cannot solely explain shifting attitudes towards Romney as a political candidate or even a public figure, I do think that a public sphere filled with more diverse representations of a religious minority can only help to create a climate more responsive to the individual political aspirations of any particular member of that minority. In the face of a narrative around Mormonism that treated the religion as incomprehensibly alien (as in images of Warren Jeffs's compound being raided by federal authorities) or overly white (as in the LDS church's resistance to the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s), it makes sense that expanding the representational territory around mainstream Mormonism can only produce a richer, more nuanced sense of the religion and its adherents. While the Mormon experience is decidedly unique in the context of the American public sphere, it is also true that this case study can provide insight into ways that religious minorities might successfully expand acceptability and legibility in the public sphere. For instance, in cases where the political public sphere seems especially hostile to a particular religious group (like, say, Islam in the U.S.), popular culture might be a fruitful avenue for beginning to expand public sphere legibility and acceptance.

What this suggests is that understanding religion and politics requires careful attention paid to *both* the political and cultural public spheres. As a form of supposedly private identity that nevertheless becomes a matter of public discussion, religion is situated across both spheres and allows us to better understand the relationship between cultural modes of representation and journalistic and political ones. Considering one without the other is tantamount to bracketing off religion from public life in the same untenable way as the secularization theorists sought to do. Not only is it theoretically questionable, but also it is practically undermined by the variety of ways that religion continues to be, and has always been, a major component of the public sphere.

Chapter 4: Québec's Changing Public Sphere: Dissensus, Democratic Iterations, and Shifting Notions of Reasonable Accommodation

In June of 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that an Abercrombie & Fitch policy requiring employees adhere to principles of their controversial “Look Book” was discriminatory when it denied Samantha Elauf a job because she was wearing a *hijab* (Islamic head scarf) (US Muslim in Abercrombie hijab court win, 2015). The decision came just weeks after a Muslim girl was sent home from school in France for wearing a skirt described as “too long” by the administration. This incident renewed the controversy around the French policy of *laïcité*, or strict secularism, because the student was assumed to be protesting a 2004 French law prohibiting wearing “conspicuous” religious symbols in public schools; a group of girls had begun wearing long skirts as a form of protest against the law banning them from wearing the *hijab* in school (The Editorial Board, 2015).

These cases demonstrate the tension that emerges when administrative bodies - whether state-sanctioned or private - attempt to regulate the public expression of religion via roundabout bans on clothing. The continuing controversy around such attempts brings to light the incomplete and impartial versions of secularism that the liberal state enshrines in law. When individual religious actors use the tools of democratic contestation (courts of law; public protest) in order to challenge bans on religious expression, they not only attempt to gain the ability to reassert religiosity in public; they also make clear the Christian biases of the liberal state's attitudes towards tolerance and multiculturalism. Indeed, the French policy of *laïcité* does not target students who wear crucifixes, and the A&F “Look Book” singles out very specific expressions of minority identity (McBride,

2005). I will argue that cases in which religious actors contest bans on public expression of their faith demonstrate that speech should be more broadly construed within the public sphere to include the visible performance of religious identity.

These cases are also situated within larger cultural attitudes towards religious minorities which have targeted Islam as a religio-ethnic force tied up with discourses of threat, incursion, and terrorism. In the wake of 9/11, and the more recent emergence of the so-called Islamic State (ISIS, or ISIL), Islamophobia has become part of the academic and popular discussion of concepts like tolerance and retaliation as much as it is an everyday practice of shoring up American (and Western) identity. The continual attacks on individual Muslims stands alongside overt efforts to ban public expressions of Islam in Canada, the U.S., and Europe. Like many forms of racial or ethnic discrimination, the consolidation of xenophobic anxieties has often targeted those who are perceived to be most vulnerable: women. As I will show, attempts to regulate the clothing of Muslim women has been a concerted effort to suppress public declarations of non-Christian religiosity. The legal bans on Islamic garb have appropriated the discourse of women's rights at the same time as they have overtly and explicitly violated those rights to free expression and bodily autonomy. This contradiction emerges most forcefully when Muslim women use the forums of democratic protest to assert that wearing the *hijab*, or the *niqab* (the full-face covering) is a matter of choice rather than coercion.

In this chapter I analyze the vocal contestations of secularism put forth by religious actors in the Canadian province of Québec. Québec is interesting because while it shares much of the cultural history of France, including Catholicism, French language laws, and a racial homogeneity currently envisioned as 'under threat' by the incursions of

religious and ethnic minorities, it is also legally beholden to federal Canadian policies encouraging multiculturalism and pluralism. Québec sits at the nexus between French ideals of cultural homogeneity, neo-Catholic secularism, xenophobia, and liberal democracy. As a result, a number of tensions have emerged in the past decade that have forced the province to confront its contradictory and conflicting values around religion and public space.

Muslims are a relatively recent yet rapidly growing religious minority in Western liberal democracies. However, I also consider the challenges brought by Sikhs in Québec. As we will see, Muslims and Sikhs have found themselves in an alliance when it comes to the public expression of religiosity, and the court cases brought by members of both religions have forced the issue in Québec.

In Québec, the state allows for the public expression of minority religions via the discourse of *reasonable accommodation*. I argue that this discourse on religion, as a form of tolerance talk, reinforces the Christian-centrism of the liberal democratic state. What's more, I argue that by asserting public expressions of religious visibility - particularly in the form of religious dress - Muslim and Sikh Québécois reframe reasonable accommodation as a *right* rather than a privilege. I use Seyla Benhabib's ideas about the democratic iteration, or the process by which citizens remake their state as more democratic through contestation and antagonism (2004). I also draw on Jacques Rancière's work on dissensus to conceptualize these contestations as a resistance to the ways that racism and Islamophobia have been instantiated 'from above' in Québec via the language of reasonable accommodation (Rancière, 2010a, 2010b, 2011). I consider these acts of publicly visible religious expression as a form of political speech that

significantly broadens the scope of the public sphere as it has been narrowly defined under the rubric of Christian liberalism.

A Brief History of Religion in the Québécois Public Sphere: From the Quiet Revolution to Reasonable Accommodation

Québec has recently undergone what Gregory Baum describes as a “rapid” process of secularization (2000: 149). He explains that until 1960 the Catholic Church continued to play a prominent role in Québécois public life, and was embedded in social life to a degree unseen in other North American contexts:

In this situation the cultural power of the Church was enormous. It defined Québec’s cultural identity in opposition to the Protestant and secular culture of North America. It demanded unanimity within its own ranks and supported the government in its opposition to pluralism. [...] This profound loyalty to the Church may seem like an anomaly in the middle of the twentieth century. Yet whenever a people has been conquered by empire and must struggle for its collective survival, the Church easily becomes a symbol of identity and resistance. (2000: 150)

When the province elected a Liberal government to power in 1960, however, the Church was quickly displaced by what has been come to be called the Quiet Revolution - a period of dramatic redefinition of the province as distinct and separate from the rest of Canada culturally, historically, and socially. The gradual transformation of the public sphere entailed the divestment of social support from the Church, and the secularization of health care, education, and social assistance. Combined with the changes taking place within the Catholic Church itself following the Second Vatican Council, Québec’s new attitude towards religion involved a continued adherence to the traditions and customs of Catholic life, if not ongoing formal participation in church membership (Baum, 2000:

163). In this sense, Catholicism retains a degree of civic influence on Québécois life, analogous, I would argue, to the role that Protestantism plays in the civil religious life of many Americans. Indeed, while 85% of the Québécois population continued to identify as Roman Catholic in 2001 (only 3% lower than in 1961), the number of actual church-goers dropped significantly (Seidle, 2009: 83).¹⁰ The declining birthrate of Québécois, combined with an influx of immigrants during the postwar period, redefined the religious composition of the province significantly (Seidle, 2009: 83). Between 1991 and 2001, the Muslim population “more than doubled [...] making Islam the third-largest faith in the province” (Seidle, 2009: 83).

The influx of immigrants to Québec aligned with national transitions towards increasing rights for minorities in Canada. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms appended the Constitution in 1982 and introduced anti-discrimination legislation (Government of Canada, 1982). The language of reasonable accommodation was introduced in 1985 in the case *O'Malley and Ontario Human Rights Commission v. Simpsons-Sears*, in which it was decided that employers must make reasonable accommodations for employees, so long as the accommodation does not cause “undue hardship” to the employer (*O'Malley v Simpsons-Sears*, 1985). However, in Québec the term ‘reasonable accommodation’ did not gain widespread purchase until the so-called ‘reasonable accommodation crisis’ of the late 2000s.

Following the Quiet Revolution, religion re-emerged in public life during the early 2000s as a number of minority religious groups brought court cases to trial

¹⁰ Leslie Seidle explains that while 80% of the Québécois population attended church weekly in 1960, by 2005 only 22% reported attending monthly (2009: 83).

contesting bans on public expressions of their faith. The most prominent of these concerned a 12-year-old Sikh boy who dropped his *kirpan* (ceremonial dagger) in a public schoolyard in Montreal in 2001. The school interpreted the *kirpan* as a potential threat, while Sikhs interpret the object as a required emblem of religious devotion. The school board originally offered the reasonable accommodation of allowing Multani to carry his *kirpan*, provided it was sewn into his clothing. However, the school's governing board refused to ratify that agreement. Gurbaj Singh Multani and his parents appealed the case, and eventually took it to the Supreme Court of Canada. In 2006 the Supreme Court decided in favor of Multani, declaring that his freedom of religion outweighed any concerns the school might have had around school safety. The decision appealed to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in upholding the right of reasonable accommodation (*Multani v. Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys*, 2006).

The decision spurred a variety of hostile reactions towards the premise of reasonable accommodation. Dimitrios Karmis elucidates the different lines of argument against reasonable accommodation spurred by the *kirpan* decision:

1) the principle of reasonable accommodation fails to limit the rights of minorities, which it holds above the rights of the majority; 2) it is incompatible with the principle of *laïcité*; 3) it is imposed by judges without democratic legitimacy; 4) it reflects a tendency towards ghettoization at the heart of Canadian multiculturalism; 5) it plays into the hands of religious fundamentalists. (Karmis, 2007: 143 my translation)

By the time the Multani decision had been made by the Supreme Court, the language of reasonable accommodation was prevalent in discussions around religious minorities within the province. However, in these lines of argument reasonable accommodation is framed as a privilege rather than a guaranteed right, and one that appeared to threaten

traditional Québécois ways of life.

After the Multani decision, a variety of other requests for reasonable accommodation came to the surface in Québec. Some Muslim women requested separate swim times in public pools; other Muslims requested non-pork meals at a rural Québécois sugar shack and accommodations for public prayer space. These requests, while not particularly burdensome for the institutions in question, inspired further anti-accommodation backlash. In particular, anxieties seemed to surface over the accommodation of minorities within a space already set apart as a linguistic and cultural minority within the nation. Mario Dumont, the leader of the third party in Québec's National Assembly (the Action Démocratique, or ADQ) synthesized these anxieties when he argued against then-Premier Jean Charest's call to increase the number of immigrants to the province: "We're a linguistic minority," Dumont explained, "and immigrants need francization" (Quebec to reconsider integration of immigrants, 2007). He criticized the Liberal leadership in the province for allowing accommodations to go too far: "When a series of clearly unreasonable accommodations took place, we were waiting for a clear stand from the premier, a solid [defense] of Québec's common values," he stated (Charest lashes out on reasonable accommodation, 2007).

The so-called crisis of reasonable accommodation came to a head in January 2007 when the small town of Hérouxville (population 1300) published a "Code of Conduct" aimed at immigrants. The rural town located in central Québec is uniformly white and Francophone, with no immigrant population, and the Code was seen as a hyperbolic response to what was a non-issue in Hérouxville. Nevertheless it issued bans on carrying symbolic weapons in school, having one's face covered, praying in school, and stoning or

burning women alive. The exaggerated response to religious accommodation - including the ban on the *kirpan*, which had just been declared a violation of the Charter by the Supreme Court - received a host of media attention, as well as support from conservative Québécois. Religious accommodation had become an issue of central concern to ordinary Francophones, whether or not actual practices of accommodation seemed to threaten traditional Québécois ways of life. The controversy over Hérouxville raised the specter of the discussion to the provincial and national level (Mahrouse, 2010; Patriquin, 2013; Quebec to reconsider integration of immigrants, 2007). Religious accommodation was now enshrined in public discourse across the province. The Bouchard-Taylor Commission that soon followed significantly narrowed the scope of its meanings, however.

The Bouchard-Taylor Commission

The Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices was created in early 2007 in order to address concerns over religious accommodation ‘gone too far.’ Employing two public intellectuals as commissioners, historian and sociologist Gérard Bouchard and philosopher Charles Taylor, the Bouchard-Taylor Commission’s aim was to produce a report consolidating public opinion on religious accommodation via a lengthy process of public consultations. These consultations were open forums for citizens to express concerns around religious accommodations, and were largely one-way conversations where commissioners’ role was to sit and listen to various complaints. One of the outcomes of the Commission’s final report, and its consultation process in general, was that it continued to reframe religious accommodation as a matter of public debate

and cultural concern, rather than a legal or rights-based mandate justified by the Charter. Indeed, Bouchard and Taylor explain that they “strongly favour” an approach to accommodation requests based on informal negotiations and “the search for a compromise” over and above “the legal route” where religious minorities use courts of law to uphold rights (2008: 19). While their prioritization of this “citizen route” appears less contentious, it also presumes that all parties are equal when it comes to rights and accommodation, and ignores the degree to which Catholicism is always already a given within the Québécois public sphere, and therefore need not be accommodated.

The basic determination made by Bouchard and Taylor was that the ‘accommodation crisis’ was really a crisis of perception. They explain that,

After a year of research and consultation, we have come to the conclusion that the foundations of collective life in Québec are not in a critical situation. Our investigation did not reveal to us a striking or sudden increase in the adjustments of accommodation that public institutions allow, nor did we observe that the normal operation of our institutions would have been disrupted by such requests, which is eloquently confirmed by the very small number of accommodation cases that ends up before the courts. (2008: 18)

In many cases, requests for accommodation were portrayed partially, and the actual facts did not line up with overwhelming negative attitudes towards such requests. However, Bouchard and Taylor suggest that media representations were not solely responsible for this distorted perspective on accommodation: they point out that immigrants were often targeted as scapegoats in the face of Québec’s changing public sphere. Finally, they suggest that, “Quebecers of French-Canadian ancestry are still not at ease with their twofold status as a majority in Québec and a minority in Canada and North America” (2008: 18).

Bouchard and Taylor argue that imposing restrictive secularism – like policies in France banning all public displays of religiosity – is inadequate for Québec, which espouses values of neutrality but also pluralism. They advocate instead for a policy of “open secularism” which simultaneously upholds universal moral equality, freedom of religion, the separation of church and state, and state neutrality. They recognize that some practices that are currently adopted in the Québécois public sphere – such as prayers at municipal council meetings, or the crucifix hanging in the National Assembly – must therefore be abandoned (2008: 20). Finally, they argue for “interculturalism” as a guiding principle in Québec, which “seeks to reconcile ethnocultural diversity with the continuity of the French-speaking core and the preservation of the social link. [Interculturalism] thus affords security to Quebecers of French-Canadian origin and to ethnocultural minorities and protects the rights of all in keeping with the liberal tradition” (2008: 19). Their conclusion is decidedly liberal in orientation: it upholds values of moral equality and state neutrality towards religious practices, without addressing the unequal access to the public sphere granted to different religious groups. While Bouchard and Taylor point out the hypocrisy of the crucifix in the National Assembly, they hold firm to a vision of liberal democracy based on consensus and agreement. They advocate for developing a common Québécois identity open to all, based on a common language (French) as well as collective values, symbols, and cultural expressions (2008: 22). Indeed, Bouchard and Taylor refer to attempts at accommodation throughout their report as “harmonization practices,” and the title of the report itself is, “Building the Future: A Time for Reconciliation.”

The media coverage that accompanied these consultations became as much a part

of the Commission as did the official report that followed. Leslie Seidle argues that media coverage of these consultation meetings tended to overemphasize negative or racist comments, while the commissioners failed to incorporate reciprocal dialogue into these conversations (2009: 92–93). Seidle suggests that had the commissioners stepped in to offer more nuanced information about various religious practices (like the Islamic headscarf, or *hijab*) or corrected mistaken impressions during the consultation process, the commission might have represented a more even-handed example of democracy-in-action (2009: 98). She also argues that the process as a whole redefined the public conception of reasonable accommodation “from a legal concept with a fairly narrow meaning to a catch-all expression that many Québécois came to use as a synonym for virtually any diversity-based adjustment” (2009: 98). In particular, the term came to stand in for anxieties around loss of traditional Québécois culture, even as “another commission that concurrently examined accommodation practices in the Québec education system found that most of the adjustments that schools make for religious and other reasons are done informally and apparently cause little stir” (Seidle, 2009: 99).

The Bouchard-Taylor Commission reinforced an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ mentality as pertained to religious minorities, who were put in the uncomfortable position of having to allay white Christian anxieties around outsiders and loss of traditional French culture (Mahrouse, 2010: 89). As Gada Mahrouse explains,

what was most worrying about the citizens’ forums was not the overtly racist remarks, the absence of political correctness or the way that racist articulations sullied Québec’s image; rather, it was the invisible and inaudible ways by which positions of superiority and hierarchy were reinforced. The superior subject position of French-Canadian Québécois was reinforced when they came to think of themselves, not only as the ones who unquestionably belonged, but also as the ones who could

determine who else could and could not belong. (2010: 89)

The discourse of religious accommodation reinscribes certain citizens as the ‘tolerators’ and other (non-, or not-fully) citizens as those who must be tolerated.

As Wendy Brown powerfully exposes in *Regulating Aversion* (2006) tolerance talk always invokes a power relation and conceives of the tolerator in a position of authority over the tolerated. In this sense tolerating minority religious traditions - or belief in general, even the religious beliefs of a Christian minority - is a way that the state recapitulates its own noncultural origins and heralds itself for being a rational, reasonable body capable of tolerance. Tolerance is a guise that obfuscates that liberalism is a culture, with its own sets of values and norms. What’s more, tolerance of minorities has historically been used to prevent non-Christian forms of religiosity from becoming part of the public sphere. As Brown recalls John Locke’s formative evaluation of tolerance as a practical solution to a difficult problem in Western Europe during the late 18th century, she recalls that minority religious expressions may exist only so long as they remain wholly private (2006: 31–32). She argues that Locke’s vision of toleration is the one that has come to fruition in liberal states, a vision of tolerance “that radically individualizes and privatizes religion, and therefore is also most closely fitted to Protestantism” (2006: 34). The same is true in Québec, where the discourse of reasonable accommodation has been used to privilege ‘traditional’ Québécois values and cultural norms, which become the determining factor in who, what, and when to accommodate. The language of religious accommodation already presupposes a normative distinction between who is tolerated and who is tolerating; the condescension of tolerance talk was thus heavily reinforced by the Bouchard-Taylor Commission’s report, and continued to define

legislative attempts to further bracket out the participation of religious minorities within public life in Québec.

Another outcome of the Bouchard-Taylor Commission was a significant narrowing of the definition of reasonable accommodation. While the term had previously had primarily legal purchase, the perceived crises in Hérouxville and Montréal redefined it as a cultural formation, the stakes of which encompassed the survival of Francophone culture. This cultural definition of reasonable accommodation veered away from a rights-based discussion and towards a culturally alienating ‘us’ versus ‘them’ framework (Mahrouse, 2010: 90). By framing reasonable accommodation as a matter up for public debate, rather than a right or even a negotiation conducted in consultation with the affected religious parties, the Bouchard-Taylor Commission advanced this cultural definition of the term. In this sense the Bouchard-Taylor Commission further depoliticized accommodation practices. Indeed, one of the outcomes of the Commission was to create the Advisory Service on Religious Accommodation, a phone line for employers to request advice on whether and how to accommodate various religious practices. Dubiously renamed the “Accommodation Hotline” by various news outlets, the service effectively characterized religious accommodation as a process of private consultation rather than a publicly available right.

After Bouchard-Taylor: Legislation

Following the release of the Bouchard-Taylor report, a number of pieces of legislation were brought to the Québécois legislature in various attempts to ban public expressions of (minority) religion. These reflected the newfound understanding of

reasonable accommodation as a cultural practice that had ‘gone too far’ rather than a set of legal claims based on citizenship rights. Put another way, the proposed legislation that followed in the wake of the Commission made the discourse of reasonable accommodation about where to draw the lines of ‘reasonableness’ rather than a fact of Charter-guaranteed protections. As soon as it was made clear that the boundaries of reasonable accommodation could be tested, they were.

In 2010 Bill 94 was introduced into the Québec legislature. This bill targets women who wear *niqab* and proposes to ban it in all public service sectors. If passed, this bill would prevent these women from receiving hospital care and taking language classes, among other government services. This bill hinges on the issue of visibility. It reads,

The practice whereby a personnel member of the Administration or an institution and a person to whom services are being provided by the Administration or the institution show their face during the delivery of services is a general practice.

If an accommodation involves an adaptation of that practice and reasons of security, communication or identification warrant it, the accommodation must be denied. (2010)

While the bill does not mention the *niqab* per se, the reference to making one’s face visible directly targets some Islamic women (and was proposed with them in mind).

When the bill was introduced, the Québec immigration minister remarked that, “if you want to integrate into Québec society, here are our values. We want to see your face” (Kay, 2011).

Visibility is configured in three ways in this bill. First, visibility is invoked in the rhetoric of the bill’s supporters, who argue that being forced to remove their *niqabs* will liberate these women from the oppressive Islamic regime keeping them covered. This

argument hinges on the idea that visibility corresponds to freedom, disregarding the idea that these women might interpret the *niqab* differently. Further, this rhetoric of freedom was challenged when a group of women – some in *niqab*, others not – protested against this bill at Montréal’s City Hall. As Seyla Benhabib has argued, adorning the *niqab* during the act of political protest challenges the notion that religion is a private affair (2004: 187). By asserting political agency in a highly visible and public way, these women challenged the discourse which suggested that their invisibility signaled their oppression (Benhabib, 2004: 183–198).

Second, supporters of the bill assumed that its passing would increase the visibility of women otherwise hidden behind the veil of the *niqab*, forcing them to remove it. However many women interviewed on the issue stated that they would rather be fined for wearing the *niqab* than take it off; otherwise they would remove themselves entirely from public view so as to avoid sanctions. It is hard to imagine any of these women using the bill as a reason to remove their *niqabs*, and as a result it would encourage increasing withdrawal of these Islamic women rather than their renewed presence in the public sphere.

Third, the bill was heralded for its progressiveness. In this case the progressive nature of the bill was aligned with its secularizing attempts. By removing a particular trace of religion from public life, Bill 94 was consistent with the general attempt to secularize the Québécois public sphere. In an editorial in the Canadian newspaper the *National Post*, Barbara Kay remarked that, “Bill 94 strikes exactly the right balance between an individual’s right to go about her private business in the costume of her choice, and the individual’s obligation to respect the values of the state when interacting

with its proxies” (2011). However, as we have seen the bill targets one minority religious practice, and says nothing about the presence of crucifixes, yarmulkes, or other more mainstream religious symbols. Complex issues of accommodation are often met with the fiercest discomfort, a discomfort which is smoothed over with the rhetoric of progressiveness and freedom (and in this case, pseudo-feminism). Ultimately Bill 94 attempts to impose a particular regime of visibility upon some Muslim women, and demonstrates the province’s inability to deal with alternative modes of recognition.

Seyla Benhabib writes of a similar case in France, where three schoolgirls refused to remove their head scarves in response to their headmaster’s ban on the *hijab*, and did so as a deliberate and political refusal (2004: 186–187). Benhabib writes of the girls’ refusal,

To assume that the meaning of their actions is purely one of religious defiance of the secular state constrains these women’s own capacity to write the meaning of their own actions and, ironically, reimprisons them within the walls of patriarchal meaning from which they are trying to escape. (2004: 192)

She also points out the irony of these girls using the democratic freedoms guaranteed to them by the state - including the right to free education - in order to contest the state’s attempts to regulate their clothing (2004: 187). She calls this a moment of the *democratic iteration*, wherein the inclusiveness of the state is called into question and reverified via an appeal to rights that is contestatory and often antagonistic (2004: 19, 197–198). Drawing from Derrida, she uses the concept of the iteration in order to point out the dynamic nature of the democratic process, as well as to resolve the apparent contradiction between the premise of liberalism (“universal moral equality”) and democracy (“citizens’ equality”) (2004: 19). Through this contestatory process, “the democratic people shows

itself to be not only the *subject* but also the *author of its laws*” (2004: 19–20 emphasis in original). The democratic iteration, Benhabib continues, is also often accompanied with a process of revoking rights and can generate both “public self-reflection” as well as “public defensiveness” (2004: 19, 198).

Likewise in Québec, around 100 protesters showed up at Montréal’s City Hall to contest Bill 94 (Protesters Denounce Bill 94, 2010). Some were wearing *niqab*, but they were also acting as political agents, engaged in a paradigm of democracy which their clothing supposedly undermined. By making visible this private religious practice these women also configured their wearing of the *niqab* as a form of political speech being silenced by the provincial government and by the press.¹¹ But, like other democratic iterations, this protest and others like it reinforced a form of public defensiveness and xenophobia that resulted in pushback rather than acceptance of these rights-based claims. In an interesting turn of events, four Sikhs who had been asked to testify in the Bill 94 case were prohibited from entering the courtroom when they refused to remove their *kirpans* (a right which had been upheld in the Supreme Court in the Multani case) (Dougherty, 2011). They were prevented from consulting on the legality of the *niqab* ban - removed from the deliberative process that is at the heart of the public sphere - because of the prohibition on their own religious expression.

In May of 2013 the Parti Québécois introduced Bill 60, known as the Charter of Values, to the Québec legislature. The Charter banned all public sector employees from wearing “conspicuous” religious symbols and mandated having one’s face uncovered

¹¹ This irony is made forcefully clear in the image of at least one female protester who wore the Québecois flag as her *niqab*, covering her face.

when giving or receiving any public services, including health care, education, and social support services (2013). The bill is a good example of Christian Liberalism: it argues for neutrality, but in practice has explicit exemptions for employees who wear small Christian symbols and for the large crucifix present in the Québec National Assembly. The latter is redefined not as a religious symbol but rather as a cultural one. This is emblematic of the process wherein Christianity is inscribed as “just tradition” rather than religion, made into the hegemonic norm underpinning all other liberal claims to rights. When Christian symbols and identities are declared a matter of culture they are removed from the arena of public debate over neutrality and secularism. Christianity is the only religion that need not be “accommodated” in this discourse because it exists outside the field of religious practices.

As in all processes of democratic iteration, the ebb and flow of support that Bill 60 received indicated a larger shift in public opinion. The Charter received heavy criticism in both domestic and international media for being racist and exclusionary. Thousands of protestors took to the streets in Québec to contest the bill in September of 2013 (Bitonti, 2014; Quebec ‘Charter of Values’ Draws Protests, 2013, Quebec values charter protest hits Montreal streets, 2013). CBC News reported that,

Demonstrators were wearing a range of religious apparel, from turbans to veils to skull caps and prayer shawls.

Protest organizers said they wanted to denounce discrimination against various of Québec’s cultural and religious communities, as well as Islamophobia. They also vowed to challenge any eventual charter of values in court. (Quebec values charter protest hits Montreal streets, 2013)

Following the provincial election in April 2014, the bill was declared effectively dead via

the victory of the Liberal Party over the Parti Québécois. The Charter was seen as a factor in the PQ's defeat, although the Liberal victory did not allay all anxieties related to the public expression of Islam. The Liberal Party revived Bill 94 when they took power and it remains on the table as of late 2015.

Some of these anxieties around the *niqab* were also reflected in attempts at federal legislation. In December of 2011, then-Immigration Minister Jason Kenney issued a policy manual that banned face-coverings during the oath of citizenship. In a press conference Kenney said it was “frankly bizarre” that women had previously been allowed to adorn the traditional Islamic garb during the ceremony, which he described as a rite of civic passage to be taken openly, and in public (Payton, 2011). Kenney cited a number of reasons for the *niqab* ban. First, he repeated a popular assumption that the *niqab* signals the oppression of women, which Canada does not condone. Second, he cited the concerns of judges witnessing the ceremony who complained that they could not tell whether these women were actually saying the correct words of the citizenship oath. Third, Kenney called upon the rhetoric of security, arguing that these women could not be easily identified while their faces were covered. Fourth and finally, and underscoring his other comments, Kenney emphasized that this ceremony was a place where visibility mattered. The *niqab* simply did not render visible the citizenship candidate in a way that was legible to the state (Payton, 2011).

Zunera Ishaq, a teacher originally from Pakistan and a Canadian permanent resident, challenged the ban in the courts. When she applied for Canadian citizenship in 2013 she removed her *niqab* for identification purposes, but she refused to do so during the public swearing-in ceremony. She sued the government, arguing that the ban violated

her Charter rights. Ishaq has framed her wearing of the *niqab* as a matter of personal choice, underscored by her insistence on wearing the garment even against the warnings of her family. She began wearing it at age 15, even though her family did not practice any form of veiling (Zunera Ishaq, who challenged ban on niqab, takes citizenship oath wearing it, 2015). Rather than being forced to veil, Ishaq received warnings from her father and husband about the repercussions of wearing the *niqab* in public and taking on a lengthy legal fight. Ishaq's insistence on wearing the *niqab* is thus not a patriarchal rejection of women's autonomy, but its direct refusal. The Federal Court of Appeal upheld Ishaq's right to wear the *niqab* during the ceremony. A Conservative appeal to the Supreme Court was dropped once Justin Trudeau's Liberals came to power in October 2015, just days after Ishaq finally took her oath of citizenship (Mas and Crawford, 2015; Zunera Ishaq, who challenged ban on niqab, takes citizenship oath wearing it, 2015).

In his decision upholding Ishaq's right to wear the *niqab*, Federal Court Judge Keith Boswell cited not the Charter rights she appealed to, but rather the fact that Kenney's manual violated the Citizenship Act, which declares that "a citizenship judge shall 'administer the oath of citizenship with dignity and solemnity, allowing the greatest possible freedom in the religious solemnization' of taking the oath" (qtd in Gollom, 2015). The policy manual itself was declared unlawful (Gollom, 2015), making Ishaq's individual rights-based claim into a universal declaration. Her challenge thus reverified the general nature of accommodation-based rights, characterizing them as broad and publicly available, rather than a matter of private, individual consultation.

The sweeping victory of Justin Trudeau's Liberal Party over the nearly decade-long entrenchment of Conservative power under Stephen Harper was also seen as a clear

declaration settling the long-standing debate over the *niqab*. By the time of the October 2015 federal election, many Canadians were exhausted by the conversation. While only six women had petitioned to wear the *niqab* during the citizenship ceremony since Kenney's policy manual was published in 2011 (Fatah, 2015), the national debate that these challenges produced - and their concomitant resistance from the Conservatives - seemed to be more burdensome than any particular religious accommodation. The Conservatives politicized the issue which had been depoliticized since the Bouchard-Taylor commission, but by bringing it to the national public sphere they also highlighted the absurdity of their own quest to silence religious minorities at the very moment of becoming Canadian citizens. Many Canadians were so fed up with the "*niqab* issue" by the time the October 19th election took place that they went to the polls donning a variety of head coverings, including a luchador mask and a pumpkin (Donnelly, 2015). Mike Kendrick, who wore the former to the polls, explained in a Facebook post,

This campaign has been plagued with fearmongering and jingoism, making a farce of real issues. I've chosen to respond to Harper's ridiculous tactics by ridiculing the very issue he's forced on Canadians for weeks. The right to cover your head does not threaten the democratic process, whether you're wearing a *niqab*, a *khustka*, or a luchador mask. Citizens should have the right to peaceful expression and belief without fear of government interference. (qtd in Donnelly, 2015)

This public sense of exhaustion is a reflection of a long series of democratic iterations that the country and the province of Québec have been undergoing for the past ten years. The ebb and flow of public sentiment - combined with the dynamic process of revoking and reinstating the rights of Canadian citizens - has produced a substantial amount of debate and deliberation in the public sphere. This debate has brought into public view what otherwise might be seen as a highly private religious practice, but the

vocal opposition to the *niqab* has also precipitated a sense of tedium. Muslim women's refusal to accept legislation that seeks to ban the *niqab* has been instrumental in encouraging ongoing debate and deliberative reflection. In this sense these women have been significant political actors and interveners in the public sphere.

Analysis: Dissensus and Democracy

The work of Jacques Rancière is useful here for understanding how dissensus emerged as a tactic of minority religious actors, especially in opposition to a consensus-based view of democracy. Like Benhabib, for Rancière politics is a dynamic act of contestation rather than a static enactment of power, and it exists outside the field of official political channels (like the assembly). In accounting for its citizens, the state necessarily leaves some out, especially when its democracy is envisioned as a process of achieving consensus (2004, 2006, 2010a). Put another way, “[t]he general will cannot be divided,” (Rancière, 2006: 298) and so any statement of generalized public opinion leaves out a supplementary part. The police, as the antithesis of politics, works to render that omission invisible. Rancière explains that, “[t]he police is a distribution of the sensible [...] This partition should be understood in the double sense of the word on the one hand, as that which separates and excludes; on the other, as that which allows participation” (2010a: 36). The police render sensible the exclusion of the invisible, while politics “before all else, is an intervention in the visible and the sayable” (2010a: 37). Politics, in Rancière's terms, is a form of disruption that upsets the distribution of social consensus.

As a result, dissensus makes clear that the state's view is always partial by giving

voice to the part-that-is-not-a-part, the part that has been left out. Democracy as an entity is thus “the process of enlarging the public sphere” through disruption (2006: 299). So, when the Parti Québécois produces a Charter of Values that makes room for the National Assembly’s large crucifix but not for a woman’s *niqab* in the emergency room, the police’s attempt at common sense is revealed to be hypocritical. Common sense is both invoked and disrupted when the partiality of the distribution of accommodation rights is made clear. Likewise, when a woman wearing *niqab* refuses to remove it in a public and highly visible context, she is performing politics as Rancière describes it.

The Bouchard-Taylor Commission was an attempt to gain consensus on the *niqab* issue, but notably left out a central subject of the dispute: Muslim women. The legislation that followed in the wake of the Commission’s report attempted to solidify the distribution of ‘sensible’ approaches towards accommodation, but in doing so also omitted the feelings of individual Muslim women and the rights to which they were always-already entitled. By refusing to adhere to such legislation, Muslim women - as well as Sikhs carrying the *kirpan* - challenged the notion that such a distribution was indeed sensible. When four Sikhs were prohibited from testifying on Bill 94, themselves removed from the court because they refused to violate the Supreme Court right to carry the *kirpan*, the incoherence of this practice of the state came to the fore.

The visceral reaction that a woman wearing a *niqab* can produce is an example of dissensus - of politics being enacted. As Rancière writes, dissensus “is the demonstration (manifestation) of a gap in the sensible itself. Political demonstration makes visible that which had no reason to be seen; it places one world in another” (2010a: 38). This combination of worlds - of private faith and public norms - is what causes a rupture in the

fabric of the sensible. As such, politics is the attempt to count the uncounted, or those who are necessarily omitted from state recognition under the logic of a consensus-based regime, and that is exactly how the iterative contestations of various religious minorities have come into the public sphere over the past decade. By refusing to relegate themselves to the private sphere, or to adhere to the bans on their clothing in public, these religious actors reverify the inclusiveness of the state.

Further, Rancière argues that any attempt to justify inequality is necessarily incoherent, because it presupposes the very equality that it seeks to undermine. In this respect, the attempts in Québec and nation-wide to restrict wearing the *niqab* pointed out their own absurdity: the idea that a Canadian citizen cannot be protected by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms which is at its core about maintaining a coherent idea of citizenship via rights. To propose inequality at the moment of its induction, as in the case of the citizenship ceremony, is to undermine the state's own principles around citizenship as a rights-based category.

Martin Patriquin, a Québécois reporter writing in the *New York Times*, describes the proposed Charter of Values as “Québec’s Tea Party Moment.” He sees the most virulent forms of Islamophobia emerging from rural Québec - as in the case of the Héraultville Code of Conduct. Writing in late 2013, Patriquin explains that,

A recent poll suggested that the values charter was most popular with white, Francophone males living outside Montreal — where immigrants are about as common as New York Rangers fans.

In catering to this white, populist rural vote, the left-of-center Parti Québécois has seemingly ventured into Tea Party territory. (2013)

He blames the Parti Québécois for exploiting this rural, lower-class anxiety and using it

to gain political leverage to offset weak support in Montréal.

However, the idea that the *niqab* ban is embedded in a rural form of Islamophobia is disrupted by Rancière's notion that racism often comes "from above" (2010b). That is to say, the fear of the *niqab* is not just situated in a lower-class sense of victimization, but is rigorously instituted by political élites (in this case, especially from within Harper's cabinet, and by the Parti Québécois). In Rancière's line of argument, racism is constructed *by* the state. He argues that in the case of France, the political and intellectual élites have used rural populations as a scapegoat for xenophobic arguments. Because it is no longer acceptable to construct categories of superior and inferior races, discrimination forms around discourses of " 'communitarianism,' universality of the law and the equality of all citizens before the law, and the equality of the sexes. [...] these arguments are made by people who otherwise make very little of equality and feminism" (Rancière, 2010b). The racism of the state produces ideologies of inclusion and exclusion while simultaneously verifying that it is the product of a rural, lower-class anxiety, therefore deflecting attention from the state's role in organizing, regulating, and managing populations. Rancière writes,

It is time to turn this argument around and mark the bond between the state 'rationality' that controls these measures and its convenient other - its adversary accessory - represented as a foil, the popular passion. In fact, it is not the government that acts under the pressure of popular racism and in reaction to the so-called 'popular' passions of the extreme-right. (2010b)

In fact, Rancière argues, it is the reverse, wherein the government institutes racism from above and uses populism to distribute it.

Likewise in Québec, where reporting on the Bouchard-Taylor Commission placed blame on the commissioners for giving voice to the rural Québécois and their

Islamophobic statements. However, the federal and provincial attempts at *niqab* legislation remind us that the fears and anxieties over the *niqab* are as much a product of “[r]acism [as a] passion from above” (Rancière, 2010b), as a reflection of the insecurities of Québécois who see their way of life under threat. The very fact that Harper kept bringing up the issue of the *niqab* ban during the 2015 federal election campaign - even in the face of a national sentiment of exhaustion over the issue - demonstrates that this form of intolerance was primarily instituted from above.

The idea that the speech of a *niqab*-clad woman can be recognized as political - as dissenting, but also as legitimately based in the foundations of freedom of speech and an accessible public sphere - means that Christian Liberalism can still be shaken. It can be upended by those who have been left out of its rendition of ‘the public’ in the moment that those citizen-subjects articulate their own existence. In this sense the *niqab* is especially important as a highly visible intervention in political discourse - and one that cannot be silenced, as other forms of political speech often are. The visceral reaction the image of a *niqab* can arouse is proof of the speech power this vestment has. In the same vein, attempts to silence this speech via bans on the *niqab* are met with visceral reactions which see these as moments of silencing, and not simply regulation around clothing. As Rancière reminds us, politics always begins with a wrong - a violation or omission. While those who would seek to ban the *niqab* outright, including the small town of Hérouxville, see their position as one of being subordinated - being left out in the accounting practices of the nation-state when it includes immigrants - so too is the contestation of women who wear the *niqab* an act of identifying the human rights violation that occurs when you wholly omit a group of people from public participation based on a visible feature.

Women who refused to remove their *niqabs* pointed out that it was not the rural Québécois who were surplus in this equation, but rather themselves. The Bouchard-Taylor Commission was an act of solidifying the speech of those who belong, and in so doing actually created a surplus out of those who were *not* asked to speak; namely, religious minorities who requested reasonable accommodations. In this sense, when religious actors protest in public or contest bans on their religious garb in courts of law, they articulate themselves as: 1) part of the *demos*, the part that has been left out; 2) active political agents rather than passive and oppressed subjects; and 3) (re)makers of democracy. Religious minorities stage equality by using both formal speech and clothing-as-speech and in so doing force the state to account for them as surplus and as citizens.

Conclusion

While the Bouchard-Taylor Commission focused heavily on the voices of the perceived disenfranchised - rural Québécois who felt threatened by an influx of immigrants and a perceived sense of attack on ‘traditional’ Francophone values - various members of the Muslim and Sikh communities have entered the public sphere of their own account. Multani’s court case stands as a seminal example of a religious actor resisting secularization mandates by using the democratic apparatus (the judiciary) in order to defend freedom of religion, under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In this sense Multani’s prolonged resistance to the *kirpan* ban stands as a good example of the democratic iteration, or the ongoing process of remaking the democratic state as democratic via the mechanisms of dissensus, debate, and contestation.

When religious minorities intervene in the public sphere in a visible way, they

change the nature of that public sphere. They challenge the implicit Christian Liberalism of the public sphere by expressing non-Christian religious sentiments under the rubric of a liberal rights regime. The case in Québec, and Canada more broadly, is not the only instance in which religious minorities are using the terms of democratic participation in order to contest their own exclusion. But by looking at Québec and Canada we can understand more clearly how the process of accumulated democratic iterations unfolds slowly over time, and how dissensus can advance the aims of democracy and challenge a consensus-based regime. In this respect the cases that I have reviewed here provide material examples of the theories of Benhabib and Rancière, and also verify the contestability of the Christian liberal public sphere. Applying these theories to other interventions in the public sphere can help us to develop a more nuanced understanding of how religious minorities are constricted by principles of sayability and permissible expressions, but also how they push back against these constraints in a dynamic fashion. Further, by tracing the different meanings of ‘reasonable accommodation’ over time we can understand the lengthy process of democratic dissensus. Rather than taking place in a particular instance, moments of dissensus are accumulative and often accompanied with a retraction of rights before they are eventually expanded. It is helpful to use Rancière to understand how this retraction emerges from the intellectual élites, while also paying attention to the political actions and expressions of those frequently omitted from political debate: women, minorities, and immigrants.

Chapter 5: Atheism as Church, Creed, and Counterpublic

In early 2014, the British government granted religious asylum to a 21-year-old Afghan man living in the U.K. Not only had the man rejected the Islam with which he was raised, but during his tenure in the U.K. he had become a self-professed atheist. The legal team that filed the petition drew on the 1951 Refugee Convention and argued that the man could face the death sentence if forced to return to Afghanistan (Atheist given religious asylum in UK, 2014).¹²

Chief executive of the British Humanist Association said this in response to the case:

‘Freedom of belief for humanists, atheists and other non-religious people is as important as freedom of belief for the religious but it is too often neglected by Western governments who focus too narrowly on the rights of Christians abroad,’ (Copson qtd in Atheist given religious asylum in UK, 2014)

This remark suggests that granting religious asylum to atheists is not simply a matter of strategic immigration, but rather a political attempt to recast atheism as a creed deserving the full protection of the law. The British Home Office agreed and granted the request, in the first known case of religious asylum being extended to atheism. Extending freedom of religion to atheists signals a significant legal and cultural shift which I examine in this chapter. I argue that the ways in which some atheists are redefining atheism as a church or creed reveals the underlying premise of Christian Liberalism.

¹² The legal team argued that it would be effectively impossible for the man to live an atheist life in Afghanistan, because even in large urban centers like Kabul one’s private life would become quickly exposed to neighbors. The argument centered on the effective lack of privacy with regards to matters of religious affiliation and practice (Atheist given religious asylum in UK, 2014).

I begin with this case because it is indicative of a broader international movement focused on gaining official *religious* recognition for atheism. Atheism is entering the public sphere in two distinct and notable ways. On the one hand, atheists are redefining atheism as a *religious category* deserving of state protections because it is a system of beliefs. On the other hand, some atheists are formulating atheism as a *religious expression*, drawing on the church model to make their belief system legible. I argue that these two forms of intervention in the public sphere mark a distinctive shift for atheism, which has historically defined itself in negative terms *against* religion.

Atheism is historically a rejection of religion. More specifically, it is a rejection of religious belief, and most often has been expressed as a rejection (and in the context) of Western Christianity. Today, the most virulent versions of atheism are found in the writings of Christopher Hitchens (who passed away in 2011) and Richard Dawkins, who suggest that most of society's ills can be attributed to a mistaken and misguided belief in God. Their brand of atheism is anti-religious, and particularly anti-Christian. In this chapter I show that despite the anti-Christian foundations of Western Atheism, specific groups of atheists are currently modeling their forms of association – and their claims to rights from the state – on Protestant Christianity. This seems antithetical to the anti-religion rhetoric of Dawkins and Hitchens, and also contradictory to older forms of atheism which emerged out of a negation of Christianity. This paradox not only highlights the contradictions embedded in contemporary atheism, but also reveals the parameters of legibility that the state imposes upon identity. What I argue is that in part due to the state's inability to easily recognize and categorize atheism within a framework of rights, many atheists have reformulated atheism as a form of belief rather than non-

belief. Configuring atheism in this way – as a church or creed – allows it to conform to the parameters of Christian Liberalism, and thus become legible. By defining religion along these lines, some atheists are able to consolidate their atheism as deserving of the same state protections that other religious groups receive. Freedom of religion has in practice meant state-sanctioned protections for certain religious expressions (like wearing a headscarf or a crucifix on the job) but has also extended to a more generalized freedom of belief (allowing for the public declaration of those beliefs). The atheists that I discuss here are primarily concerned with asserting that their affiliation should be categorized as form of belief and consequently protected in the same fashion.

The cases here are drawn from the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. It is not surprising that these national contexts reflect a certain shared (colonial) history and intellectual trajectory concerning the status and viability of atheism as a philosophical and religious pursuit. Indeed, the atheism that I am tracing here is decidedly a-theist, in the sense that it has philosophical origins in the rejection of Western, Christian theism. It is especially notable that the atheism which is emerging in the public sphere today is in contradistinction to this older philosophical form of a-theism. Some questions that guide my analysis are: Why are some atheists trying to gain protection under the mandate of religious freedom in the contemporary moment? Why are many atheist churches emerging at this time? And what does the label ‘atheist’ signal for those who lay claim to this identity?

I begin with a brief historical overview of atheism as a category of self-identity, arguing that much of the atheism we see in Western news coverage today is of a very particular brand. Next I review several cases of atheism made public within the early

2010s, including one atheist group's attempt to gain protection under the newly-established Canadian Office of Religious Freedom; a case of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal deciding on whether atheists are allowed to distribute a Freethought book in public schools; and the recent rise of atheist congregations across Canada, Britain, and the U.S., modeled directly on the Protestant church format. In each case I ask how atheism is being framed - both by the state, and by the adherents who identify as belonging to its community of non-belief - and why such framing so frequently adopts the language used in the discussion of religious groups. I argue that this brand of atheism is taking this form because the public sphere is predisposed to recognizing forms of religiosity that most closely adhere to Christian Liberalism.

I will show that in fact the use of religious terminology and format amongst different atheist groups is alternately a political move highlighting the Christian Liberalism of the state and a rhetorical choice that situates many atheists within a meaningful community of support. The fact that atheism is a category of non-belief renders its concomitant identification purposes difficult to manage, both for the state and for adherents. Atheism does not have explicit expressions or public practices that can be accommodated in the same way that large mainstream religions do, and so the emphasis on belief re-categorizes atheism as a religion in its own right. By emphasizing *belief* atheists make their claims legible to the state and its mandate to protect religious freedom. What's going on, I contend, is that these atheists see the need to render legible their non-belief to both the state and the public sphere at large, and are drawing on the methods of religious groups in order to do so.

What Atheism?

Literally, atheism is a-theism. That is, it stands in contradistinction to theism, and as Paul Cliteur argues, the theism which it denies is of a very particular sort (2009). He explains that atheism is simply a rejection of monotheism; a denial of its truth-claims and assumptions (Cliteur, 2009). As Hyman elaborates on his helpful book on the history of atheism, both atheism and the theism it rejects are distinctly modern Western conceptions (2010). The term atheism becomes meaningful in 16th century Europe, and by the early 17th century it is used pejoratively to discredit those who appear heretical or politically dangerous to the state (Hyman, 2010: 3–6). At this time atheism was embedded in discourses around sorcery and witchcraft, although very rarely did those accused of holding atheist beliefs actually adopt the label themselves (Hyman, 2010: 6). Diderot (1713-84) is believed to be the first self-confessed atheist, and his attempts to purge the religious undertones in Descartes and Newton while salvaging their scientific principles laid the groundwork for atheism’s more positive appraisal amongst the French Revolutionaries (Hyman, 2010: 6–8).

Atheism continues to be used as a label for discrediting alternative viewpoints, and even John Locke’s *A Letter Concerning Toleration* - which calls for the state to recognize and tolerate all forms of religious diversity - singles out atheists for lack of state support and recognition (1796). “Promises, covenants, and oaths,” Locke explains, “which are the bonds of human society, can have no hold upon an atheist” (Locke, 1796: 56).¹³ Atheism has historically been dangerous to espouse, and even when manifested in

¹³ The inconsistency with which Locke grants the right of tolerance has been noted (Schulman, 2009).

private spaces, rarely gets named as such because of the loaded and pejorative nature of the term.

Nevertheless, atheism continued to grow as a philosophical understanding directly repudiating the theism that emerged during the Enlightenment. As Hyman explains, it is not until God is made anthropomorphic and knowable through the “language of ‘clear and distinct’ ideas” that atheism emerges (2010: 62). In contrast to this modern conception of the Christian God, the premodern idea of an unknowable deity who cannot be grasped by human understanding and can only barely be conceived through the tradition of theological analogy is less vulnerable to atheist attack. As Cliteur explains, atheism is not the unwavering idea “that God does not exist, [but rather an affirmation] [...] that the reasons to believe in his existence are not convincing” (2009: 16). Once God is put into the same conversation as empiricism and rational inquiry, he is either transformed into an anthropomorphic and worldly deity, or else the credibility of knowing such a figure falters (Hyman, 2010: 62–63). Hyman goes on to argue that atheism is rooted in this distinctly theological conversation on the nature of the deity, rather than posing an external challenge to theology per se (2010: 67). Once the deity, and the Christian Bible, are exposed to the criteria of modern epistemology, they become much more literal than they were in the premodern era (Hyman, 2010: 83–85). As a result, “modern theism and modern atheism share far more than their devotees often credit (a common definition of God, a common understanding of truth, a common epistemological procedure)” (Hyman, 2010: 80). Does this mean that atheism is simply a form of religion that rejects certain tenets of theism? If both theism and atheism are part of the same conversation, how different can they be?

Christian atheism notwithstanding (Altizer, 1966), Cliteur argues that atheism is by definition *not* a religion: “It is not the case that by denying a religion you, by some magic trick, invent a religion of your own: the religion of irreligious or a-religious people” (2009: 2). While the philosophical origins of modern atheism are grounded in a modern understanding of the Christian deity, it is not true that all adherents to modern atheism subscribe to the same form of non-belief that specifically targets this form of theism. Nevertheless, the historical importance of making the distinction clear between theism and a-theism is clearly more significant for some (Western, Christian) cultures than it is for others. It is for this reason that the claims of contemporary Western atheists start to become more meaningful, especially those which are modeled on religious conventions. These atheist traditions have philosophical origins in a modern Christian theology, and so it is not entirely unsurprising that their approaches and practices appear similar to some Christian denominations. At the same time, the rearticulation of atheism as alternately a religious category and a religious expression seems especially antithetical to the legacy of Western philosophical atheism.

In the United States, many secular humanist and atheist groups were shored up in the wake of the failure of the secularization thesis and the rise of the Christian right (Cimino and Smith, 2007). During the mid-twentieth century some atheists and secular humanists found a home within Unitarian Universalist congregations. However, Richard Cimino and Christopher Smith suggest that,

a growing trend toward Christian or alternative forms of spirituality and away from non-theism in Unitarian-Universalism has tended to alienate secular humanists from what was once their strongest ally (2007: 415)

Perhaps ironically, the perception that atheism and secular humanism are marginalized

within the religious mainstream has led to the adoption of evangelical tactics:

secular humanists and atheists have assumed a position in American society that stresses maintaining boundaries and reinforcing group identity in the face of a larger external threat. That is, like evangelicals, secular humanists and atheists feel ‘embattled’ by a persistently religious society. (Cimino and Smith, 2007: 410–411)

The structural similarity between secular humanist and atheist organizations and evangelical groups is not accidental. Both are forms of minority identity, whose group cohesiveness has been shored up during times of perceived struggle and oppression.

The most ‘fundamentalist’ version of this atheism comes in the form of the new atheism of Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and other popular critics of religiosity. This version of atheism, which states that *God is Not Great* (Hitchens, 2009) and that religion is simply a *Delusion* (Dawkins, 2008) is criticized even from within the atheist community (Cimino and Smith, 2011). While proponents of ‘fundamentalist’ atheism direct their most virulent attacks towards Christianity, they also tend to reject religion of any kind. As Hitchens puts it, “[r]eligion poisons everything” (2008: 13). Both Dawkins and Hitchens – who have written the most popular and virulent atheist texts – adamantly contend that atheism is *not* a religion. Claims that atheism is a creed,¹⁴ then, seem completely antithetical to the arguments made by the likes of Hitchens and Dawkins.

As Cimino and Smith explain, secular humanists and atheists “have internalized both their minority status and the failure of progressive secularism in the United States” (2007: 411), a failure which only became clear in the context of the evangelical revival of

¹⁴ While the term “creed” may refer to any system of belief, religious or not, in American and Ontarian legal understanding the term specifically refers to *religious* systems of belief (Creed, n.d., Creed, n.d.).

the late 20th century. Cimino and Smith suggest that this shows the extent to which “the opposition has helped to define the [secular humanist] movement” (2007: 417). The rise of the religious right – and personal interactions with evangelical Christians – has spurred many formerly uncommitted secularists to join atheist and secular humanist groups (Cimino and Smith, 2007: 418). As a result, secular humanists and atheists have adopted three strategies in response to these perceived failures and the persistence of religious vitality in the United States. According to Cimino and Smith, they have shored up a niche for their secular community, appropriated the rhetorical devices and approaches of evangelicals, and drawn on minority discourses and identity politics in an attempt to gain equal rights and protections (2007). What this amounts to, ultimately, is the rise of a kind of ‘religious’ atheism, centered on defining a positive identity for atheist adherents and providing some of the elements of community and support that older Unitarian Universalist churches offered.

Freedom of Religion and Freedom from Religion

In both Canada and the U.S., there is ongoing debate about whether religious freedom should constitute both freedom *of* religion, as well as freedom *from* religion. Does freedom to express one’s religious belief also correspond to a freedom to not be exposed to the religion of others? The First Amendment of the United States Constitution guarantees that no religion will be established or favored by the state, but also that no religious expression will be prohibited. The first part of the Amendment - known as the

Establishment Clause¹⁵ - has been emphasized by Freethought organizations like the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), which works to report and contest violations of church-state separation.

In Canada, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees the fundamental freedoms “of conscience and religion [...] of thought, belief, opinion and expression, [...] of peaceful assembly; and [...] of association” (1982). Atheists in Canada have argued that this way of framing religious freedom excludes nonbelievers from state protections. When Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird introduced the formation of the Office of Religious Freedom in 2012, he recapitulated Canada’s commitment to promoting religious diversity both at home and abroad, in large part because “[h]istory has shown us that religious freedom and democratic freedom are inseparable” (*Canada Reiterates Commitment to Religious Freedom*, 2012). However, he also maintained that, “[w]e don’t see agnosticism or atheism as being in need of defense in the same way persecuted religious minorities are. We speak of the right to worship and practice in peace, not the right to stay away from places of worship.” Baird reproduced the traditional anti-atheist conviction that religious freedom entails freedom *to* religion, not freedom *from* it.

Some atheists argued there was a logical discrepancy in their exclusion from the mandate of the Office. One group that took notice was the Center for Inquiry (CFI), an American nonprofit organization with various international branches dedicated to “foster[ing] a secular society based on science, reason, freedom of inquiry, and humanist values” (About | Center for Inquiry, 2013). After meeting in April of 2013, The Canadian

¹⁵ There are three principles of non-establishment decreed by the Supreme Court that have come to be known as the “lemon test” (Freedom of Religion and the Establishment Clause, 2010).

Center for Inquiry petitioned the Office of Religious Freedom to pay heed to the ongoing violence against atheist bloggers in Bangladesh. In a letter to Andrew Bennet, the Ambassador of the Office, the CFI wrote that,

In March, Islamists continued to threaten prominent bloggers and have called for the ‘execution of 84 atheist bloggers for insulting religion.’ [...] We would like the Office of Religious Freedom, in keeping with its commitment to Human Rights, to act swiftly and send a formal protest to the Bangladeshi government referencing the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Articles 18 and 19, which guarantee every individual the right to freedom of belief, religion, and expression. Bangladesh is a signatory to this convention, as is Canada. (Veronica, 2013)

The Office, for its part, has not produced any press releases on the issue, nor on atheism generally. It continues to receive criticism from atheists in Canada, with the CFI leading the charge. The CFI Ottawa webpage details a list of international human rights abuses against atheists and provides a stock letter that can be addressed to the Office in order to bolster support for their petition (Bromine, 2013).

The Office of Religious Freedom is to some degree a Christian-centered organization (Bennett is a former dean of a private Christian college in Ottawa and a current subdeacon and cantor for the Catholic Church). However, it is notable that the most public and vocal critiques of the Office have come not from religious minorities, but from atheists and other nonbelievers (4 questions about Canada’s new Office of Religious Freedom, 2013). Seeing a gap in the protections offered by the Office - and perhaps galvanized by Baird’s explicit denial of protection to atheists - the Center for Inquiry has used this as a jumping-off point to argue for the equal protection of believers and nonbelievers alike. In offering these protests, CFI members have used the model of religious minorities in order to gain legibility for atheism as an identity category in need

of protection, especially when that minority identity makes atheists vulnerable abroad. It is interesting that rather than use the language of human rights violations or secular security guarantees, the CFI reproduces the value of *religious* protection by arguing that its mandate ought to be larger and more all-encompassing - rather than illogical in the first place, or replaceable with a secular human rights agreement.

In the United States, the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) consistently intervenes in public debates in an attempt to mark out and undermine violations of the separation of church and state. Founded in the late 1970s and headquartered in Madison, Wisconsin, the FFRF is more militantly secularist than the CFI, publishes the only American Freethought magazine, and with over 19,000 members is the largest organization in the U.S. for nonbelievers (Freedom From Religion Foundation, n.d.; Wing, 2013). It is dedicated to reporting and contesting violations of the separation of church and state. (The organization's webpage even has a convenient hyperlink for visitors to report violations.) It has mounted several successful court cases over prayer in public schools, public displays of religiosity like nativity scenes, and tax exemptions for religious groups (Freedom From Religion Foundation, n.d.; Wing, 2013). The FFRF has been more successful than its Canadian counterparts by asserting atheism as a *negative* identity (rather than a religious category) and articulating the entrenched religious bias of many American institutions. It does not present atheism as a belief system that deserves state protections under the mandate of religious freedom; rather, it focuses on shoring up challenges to the state's privileging of religious institutions by way of special treatment like tax exemptions.

The FFRF does not argue that atheism is a creed deserving of religious

protections, but works to dismantle the process by which various American institutions are inflected with religious traditions and exceptions. Indeed, it would seem contradictory to its mandate to assert atheism as a religious category. Members mobilize around the separation of church and state - a separation that notably does not exist in the Canadian context. Nevertheless, the organization's tactics, which approximate lobby groups and special-interest organizations, have made decided inroads in the American context.

For example, the FFRF voiced loud discontent in response to the 2014 Supreme Court Decision around Hobby Lobby which upheld the corporation's right to freedom of religion. Hobby Lobby argued that the Affordable Care Act's federal mandate for employers to provide contraceptive healthcare was a violation of the corporation's religious beliefs, and the Court agreed. The ruling was not based on the First Amendment, but rather on the 1993 Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA). The RFRA declares that a person may be exempt from federal law if adhering to it would "substantially burden a person's exercise of religion" (Religious Freedom Restoration Act, 1993). The FFRF submitted an amicus brief during the case, urging the Court to declare the RFRA unconstitutional (Freedom From Religion Foundation, 2014). By granting Hobby Lobby religious liberty in this case, the Court also declared that corporations are persons deserving of the same RFRA protections as individuals (Alito, 2014). In response, the FFRF took out a full page ad in the *New York Times* and issued a statement following the Hobby Lobby case denouncing both the ruling for its imposition of religious beliefs on female employees as well as the RFRA for being in violation of the First Amendment guarantee of freedom *from* religion (Gaylor et al., n.d.). As this case shows, the FFRF tends to gain public recognition in the context of particular court cases

and does not mount an ongoing challenge in the American courts attempting to redefine atheism as a creed. The FFRF attempts to ‘secularize’ the state as much as possible by removing the influence of religious bodies on particular government institutions.

In contrast, in Canada – where there is no church-state separation – major atheist organizations focus on ensuring the liberal right to express non-belief without fear of persecution. When protection is explicitly denied to atheists, these groups mobilize in the service of regaining the protections guaranteed to others. This is a way for atheists to intervene in public conversations around religious freedom even as they are unable to contest the religious bias of the state.

The difficulty in arguing for and gaining freedom from religion in both the U.S. and Canada puts atheists in a particularly challenging position. If you hold a religious belief that discriminates against any other faith-based identity, that is not grounds for protection by the state. In the context of freedom of religion, atheists are increasingly articulating their system of belief in positive rather than negative terms, which allows for broader consideration and protection from the state. To a certain extent the liberal foundations of religious freedom in the U.S. and Canada preclude freedom from religion and thereby facilitate easier recognition for positive forms of belief. While the FFRF upholds atheism as a negative category and seems philosophically aligned with the likes of Dawkins and Hitchens, the CFI is increasingly re-categorizing atheism in religious terms. In this sense it marks a significant shift in the definition of atheism.

Atheism as a Religious Category

In the Niagara region of Southern Ontario, former Catholic chaplain René Choinard brought an atheist case to the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal. Choinard, who identifies as a secular humanist, became alarmed when he became aware that the Gideon Bible was still circulated within the District School Board of Niagara. In response, he petitioned the school board to allow him to distribute the atheist text *Just Pretend: A Freethought Book for Children*. After they denied his request, Choinard brought his case to the Human Rights Tribunal, arguing that the denial constituted a discrimination based on “creed” (Hopper, 2013). The terminology is significant here, because while creed can refer to any system of belief – including nonreligious beliefs – the Ontario Human Rights Commission adopts a definition of creed that interprets the term as “ ‘religious creed’ or ‘religion,’ ” and while “belief in a God or gods, or a single supreme being or deity is not a requisite.[...] The existence of religious beliefs and practices are both necessary and sufficient to the meaning of creed, if the beliefs and practices are sincerely held and/or observed.” (Creed, n.d.). Notably, the OHRC goes on to state that “[c]reed does *not* include secular, moral or ethical beliefs or political convictions” (Creed, n.d.). And so, Choinard’s claim seemed to be inconsistent with the definition of creed employed by the OHRC.

However, after reviewing the policy on the distribution of religious texts in schools, the Tribunal declared that it was indeed discriminatory against atheists on religious grounds: “ ‘Protection against discrimination because of religion, in my view, must include protection of the applicants’ belief that there is no deity,’ wrote David A. Wright, associate chair of the commission, in an August 13 decision” (Hopper, 2013). The decision further reads that, “ ‘The [old] policy was discriminatory because its

definition of acceptable materials violated substantive equality by excluding the kinds of materials central to many creeds”” (Hopper, 2013).

The decision was a victory for Choinard, although in a letter to the school council he pointed out that he was not actually attempting to proselytize on behalf of atheism, but rather highlighting the hypocrisy of distributing religious texts of *any* kind within a public school system:

‘We believe that if non-theistic materials were distributed in an Ontario Public School...people would insist that the Public School system is not the place for people with a religious agenda; and that is exactly our point!’ (Choinard qtd in Hopper, 2013)

However, by declaring atheism a creed deserving of the same protections as other faiths, the Tribunal expanded the definition of religion within Ontario. It seems that Choinard’s atheist agenda - to eliminate the distribution of Gideon Bibles in public schools - backfired once atheism was recognized as a religious creed. Nevertheless the case also brought to light the Christian Liberalism within the school system, and in this sense was a victory for the atheist community.

What this decision suggests is that the state is consistently more able to manage claims based on the freedom *to* religion, and would be forced to confront its own religious biases in order to promote the freedom *from* religion. Indeed, Baird’s claims make it clear that the state has no interest in promoting freedom from religion. The positive conception of atheism-as-creed is more legible as an identity category than the negative understanding of atheism-as-not-religion, not least because it is unclear what

freedom from religion would actually constitute.¹⁶ Presumably it would involve increasing emphasis on the separation of church and state, but as we have seen, this argument only functions in a national context in which the separation has been mandated (the U.S., but not Canada). Likely it would mean violating the rights of some religious groups to express their religious beliefs - such as the Gideons offering bibles to students who have gained parental permissions. As a result, the charge of some atheist groups for freedom from religion seems less viable within a state that already promotes religious expressions of various kinds. Indeed, this helps to explain why and how the U.K. was able to grant religious asylum to the Afghani atheist described at the beginning of this chapter.

Atheism as a Religious Expression

While Choinard may not have believed that atheism is really a religious creed (and was instead trying to point out the religious bias of the state), it is true that many contemporary atheists confirm that their non-belief ought to be treated like a religion. The steady emergence of atheist churches in the past few years confirms this fact. Modeled on Christian worship ceremonies and offering community and celebration without godtalk, these churches are earnestly defining their brand of positive atheism in religious terms.

The largest and most rapidly growing of these groups is the Sunday Assembly

¹⁶ In the U.S., evangelical Christians have used the argument that secular humanism is a religion in order to attempt to remove its influence from the public school system (Cimino and Smith, 2007: 417). They base this claim on a 1961 Supreme Court decision (*Torcaso v. Watkins*, 1961), in which Justice Black wrote in a dictum that secular humanism is in fact a religion – a comment which had no bearing on the case and which is not legally defensible. While for a long time secular humanists rejected this claim because it was being used to marginalize reason and science as systems of personal belief rather than fact (Cimino and Smith, 2007: 417), today atheists are reclaiming the label of ‘religion’ in order to gain new categories of rights and protections.

(SA), an atheist community spearheaded by two British comedians and with official branches in Australia, America, and the U.K. The Sunday Assembly is impressive in its size and its reach. In January 2013 the Assembly had its first meeting in London, and following a tour of the United States have built offshoot congregations in New York, Portland, Brighton, Bristol, Oxford, Melbourne and Canberra. This list is not exhaustive as SA branches pop up frequently. At least 30 chapters of the Assembly are recorded by an NPR broadcast in January of 2014 (del Barco, 2014).

Highly organized, the SA has a public charter and a list of 10 principles, both of which are prerequisites for establishing new branches. The public charter states,

The Sunday Assembly is a godless congregation that celebrates life. Our motto: live better, help often, wonder more. Our mission: to help everyone find and fulfill their full potential. Our vision: a godless congregation in every town, city and village that wants one. (Public Charter for the Sunday Assembly, 2014)

The 10 principles include the fact that the SA celebrates no doctrine or deity, but expressly does not exclude members who do. The Assembly presents itself as radically inclusive, community-minded, and encourages self-improvement and volunteerism amongst its adherents. In this sense it is consistent with other voluntary associations, which are not necessarily modeled after religious worship. The Assembly offers a three-step process for accrediting new branches, which along with adhering to the charter, must use the Road Map for new Assemblies and adopt the Accreditation Model (“ensuring we can step in if an Assembly starts sacrificing children or somesuch”) (Public Charter for the Sunday Assembly, 2014). The humorous tone of the SA website does not detract from the serious and methodical process of accreditation.

There has already been a schism within the Assembly, with its New York City

branch bifurcating over the issue of the use of the word atheism (Atheist Church Split: Sunday Assembly And Godless Revival's 'Denominational Chasm', 2014). Sunday Assembly co-founder Sanderson Jones urged chapter head Lee Moore to move the New York meetings from a bar to a more family-friendly (and more church-like) environment, and to focus less on atheism and more on community-building (Hallowell, 2014). In response, Moore and several others left the congregation and started another atheist group, the Godless Revival. Moore explains that a minority of members felt that the Sunday Assembly was becoming overly religious in tone, and that “ ‘What started out as a comedic Atheist church wants to turn itself into some sort of centralized humanist religion’ ” (Moore qtd in Atheist Church Split: Sunday Assembly And Godless Revival's 'Denominational Chasm', 2014).

In January 2014 I attended a Sunday Assembly meeting in San Diego, California. The meeting marked the second gathering of the San Diego chapter, which was first established in late 2013. Around 150 people were in attendance, and the event was highly organized. Like a Christian congregation, the meeting included live music, nametags for all attendees, coffee, tea and cookies, and calls for donations. Children were sent away at the beginning of the service and called back to the group at the end. The 'sermon' was delivered by local atheist activist (and writer for the Richard Dawkins Foundation) Dan Arel, who lectured on the moral underpinnings of Immanuel Kant's concept of universal laws. He stressed the importance of being “good without god,” and the good fortune of atheists in central San Diego who are free to be 'out' without fear of repercussions. He encouraged those in attendance to publicize their atheism widely, in the hopes of redefining atheism as a moral and ethical standpoint. Publicity was a theme throughout,

and the meeting had a 'media-free zone' for congregants not wishing to appear on camera (the assumption being that everyone else could be documented for publicity purposes).

A community member offered the 'quote of the day,' which came from Martin Luther King, Jr., in anticipation of his upcoming birthday, on the virtues of mercy. Another community member offered her 'best moment' story, a recounting of her travels to China where she was forced to rely on - and surprised by - the kindness of strangers in a foreign land. A moment of silence offered time for congregants to reflect on the present moment, and announcements near the end of the meeting reinforced the need for donations for future meetings to take place. (The meeting's program included a detailed breakdown of costs for present and future gatherings.) An icebreaker game encouraged congregants to meet one another in the hopes of strengthening community ties.

I spoke with several members of various San Diego atheist organizations at the meeting in order to gauge their impressions of the Assembly. The SA has overlap with many other atheist groups, according to one active atheist leader. However, many pointed out that the style of the SA gatherings is notably different from other groups, like the San Diego New Atheists and Agnostics (SDNA) and other groups affiliated under the umbrella group of the United Coalition of Reason, or SDCoR (of which the Sunday Assembly is a part). Several attendees indicated that the SA meetings were more "lively," interesting, and engaging than their other secular counterparts. One Jewish atheist remarked to me that the SA meeting had an explicitly Christian tone, which made her uncomfortable. Many attendees reported that they would come to an Assembly meeting again.

Alongside one table collecting (new) underwear for the homeless and another

featuring literature from the various atheist organizations in the city, there was a booth selling Sunday Assembly merchandise in order to raise money for the group. The next meeting (in late February) was to be held in a different location, and as of this time there is no permanent venue for the San Diego Sunday Assembly congregation.

Unlike the New York congregation, the San Diego chapter used the word atheism freely and frequently throughout the service. Having Arel speak suggests that the San Diego group has closer ties to other atheist groups like the Dawkins Foundation, and is less reticent to invoke these ties. Indeed, the interconnectedness of various San Diego atheist organizations (united under the umbrella of SDCoR), combined with the relatively small population of this urban center in relation to Manhattan, means that it currently makes sense for the San Diego SA chapter to be a kind of unifying congregation across various atheist, secular humanist, and agnostic lines. It is not yet clear whether the SA will alienate some atheists who attend other non-belief-based groups within the city, although my informal conversations with those in attendance suggests that to some extent it will. Along these lines, whether there exists a large enough population of self-described atheists in the city to support multiple congregations remains to be seen.

The Sunday Assembly is perhaps the largest and farthest-reaching transnational atheist church. While there is no consistent information about the SA's membership, each local congregation is attended by anywhere from dozens to hundreds of people, and the SA aims to have "100 Assemblies in 15 countries by Sept 2014" (The Sunday Assembly, n.d.). As of May 2014, the SA website lists 38 official chapters, in Europe, North and South America, Australia, Hong Kong and Singapore (The Sunday Assembly, n.d.).

Other smaller and more local atheist congregations have also emerged over the

past several years throughout Canada and the United States. In Calgary, a secular church was founded in 2013. The congregation explicitly identifies as a “church,” and founder Korey Peters explains the reasons for this on the group’s website. First, the

Calgary Secular Church (CSC) was formed with the deliberate intention of taking all the good parts of the Christian church (the community, fellowship, ethical teaching) and getting rid of the bad parts (the injustice, superstition, and dogma) (Peters, 2013c)

Second, they strategically adopt the label of church in order to expand the meaning of the term and thus “weaken[...] Christian privilege” (Peters, 2013c). Finally, the term “brings us publicity [...] controversy has been very useful for getting the message out” (Peters, 2013c). Use of the term “church,” then, is strategic, but also earnestly reflective of the goals and practices of the organization. As Peters explains,

We meet on a Sunday morning and have a New (and much improved) 10 Commandments. We talk about how we can work in the world to reduce misery and increase happiness. We stand together at the beginning and say our liturgy together. We have a class for children that teaches them to be global citizens.

If that’s not a church, what is? (2013c)

The CSC not only proselytizes, it also promotes community organization and an ethics of citizenship modeled on Christian congregations. The CSC’s 10 Commandments emphasize compassion, respect, philosophical questioning and argument, and justice (Peters, 2013b). Their Constitution likewise articulates the group’s goals of minimizing suffering, maximizing happiness, and promoting community and environmental sustainability (Peters, 2013a). While the group does not yet have a church edifice (they meet in a theatre company), its Facebook profile lists 190 members as of February 2014 (Calgary Secular Church Facebook Page, 2014).

The group has received quite a bit of press coverage, which is especially significant given the small number of congregants.¹⁷ Attempting to explain the recent surge of atheist churches, Salon.com contributor (and self-described atheist activist) Adam Lee writes that,

the needs these congregations aim to fulfill aren't religious, but human. I grant that the term 'atheist church' sounds clunky and self-contradictory, because these areas of human interaction have historically been claimed by religion and our language doesn't have good non-religious words for them. But whether atheist or theist, all human beings benefit from belonging to a welcoming, supportive community. (2013)

While it is true that the mandates of atheist churches all expound the virtues of a supportive community outside traditional religious structures, it is also the case that many forms of community are possible without the church label. In addition to this, I find Peters' description of the term "church" revealing - as simultaneously an appropriation of religious rhetoric, an accurate description of group activities, and an active attempt to publicize the organization. Publicity seems to be one of the guiding forces of both the CSC and the SA, so the strategic use of the word "church" is not accidental. It is a mechanism for proselytizing. It is also notable that Peters is an ex-Christian, who began the CSC in part to create a church-like environment for children to be raised in, but without dogma and "superstition" (Meet Calgary's First Atheist Church, 2013).

Atheist churches, then, seem to satisfy the community and ethical yearnings of some atheists, and appear to be particularly popular amongst formerly religious congregants. This gains special relevance in the American context, where many atheists

¹⁷ To put the CSC in perspective, Calgary has a population of just over 1 million, and the 2001 census reports over 25,000 Muslims, 16,000 Buddhists, 7,000 Hindus, and nearly 220,000 residents who report having "no religion" (*2001 Community Profiles - Calgary, Alberta*, 2007).

and secular humanists attended Unitarian Universalist church services before they became overly religious in tone (Cimino and Smith, 2007: 415). Following the atheist exodus from the Unitarian Universalist Church, it makes sense that some atheists would seek to reclaim the community and support that church attendance once offered. These atheist churches borrow much from their Christian counterparts, from the form of stipulating beliefs (whether 10 Commandments or 10 Principles) to the Sunday gatherings and the moral undertones advocating community activism, social justice, and equality. However, the specificity of the practices and rituals undertaken in these congregations underscores less a universal human need (as Lee proposes) than a desire to recapture many elements of these adherents' former denominational life and community. In fact, these congregations mirror Christian denominations so closely that many non-believers may be uncomfortable with the religious atmosphere of the gatherings (Atheist Church Split: Sunday Assembly And Godless Revival's 'Denominational Chasm', 2014). Rather than responding to a universal human need, these congregations fulfill a decidedly religious gap in the lives of many contemporary atheists, especially those with previous religious affiliations. They represent a form of atheism that is adopting the form of Protestant worship ceremonies, along with their language for describing adherents (congregants) and meetings (church).

Atheist churches offer a very different form of atheism than that espoused by virulent anti-religionists. To put this into context, in his 2009 bestseller *God is Not Great* Christopher Hitchens defiantly argues that atheism is neither a religious category, nor a religious form of expression:

here is the point, about myself and my co-thinkers. Our belief is not a

belief. Our principles are not a faith. [...] There is no need for us to gather every day, or every seven days, or on any high and auspicious day, to proclaim our rectitude or to grovel and wallow in our unworthiness. We atheists do not require any priests, or any hierarchy above them, to police our doctrine. Sacrifices and ceremonies are abhorrent to us, as are relics and the worship of any images or objects (even including objects in the form of one of man's most useful innovations: the bound book). (Hitchens, 2009: 5–6)

While Hitchens frequently indulges in hyperbole in his work, and probably would have had no problem with atheists gathering on weekly occasions and forming communities of support, it is unlikely that he would have been in favor of atheists drawing on Protestant forms of worship or using religious terminology to describe these gatherings. Atheist churches present a definite break with Hitchens's form of atheism, and rearticulate non-belief as a positive identity rather than a negation of religious forms.

Conclusion: the New Atheism

In 2011 Richard Cimino and Christopher Smith published the results of their textual analysis of two major secular publications, *Free Inquiry* and *American Atheist*, alongside online survey data gathered from self-identified atheists. Cimino and Smith attempt to make sense of what they call the 'new atheism' emerging during the period of 2006-2008. This new atheism, unified by the 'canon' of Dawkins, Hitchens, and other popular public atheist writers, emerges in the American context and becomes a self-conscious identity to which many secular humanists and atheists alike lay claim. In Cimino and Smith's estimation, the new atheism signals the increasingly available information about atheism online, and marks its emergence in the public sphere (2011). American atheists are much more comfortable 'coming out' today than in any other

historical context, in part due to the publicity that writers like Dawkins and Hitchens have gained. At the same time as the new atheism allows atheists to participate in the public sphere more openly and honestly, it also responds to ongoing feelings of scrutiny, oppression, and marginalization.

Cimino and Smith assess, based on their textual readings of these atheist publications and their survey data, that atheists have recently developed a more vital and lively counterpublic (2011). Disputes over the anti-religion doctrines of Dawkins and Hitchens are criticized by some atheists and applauded by others. As we have seen here, the attempts by the CFI and various atheist churches to redefine atheism in religious terms are at odds with this brand of atheism. As a result, contemporary atheism has no central core or overarching dogma. Cimino and Smith suggest that,

The common link among secularists is a minimal ‘no’ to theism and an affirmative ‘yes’ to reason and science, which may be a severe limitation to building strong-tie communities, a unified political front, or a movement fitted with actors all struggling for the same goals. (2011: 36)

However they also argue that these features characterize the atheist counterpublic as an active public sphere.

This seems consistent with the variety of atheist and secular humanist experiences described here. While atheist churches offer one particular brand of atheism modeled on a Protestant form of worship, other secularists are using courts of law in order to claim atheism as a protected religious category. Many more atheists and secular humanists are not accounted for in these movements. Indeed, the work of organizations like the FFRF still stands in contrast to forms of atheism which approximate and appropriate religious forms and language; rather than adopting these, the FFRF – like older atheist groups in

the United States – continues to contest the presence of religion in the functioning of the state. Other atheists have found that this approach is limiting, and are seeking to claim the privileges granted to religious groups for their own. Indeed, this approach might be more successful in the wake of the Hobby Lobby decision which expanded the scope of religious freedom considerably by granting it to a corporation. These newer atheist groups perhaps recognize that the state is more readily able to accommodate religious expressions than it is to make secular accommodations that run the risk of violating religious freedom.

Further, while court cases construct atheism-as-creed for political purposes, atheist churches do so for cultural and social reasons. Atheist churches offer community and support without godtalk and are directly intervening in the public sphere via targeted efforts at gaining publicity. Attempts to redefine atheism as a creed for legal purposes are at once an attempt to make clear the Christian bias of the state, but are also indicative of the ways that identity politics – and positive identity categories – are more easily accommodated in contemporary Western states than negative ones. In both cases the emergence of these newer forms of atheism makes clear the latent Christianity embedded in the cultural and political institutions of the U.S. and Canada. It also demonstrates the role of the state in rendering legible certain forms of non-belief over others. Defining atheism as a religious category is to some extent a result of preexisting categories of protected identity, while espousing atheism as a religious expression offers a positive alternative to the ‘new’ atheism of Dawkins, Hitchens, and others. What is clear is that the ongoing intervention of atheists within the public sphere is not only reshaping the category of ‘religion’ on a broad scale, but also refashioning atheism from within. As a

result, the ‘new’ atheism refers not just to the popular writings of Dawkins, Hitchens, and others, but also to the increasingly variable forms of atheism described here. Whether atheism ought to be considered a religious category or a religious expression is to some extent beside the point; that it *already is* is crucial for understanding the contemporary inroads atheists are making in the public sphere. Further, in engaging in the public sphere, these atheists are making the edifice of Christian Liberalism more visible. Atheism may be legible as a church or creed, but only when modeled closely on a version of church or creed very familiar to the state.

This chapter is a modified version of an article previously published in *Culture and Religion*, “Atheism in Religious Clothing?: Accounting for Atheist Interventions in the Public Sphere” (2015). I am the sole author on this paper.

Conclusion

In response to virulent Islamophobic statements circulating during the 2016 presidential election campaign – and during a time when Syrian refugees were seeking refuge in the United States and other Western nations – the Mormon Church issued the following statement: “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is neutral in regard to party politics and election campaigns. However, it is not neutral in relation to religious freedom” (Church Points to Joseph Smith’s Statements on Religious Freedom, Pluralism, 2015). As Jack Jenkins points out in an editorial on *ThinkProgress*, the legacy of various attempts to identify Mormons as racially non-white (2016) is that today Mormons are among the contingent of religious believers strongly supportive of other minority faiths, including Islam. This perhaps unlikely alliance between Muslim refugees and American Mormons makes more sense in the context of the case studies that I have elaborated in this dissertation. In the face of a public sphere strongly colored by the cultural investments of Christian Liberalism, religious minorities are equally invested in unhinging the process by which these constraints have precluded certain forms of democratic participation.

It is useful at this point to return to the Public Religion Research Institute’s 2014 American Values Survey that I discussed in the introduction. If nearly half of the American populace (46%) is concerned with their religious liberties being infringed upon, and an equal number (46%) is concerned with the imposition of others’ religious beliefs, it is interesting now to look at who constitutes each of these extremes. White evangelical Protestants and Hispanic Protestants are most concerned with their religious freedoms being infringed upon. In contrast, it is the religiously unaffiliated, along with

Jewish Americans, who report the greatest concern over the entrenchment of a particular religion within the state. Put another way, members of the majority religion in the U.S. (evangelical Protestantism) report greater concern that they cannot express their religion to the extent that they might like. They perceive their faith as under attack, probably by secular humanist agendas in the public sphere. In contrast, those without religious affiliation, and members of a minority religion (Judaism), perceive their way of life as more threatened by the intrusion of a (majority) religion in the public sphere. I would argue that the religion they perceive as “trying to pass laws that force their beliefs on others” (Jones et al., 2014: 5) is in fact the Protestantism embedded in Christian Liberalism. When this Protestantism is displaced as the unmarked norm, or highlighted as a religion like any other that can be accommodated but not privileged by the state, it makes sense that members of this religion would perceive their faith as under attack.¹⁸

The case studies have revealed highly specific findings. In the first case study, I argued that popular culture representations of Mormons and Mormonism expanded the public sphere and increased the relative acceptability of LDS political candidates. This case can provide a guide for religious minorities seeking to intervene in the public sphere; popular culture may be an especially open arena. It is also the case that citizens within a liberal democratic state may be more inclined to participate in discussions around topics that are popular, as opposed to those that are officially political. Future work on this may investigate the role of popular culture in expanding the acceptability around other

¹⁸ The Pew Research Center reports the following religious constitution of the United States: 25.4% Evangelical Protestant; 14.7% Mainline Protestant; 6.5% Historically Black Protestant; 20.8% Catholic; 1.6% Mormon; 0.5% Orthodox Christian; 0.8% Jehovah’s Witness; 0.4% Other Christian; 1.9% Jewish; 0.9% Muslim; 0.7% Buddhist; 0.7% Hindu; 0.3% Other World Religions; 3.1% Atheist; 4.0% Agnostic; 15.8% Nothing in Particular (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2015). The census does not ask about religious affiliation.

religious minorities. For example, there is an animated Pakistani children's show called *Burka Avenger* (Rashid, 2013) which depicts a mild-mannered female teacher adorning a *burqa* at night in order to fight against mercenaries and corrupt politicians who try to shut down girls' schools. The characterization of the *burqa* as a superhero costume affording anonymity, protection, and ninja-like fighting skills stands in direct contrast to Western media depictions which portray it as inherently oppressive. Now in its fourth season, the show has aired in a number of different languages in Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan. Can shows like these succeed in a Western media context? Will popular culture be a fruitful arena for expanding the parameters of acceptability around being Muslim in the West? These questions can guide future work.

In the second case, I showed that attempts to secularize the Québécois public sphere will not go unchallenged by religious minorities appealing to a rights-based notion of reasonable accommodation. This case also highlights that attempts at secularization are not necessarily uniform; the special exceptions made for Catholic expressions in Québec help to verify the fact of Christian Liberalism in the province. Further work on this case can continue to trace the ebb and flow of rights for religious minorities. It remains to be seen whether the province itself will abandon attempts at rigorously (but partially) secularizing its public sphere. The ongoing tensions between provincial politics and federal legislation will also provide a rich source of study, especially given the recent victory of Justin Trudeau's Liberal Party in the 2015 national election. Trudeau has articulated a more open attitude towards the accommodation of religious minorities than his Conservative predecessor Stephen Harper, and in one of his first acts as Prime Minister he appointed several Sikhs to his cabinet. How might Québec respond to this

shift in accommodation practices? Will rights continue to expand, or will they retract in response to federal policy changes?

Finally, in the third case I demonstrated that atheists are finding it advantageous to redefine their atheism as either a church or creed in line with a Christian understanding of religion. Atheist churches use the term in part because it is comfortable for attendees who defected from Protestant congregations. The notion of atheist church has also generated controversy, especially in news media, which contributes publicity and thus acts as a form of proselytizing. The redefinition of atheism as a creed can be seen as a political strategy aimed at exposing the Christian Liberalism of the state, as in the case of René Chouinard's attempt to distribute Freethought books in an Ontario school. Or, it can be seen as a genuine attempt to gain protections for a category of identity that the state is ill-equipped to recognize, such as when religious asylum was granted to an Afghan atheist in the U.K. Throughout the chapter I argued that conforming to a version of church or creed that is most closely fitted to Protestantism will be successful for recognition, at least in many Western liberal contexts. Will atheist churches continue to grow? Will more states recognize atheism as a category deserving of religious protections? Or will atheist organizations like the FFRF be more successful at identifying the role that Christian Liberalism plays in the state? These questions can guide follow-up on this case.

The promise of liberalism is neutrality, which is contradicted by the fact that the liberal democratic state is best equipped to recognize and accommodate Christian forms of religiosity. Religious actors will continue to intervene in the public sphere, especially when they feel they are being unduly excluded from this space. Christian Liberalism can

be a useful concept for understanding future interventions made by religious minorities in different national contexts. It is also possible to expand the concept across national borders; to what extent is liberalism by default Christian? Are different versions of Christian Liberalism more or less susceptible to contestations by religious minorities?

While this dissertation has not been an explicitly comparative project, a few observations can be made from case studies situated in the United States and Canada. As I have demonstrated, the official separation of church from state in the United States has not prohibited the development of a fully fleshed out (yet nonspecific) Protestant civil religion, which continues to shape the parameters of the public sphere. In fact, in many ways it has encouraged a strong form of civil religion to develop. Christian Liberalism in the U.S. is decidedly Protestant, although it can extend to permissible Catholic statements to the extent that they conform to this version of the public sphere. This helps to explain why John F. Kennedy, when he talked about his Catholicism in quasi-Protestant terms (as a matter of individual, private faith), was better received than Mitt Romney (whose attempt to distance himself from his Mormonism only ended up causing confusion).

Admittedly I have not revealed anything about the Canadian public sphere as a whole. This is because there is no singular public sphere in Canada, but rather, as Kim suggests, two: one for Québec, and one for 'everyone else' (1993). This is as much a linguistic divide as it is a religious one. Nevertheless, I have shown that in the case of Québec a fairly strong Catholic secularism shapes the public sphere. Christian Liberalism is very Catholic, and very secular, without these two seemingly opposing ideals ever coming into conflict. We need look no further than the National Assembly, and the large crucifix that is declared a matter of tradition rather than religiosity in the province's

attempt to ban public expressions of faith. The fact that there is no official separation of church from state in Canada has not resulted in a uniform civil religion in that nation, but it has perhaps enabled a closer proximity between state-sanctioned morality (and civic norms) and social life than in the American case. Québec is a good example of this, although further work would need to be done on English-speaking Canada in order to verify this claim. Most likely the distinct cultural and linguistic traditions of the French-speaking province have created a unique environment for Christian Liberalism. To what extent a Protestant version of this liberal culture exists in English-speaking Canada remains to be seen.

It is possible that some readers will interpret the case studies I have laid out as indications that Habermas was correct from the outset: these religious actors have simply learned how to ‘translate’ various religious discourses into neutral rights claims within the liberal democratic state. And while the aspiration for rights is indeed located within the paradigm of liberal rationality, there is something about popular depictions of the Mormon origin story, a Muslim woman wearing a headscarf, or an atheist group self-branding as a ‘church’ that is untranslatable in these terms. These are moments of religious discourses coming into the public sphere, when internal frames of reference (or in Habermasian terms, ‘lifeworlds’) assert themselves on the public stage. This public invocation of very religious expressions – via rhetoric or clothing – is itself challenging the notion that the public sphere ought to be a place where universal consensus and understanding may be achieved.

It is also possible to read these interventions as achievements of consensus over a longer duration of time; perhaps by the time this dissertation is in a published form, the

notion of a Mormon president will be so obvious as to become a given. However, what I think is more likely, based on the form that these case studies have taken thus far, is that antagonistic dissensus will continue as further democratic iterations unfold. Indeed, the ongoing legislative attempts in Canada to regulate wearing the headscarf in public demonstrates that the rearticulation of religious accommodation in terms of rights has not fully succeeded. Discourses are always open to contestation and negotiation, and while the process of the democratic iteration marches on, it does so not without serious struggle.

The purpose of this dissertation has not been to offer substantive study of particular religious movements (although that is certainly a side-effect of the research put forth). Its purpose, rather, has been to explore the potential of using a new frame of reference when understanding the contemporary role of religion in the liberal democratic state. If there is a religious subject at the heart of this dissertation, it is Christian Liberalism. The work of the religious minorities that I have elucidated is useful in laying bare this discourse as a matter of fact. Future work on this topic could consider other kinds of interventions in the public sphere, including confrontations that result in violence or the threat of violence. Religious terrorism in particular offers one counterpoint to the nonviolent forms of disruption described here. For example, the January 2016 standoff between federal authorities and the self-described Mormon militia led by Ammon Bundy at the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon could offer a useful case study into contestations that are violently, rather than nonviolently, confrontational. This is a case where the group's religious motivations need to be considered alongside its political goals in order to fully understand the occupation.

Questions guiding this kind of analysis include: How did press coverage of the occupation represent the theological motivations of Bundy's group? How does the introduction of violence or the threat of violence change the character of the public sphere, and to what extent do these interventions highlight the Christian Liberalism of the state? Are these kinds of interventions more or less successful at expanding the scope of citizens' rights? These kinds of questions can guide further work on religion in the liberal democratic state.

I have attempted to shy away from normative claims. I do not mean to present a political project invested in a particular outcome – say, the introduction of religious language into the public sphere. Rather, I have aimed to show how religion is *always already* embedded in the public sphere, whether through the unmarked legacy of Christian Liberal discourse, or through the interventions that the case studies describe. The only 'ought' that I will put forward is one directed towards theorists of contemporary religion: we ought to better understand the negotiations that religious minorities are undergoing within the parameters of an already existing framework for distributing legible expressions. We ought to take seriously the notion that religious actors are invested in the discourses internal to their systems of faith, and we ought to account for the ways that these religious discourses make themselves known in public spaces. Future work might consider the moments when religious groups opt in to participate in public sphere conversations – or those moments when religious minorities are forced into public view in part due to competing rights-based claims. Finally, we ought to expand our notion of the public sphere while retaining its democratic potential. We ought to underscore the importance of both the explicitly political and the more nuanced cultural

arenas of public sphere talk. We ought to foreground the role of popular culture *alongside* official political channels of discussion, like the legislature. And we ought to do so using a nuanced critical apparatus that does not dismiss the ways that religious minorities are always already deeply invested in contemporary public life.

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