Sacred Space Conflicts: Inclusivist Failures and Exclusivist Saviors

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Abstract:

The following centers on an investigation of *sacred space conflicts*. In particular, I examine the inclusivist *thick religion* approach posited by Ron Hassner. I discuss why I believe his approach fails to resolve these conflicts. Subsequently, I argue that an exclusivist political approach to religious claims in the public sphere, informed by the Rawlsian *idea of public reason*, is a better strategy to pursue. I briefly posit an analytic framework with which to develop a better understanding of *sacred spaces*. Such a framework, I hold, allows us to better identify the properties of *sacred spaces* that lead to conflict. As such, we will have established some of the justificatory conditions necessary to hold that certain *sacred space* properties / religious beliefs ought to be excluded from public political deliberations. Specifically, I mean the various negotiations (deliberations) entered into by states and other actors (both at the domestic and international levels) aimed at the amelioration of *sacred space conflicts.*

Sacred Space Conflicts: Inclusivist Failures and Exclusivist Saviors

An area of study that emerges from the dynamic relationship between political thought and religion concerns *sacred spaces* and the distinct conflicts they inspire. I am interested with the nature of these conflicts as they bear out internationally. Religion and politics, historically, are such powerful behavioral motivators that *sacred space conflicts* have been responsible for significant amounts of destruction and death. Therefore, in my effort to better understand *sacred space conflicts* I primarily review the work of Ron Hassner (2003; 2009).

Hassner offers up a provocative account of how we ought to both conceptualize numinous locations (the phenomenological definition) and how we might better address *sacred space conflicts* (the *thick religion* approach). Ultimately, I claim both components of Hassner's position fail because they are too inclusive towards problematic religious claims. Specifically, Hassner aims for greater appreciation for how people experience *sacred spaces* and the greater inclusion (literally) of formal religious institutional leaders in resolving conflict. For Hassner, this inclusive sensitivity offers increased respect for religious citizens and makes peaceful *sacred space conflict* resolution more tenable.

I argue, on the other hand, that we should instead take an exclusivist position in relation to religious claims in matters surrounding *sacred spaces*. When dealing with the nature of *sacred spaces*, and how people experience them, I recognize that certain individuals and organizations are intimately invested in these phenomena. Yet, using this observation to assert that a *sacred space* is *indivisible* (which leads to *intractability* and then conflict) strikes me as problematic. If these spaces exist in any physical sense then they are in fact divisible. And, it is my suspicion that it is state, and the relevant institutions, power dynamics that explain why certain disputes over *sacred spaces* culminate in conflict while others do not. So, it is this political arena that

should be the focus for better remedying *sacred space conflicts*, and not Hassner's inclusivist *thick religion* approach.

So, what do inclusivist and exclusivist approaches to religion in the public political sphere of deliberation mean? The inclusivist position simply holds that religion must be apart of public politics as much as possible for the sake of justice. Religious beliefs are often central to agents' core identities. As such, they desire to have these beliefs reflected in politic outcomes. Exclusivists, then, hold the contrary position for the sake of justice (Chambers 2010). There are certain features about religion that are problematic in consensus building. These problems lie, in part, in the vast pluralism and often-adversarial nature of religious beliefs. So, to have a fully legitimate public sphere we are to exclude these types of claims. Depending on the *sacred space / conflict* under consideration, the public sphere can be understood as operating at the international level.

My aim then is to begin to present the case that we should be more exclusive politically to the religious components that make up *sacred space conflicts* and the negotiations meant to resolve them. Though my exclusivist position may seem peculiar, given that I am investigating *sacred spaces*, I contend it offers a more satisfying theoretical account if our aim is to produce resolutions to conflict that are both just and effective in the real world. Hassner's, all be it brief, inclusivist prescription (Hassner 2009: 174 – 179) seems to me likely to exacerbate the turmoil surrounding *sacred space conflict*.

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We can appeal to two questions in helping us attain some explanatory leverage in better understanding *sacred spaces*, the conflicts they inspire, and potential political ameliorations to these conflicts. First, how ought we understand what constitutes a *sacred space*? Second, what,

then, are the strategies we ought to employ politically in an effort to remedy or at least ameliorate these conflicts? These questions seem to be needed in this investigation, as Hassner somewhat sidesteps them. He says, "I have dodged altogether the responsibility of grappling with the definition of 'religion'" (Hassner 2009: 5). As I. S. Lustick (2011) points out, this lack of definition is problematic, particularly if we want a consistent lens with which to understand what constitutes a *sacred space*.

I undertake the first question since the special features of these unique locations, those that hold causal bearing on the conflicts *sacred spaces* historically produced, have not been fully appreciated in the current pertinent literature. Clearly, there is something distinct about these locales that have made them more prone to violence. A variety of scholarly approaches have put forth definitions that enable them to attain explanatory leverage for their given areas of study. Religious historians might describe sacred sites as areas where heaven meets Earth, in a literal sense. Social scientists like James Fearon (1995) postulate accounts that lend themselves to the quantification of particular salient variables for understanding conflict. Ron Hassner (2003; 2009) appears to be concerned with qualitative components of these conflicts in determining case selection. As will be further addressed, one of these variables is that *sacred spaces* cannot be legitimately divided amongst the parties involved (*indivisibility*).

My purpose, however, is to investigate alternative understandings of *scared spaces* likely to alleviate, in a just manner, the consequent of intractable disagreement and conflict for uncontested control of these locations. By just, I mean some solution that treats all parties involved equal and makes use of substantive justificatory reasons. I think an (international level) appeal to something like John Rawls's *idea of public reason* (Rawls 1997, 2005) will aid in developing an account that is just and exclusivist in outlook. Rawls says, "[Public reason] is a

view about the kind of reasons on which citizens are to rest their political cases in making their political justifications to one another when they support laws and policies that invoke coercive powers of the government concerning fundamental political questions" (Rawls, PRR, 476). *Public reason*, then, should be a central aspect to *sacred space conflict* negotiations. This seems to be the case, as coercive actions will inevitably be involved in resolutions, since religious beliefs (especially regarding these sites) are passionately held by large numbers of people.

Returning to discuss question one, my purpose is to open the door for meaningful deliberation regarding my second question. Rawlsian *public reason* should be advantageous in this regard. As I see it, how we conceptualize *sacred spaces* significantly impacts the viable strategies available for consideration for question two (conflict resolution). If we conceive (or perhaps describe) holy locations as arenas where supernatural features are treated as matters of fact, this will entail serious implications for a polity at large. That is to say, how we define (or socially regard / politically treat) these places will dictate whether actions undertaken effecting *sacred spaces* are legitimate.

Perhaps it is the case that only recognized religious leaders hold the authority to resolve issues surrounding these sites. These people would seem to be best positioned inherently, or the only legitimate actors able, to address *sacred space conflict*. Such an understanding would subsequently inform us to best ensure this set of affairs; we must cordon off the public political sphere from having any input in these matters. The logic might be that the general public does not have the special access to divine revelations that religious leaders do. Or maybe it is simply that religion is a privileged part of life, outside the jurisdiction of public politics all together.

I find such reasoning to be highly problematic. For one, we know that the violence often associated with *sacred space conflict* spills over into the public square. It impacts the lives of

citizens regardless of their religious affiliations. This harm, I think, provides sufficient impetus for the public political sphere to be intimately involved with an issue that, on its face, seems solely the province of institutionalized religion. A polity bears the brunt of *sacred space conflicts* and the consequences they yield. The public, therefore, ought to have input in remedying these occurrences.

Civilian causalities are not, unfortunately, the full extent of the negative consequences that result from these unique conflicts. In relation to traditional politics, *sacred space conflicts* also bleed into both domestic and foreign affairs of states. The Israel – Palestine conflict is one such example where this influence is readily apparent. Noted author (and atheist) Christopher Hitchens posited, "The parties of God have a veto on it [a two state solution] and everybody knows it is true" (Munk Debates 2010: 00:12:30 – 00:12:45). Despite the fact that all the relevant parties involved with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict share a general consensus for enacting a two state solution, this outcome has failed to come to fruition. Some intervening variable has stepped in to foil progress towards the overwhelmingly desired two-state outcome. And, as Hitchens (Munk Debates 2010) astutely observed, it is institutionalized religions and their articles of faith that hold this veto.

Ron Hassner (2003) observes this veto in action when examining Israeli – Palestinian peace negotiations. He notes that the Palestinian delegation, during the 2000 Camp David Accords, became incensed when the U.S. mediators referred to the Al-Aqsa Mosque site as the Temple Mount. Specifically, Hassner recounts Yasser Arafat ending discussions because Madeleine Albright referred to the Al-Aqsa site by its Judeo-Christian name (Hassner 2003: 29). From the Palestinian delegation's perspective, this terminological slip up represented the United States' bias in favor of Israel. It seems to have been the case that the general lack of sensitivity

towards religious matters, on the behalf of the U.S. delegation, served as an Achilles heel for the entire peace negotiations (Hassner 2003: 28).

A related difficultly surrounding the Middle East peace processes has also been the issue of scope with regards to defining *sacred spaces*. This is because the spatial area these sites occupy is also directly determined by the articles of faith the religious parties involved with the territorial dispute hold. If the conflict (or relevant ideology) is strong enough, a *sacred space* may encapsulate a global (potentially even interstellar) amount of territory. Though one *sacred space conflict* (Temple Mount / Dome of the Rock) may dominate the rhetoric of the Palestine – Israel hostilities, this is not the whole story.

Consider that for Jews living in "illegal" West Bank settlements, and for U.S. Christian supporters, the entire territory is a part of the Holy Land (Gallagher 2015). U.S. Christian Reverend John Hagee, head of Christian Friends of Israeli Communities charity, argues that Israel exists because of a covenant made between God and Abraham and that covenant still stands (Rutenberg, McIntire & Bronner 2010). The *sacred space* here is roughly the entire country of Israel. Having a limit to the size or scope of a holy location should strike us as a desirable attribute for public politics to demand on the part of the religious fueling conflict. I refer to this demand as the demand for reasonable scope.

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How, then, are sacred spaces conceptualized? Specifically, for the purposes here, a definition is required that allows for greater insight into the political mechanism that contribute causally to conflict. Several features of what constitutes a *sacred space* are, more or less, readily apparent to the casual observer. A *sacred space* has endowed upon it special attribute(s) that make it distinct from other comparable non-sacred locations. More often than not, such attributes

are not demonstrable in any physical sense. Not surprisingly, *sacred spaces* are very much tied to their associated doctrines and institutions of faith. These "special features" of *sacred spaces* make them particularly vulnerable to violent dispute. As demonstrated by the previously discussed example, the public also seems to have an implicit demand (definitional restriction / exclusion) on *sacred spaces* to constitute a specific (or reasonable sized) spatial location. *Sacred spaces* as large as countries, or even larger, should strike us as inherently problematic.

One attribute of conflict that has been pointed to, as a cause for *intractability*, has been that of *indivisibility*. "Issue indivisibility refers to situations where two rational actors cannot agree that the issue over which they are bargaining over is divisible" (Toft 2006: 36). James Fearon (1995: 382) argues the cause of *indivisibility* rests in domestic politics rather than something inherent in the issues themselves. Ron Hassner (2003; 2009) instead claims *sacred spaces* are distinct when it comes to issues involving *indivisibility*. Contra Fearon (1995), Hassner argues there are two problems with traditional treatments of *indivisibility* with regard to *sacred spaces*.

First, there may indeed be some components inherent to *sacred spaces* that make negotiations involving them intractable. This point is meant to demonstrate that since these conflicts center on physical matter then they are in a literal sense divisible. So, divisions of the sites leading to peace are at least conceptually possible. Hassner moves to show us that something else is going on which is responsible for irresolvable conflict.[1] Second, the observation of 'domestic politics' or the social construction of reality leading to this *intractability* goes too far (Hassner 2003: 10). If this were the case, the implication would be

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[1] "Because de facto indivisibility depends on more than just religious ideas, there are exceptions to the rule, where third parties have been able to force division of sacred space. These forced arrangements of shared control over sacred space, however, tend to be unsatisfactory to either party, highly unstable, routinely violent and short lived. These divisions by fiat repress the conflict, creating tensions that seethe under the surface, threatening to erupt as soon as one party perceives changes in the balance of power." (Hassner 2003: 24)

that *intractability* should be an easier thing to resolve. But since *indivisibility,* and the *intractability* it leads to, is observed in reality to be difficult to socially deconstruct, Hassner is dissatisfied with this type of constructivist explanation.

Additionally, Hassner notes, that if it were the case that agents could easily create and dissolve indivisible issues then we could not know which issues would lead to conflict beforehand (ex ante). We would have to wait for parties to interact before we would know whether a *sacred space conflict* would even arise (Hassner 2003: 10) So, simply dividing holy sites amongst the relevant parties, or the social reconceptualization of these locations, fails to resolve (prevent) conflicts.

Hassner (2003) argues that we require an understanding (definition) of *sacred spaces* that captures, to a greater extent, the nuances of sacred grounds that contribute to intractable conflict. "Some beliefs constitute the identity of agents and create the structural constraints within which they act" (Hassner 2003: 11). Hassner holds that analyses of *sacred spaces* need to take account of both the *centrality* and *exclusivity* of these locations. What is meant by *centrality* is the relative importance the site performs in regards to the faith's doctrine. *Exclusivity* refers to the degree to which the access to and behavior with the site are circumscribed, monitored and sanctioned (Hassner 2003: 7).

An approach with such sensitivity will also have the benefit of allowing observers to make predictions about which type of sites are likely to lead to conflict beforehand. Recall that this was one of the shortcomings Hassner found with contemporary approaches in understanding *indivisibility*. The more central or exclusive a people hold a site to be, the greater the chances for intractable conflict leading to violence.[2] This has the added theoretical utility of conforming to

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[2] "The more central the site to the identity of the religious community, the more likely the community is to take action in response to challenges to the integrity of the site. The more exclusive the site, the greater the risk that

the real world. In many cases we know, ex ante, if an issue has the potential of resulting in conflict. Consider for example construction projects that take place on ancient burial grounds of some group.

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Hassner (2003; 2009) holds it is an approach that rests on a phenomenological definition of *sacred spaces* that garners the greatest theoretical leverage in understanding the sources of intractable conflict. Roughly, what is meant by phenomenological constitutes how agents feel about, or experience, a sacred space to be like. According to Hassner, the phenomenological definition better captures centrality, exclusivity, and overcomes the ex ante shortcoming of contemporary approaches to *indivisibility*. This move also enables Hassner to overcome the other shortcoming of the failure to recognize *indivisibility* as a quality inherent in the disputed objects themselves. Though it may be an instance of philosophical slight of hand, Hassner holds that *indivisibility* is an inherent quality in how actors perceive a *sacred space* (Hassner 2003: 12). He goes on to claim that, "Indivisibility is problematic only when it coincides with multiple claims to ownership: it is the need of more than one party to possess, or hold sovereignty over, an indivisible good that creates an indivisibility dispute." (Hassner 2009: 42)

The phenomenological definition, then, consists of three parts: *integrity*, *boundary*, and *nonfungibility*. *Integrity* refers to issues that cannot be subdivided without diminishing its value. *Boundary* refers to instances where parties are referring to the same thing (place). Finally, when an issue cannot be substituted for or exchanged for something of equal value it is considered to be *nonfungible*. These three components are necessary to the definition of a *sacred space* and all rely on an agent's subjective perceptions of the location (Hassner 2003:12-13). "This is a

foreign presence or conduct will be interpreted as an offensive act." (Hassner 2003: 8)

phenomenological definition, because it focuses not on the objective characteristics of a good or issue but on its qualities as perceived subjectively by parties to a dispute. What matters is not whether the good can, in fact, be divided physically, but whether the parties perceive it as the kind of good that can be divided" (Hassner 2003:13).

This new phenomenological conceptualization of *sacred spaces* opens the door for greater religious inclusion in conflict resolution. Hassner holds this will ameliorate the negative consequences brought by purely political treatments to the issue. Believers are afforded greater diffidence because we ought to recognize it is their perceptions (and associated feelings) of these sites that are at the heart of intractable *sacred space conflict*. Furthermore, Hassner claims that once the importance of the religious adherents is recognized, a greater flexibility can be introduced into conflict resolution.

Specifically, he argues formal institutional religious leaders can perform a role in shaping perceptions of *sacred spaces*. These religious leaders can literally offer flexibility where traditional treatments regarding *indivisibility* led to intractable conflict (Hassner 2003: 31-32). "When political actors are impervious to the power of religious actors, this indivisibility problem can be overcome unilaterally by means of coercion. Forced divisions of sacred spaces, however, tend to be unstable, unsatisfactory to all parties involved and highly sensitive to change in the status quo" (Hassner 2003: 33). The move away from unstable unilateral action and greater inclusion of religious matters in *sacred space conflict* resolution Hassner labels as approaches of *thick religion* (Hassner 2009: 176 – 179).[3]

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[3] "A *thick religion* approach to the study of religion and international politics requires and understanding of religious detail but also a willingness to generalize from particular religious movements, regions, or instances to arrive at broader conclusions." (Hassner 2009:178)

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I argue the *thick religious* approach to *sacred space conflicts* advocated for by Hassner (2003; 2009) is problematic. For one, Hassner's move towards greater emphasis on the inclusion of the religious misses much of the related politics surround these issues. Daniel Philpott (2007) speaks to this fact when he discusses the ideas of *differentiation* and *political theology*. *Differentiation* is, roughly, the degree to which church and state are separate in a particular nation.[4] This is an ostensible institutional fact about a particular country in the world. The United States would an example of a high *differentiation* (separation between church and state) while the converse would be true of a country like Iran (integration of mosque and state).

Political theology refers to the political ideas held by religious communities regarding who holds legitimate political authority within a country.[5] The extent to which they find political arrangements legitimate, or not, will have serious implications for the political outputs of their respective nations. Examples where religion tends to support the political authority of the state includes the US and India. Places where the state and religion conflict include countries formerly under communist regimes.[6]

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[4] "[D]ifferentiation is the degree of mutual autonomy between religious bodies and state institutions in their foundational legal authority, that is, the extent of each entity's authority over the other's basic prerogatives to hold office, choose its officials, set its distinctive policies, carry out its activities, in short, to govern itself." (Philpott 2007: 506 -507)

[5] "*Political theology* is the set of ideas that a religious body holds about legitimate political authority" Philpott 2007: 507). This determines the extent to which religious leaders and organizations will, "support, oppose, modify, or thwart the activities of state" (Philpott 2007: 507).

[6] Places like the former USSR, from its outset, moved to eliminate formal institutionalized religion from its territory. Leninist and Stalinist Communism, with its roots in Marxism, theoretically required the elimination of religion to facilitate the overthrown of the existing state and foster a communist revolution. However, for all practical purposes, the Church represented a rival political authority to their regimes. It is not surprising then that as religious communities were hunted down they would not find the Bolsheviks to be a legitimate political authority. Interestingly, as formal religion became outlawed, Stalin used many traditional religious mechanisms to cement his

Differentiation and *political ideology* undoubtedly impact *sacred space conflict*. If the parties involved in these types of conflict have differing expectations regarding separation of church and state, then the religious insensitivity Hassner (2003) observes as a failing in negotiations like the 2000 Camp David Accords may be unavoidable. That is to say, there may indeed be institutional features of a state, like *differentiation*, that make *sacred space conflict* condemned to be intractable. This is a particularly salient point if the *sacred space conflict* occurs between multiple international actors.

Likewise, the extent to which the religious view a political authority as legitimate (*political theology*) is not restricted to its own borders. If I am a political actor with a Jewish faith-based worldview then my ideological commitments may place me in a position where I cannot even recognize the authority of those I am negotiating with or the legitimacy of their territorial claims. As a Muslim, how could I make concessions to Israel over the Temple Mount if I sincerely believe there was never a Jewish structure at that location in the first place? From a political perspective, it is not clear to me how greater inclusion of religion, Hassner's *thick religion approach*, can solve these problems. It strikes me as more likely, rather than fostering increased flexibility into sacred space conflicts, enhancing the role of religious leaders will only exacerbate sectarian violence.

In addition to Hassner's lack of appreciation for the political challenges facing the *thick religion approach,* I hold there are also serious philosophical challenges that he must overcome as well. The phenomenological definition of sacred spaces, Hassner utilized to justify his approach, lacks an argument regarding its political validity. In particular, the phenomenological

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authority over the Soviet peoples. This phenomenon can still be observed today in places like North Korea, where the Kim family dynasty is revered as divine.

view being used to justify the greater role for religious actors in *sacred space conflict* resolution requires greater support.

I do not deny that actors may hold a particular phenomenological understanding of the sites they deem to be sacred. Where I am uncertain is to what extent this type of definition is useful, or even legitimate, in political discourse aimed at conflict resolution. As already mentioned, it could be the case that greater religious leader involvement could make *intractability*, leading to violence, even worse. Furthermore, it is not clear where religious leaders draw the authority to help shape political outcomes that will impact the lives of all citizens, and not merely the adherents to their faith, in the first place.[7]

One-way to characterize my objection to Hassner's approach is that he has merely treated the symptoms of a particular social illness (*sacred space conflicts*). He provides a reasonable and scholarly sophisticated account of *sacred spaces* that have led to conflict over time. And his suggestion that we have greater sensitivity to religious beliefs and greater inclusion for religious leaders does seem helpful. Yet, it remains uncertain whether the *thick religion approach* would yield positive results. In addition, it remains dubious whether we should recognize the phenomenological definition of *sacred spaces* as legitimate in the first place.

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[7] I do not think Hassner provides sufficient grounds as to why theologians could not be appealed to, to provide the religious sensitivity and expertise necessary to foster flexibility into intractable sacred space conflicts. I think the implicit assumption Hassner relies on is that religious actors hold some special authority if they are formal members of a particular institutionalized religion. A question I think that naturally arises here is who decides who are legitimate institutional religious authorities. The Church of Latter Day Saints might meet the institutional requirement for instance. But do members of this organization need to be involved in the Middle East peace process so as to offer greater flexibility?

The inclusion of theologians, instead of recognized religious authorities, in conflict resolution also relates to Philpott's (2007) religious analysis. In a secular country, like the United States, when there is a sacred space conflict, the greater objectivity offered by scholars (theologians, historians, etc.) could be seen as valuable. The conflicting parties could rest assured that whatever the political outcome reached it would not be biased in favor of their opposition. In states that are more religiously integrated, or where the religious do not support the current political authority in power, then perhaps appeal to religious leaders would be useful in resolving sacred space conflicts. However, countries were this would be true are generally places not regarded as just political regimes in the first place (Iran, Afghanistan, etc.).

If the 2000 Camp David Accords broke down over religious insensitivity, greater religious inclusion should correct this. Yet, it remains uncertain whether the *thick religion approach* would yield positive results at all. In addition, it remains dubious whether we should recognize the phenomenological definition of *sacred spaces* as legitimate to begin with. Literal interpretations of scripture make it unlikely that the demand for reasonable scope can be met at all for instance. Even though this demand should be prima facie desirable for all reasonable agents. We might view Galileo's dispute with the Latin Church as a *sacred space conflict*. For the Church, the scope of the sacred ground encapsulated everything, or in modern terms the universe.

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I contend that we must instead address the root cause of the illness; the manner with which different sets of peoples conceptualize these sanctified places. I reject (exclude) the value of religious phenomenological experiences Hassner views as imperative to his understanding of *sacred spaces*. Clearly, there have been large-scale worldviews that have been rejected despite the undoubtedly very real experiences these groups were having regarding a particular special location. So, this is what I mean by an exclusivist approach as saving us from (at least some) of the problematic features of religious belief involved with *sacred space conflicts*. The most evident problematic feature, I think, is justificatory political claims arising from supernatural commitments (like *indivisibility*).

We might think a peaceful Nazi sympathizer garnered some satisfaction in observing the implementation of Nazi territorial objectives. Perhaps this individual viewed the reclamation of the Sudetenland as a spiritual imperative for the Fatherland. Yet, given that we know how

horrendous the Nazi ideology ended up being it does not seem to be the case we ought to have given special preference to phenomenological experience felt by the peaceful individual.

Something other than a strict appeal a particular ideological view in *sacred space* cases, offered up by religious leaders, is required to avoid the intractability inherent in *sacred space conflicts*. The types of reasons utilized in political negotiations / deliberations matters. I argue that successful alternative conceptions of *sacred spaces* will (and indeed must) be commensurate with the tenets of liberal democracy if we aim to produce just outcomes.

In order to uncover what the problematic properties of *sacred spaces* are, a fuller picture of how these sites are ostensibly (socially) defined must first be pinned down. To this extent, my project is not entirely dissimilar from the scholars previously enumerated. Yet, unlike other relevant scholarship, the goal here is not entirely empirical. The task I set for myself is to uncover a normatively satisfying conception of *sacred spaces* that all interested parties can reasonably abide. This has the added utility of permitting input from secular citizens as well (greater social inclusion). Examining real world cases of *sacred spaces* and *sacred space conflicts* (the empirical data) will be of value to this research. Yet, in much of this scholarship, there is an unfounded impulse to move from empirical descriptions of *sacred space conflict* to prescriptive policy meant to minimize their outbreak. My project, therefore, strives to bridge this descriptive – prescriptive justificatory gap.

My first step is to establish a real world definition, with minimal social malleability, of sacred sites. In other words, I move to elucidate a prima facie definition of *sacred spaces* that reasonably encapsulates a general social understanding of these locales. Such a definition serves as a baseline with which to then measure the worth of alternative (less problematic) social conceptions of *sacred spaces*. If it seems likely that an alternative understanding of *sacred*

spaces would lead to the same, or greater amounts of harm, then we ought not adopt it. If, however, we can come to an understanding all parties could not reasonably reject, and it would lessen the amount of harm, then it is worthy of concerted political pursuit.

My hope, therefore, is to set up a philosophically rigorous analytical framework with which to evaluate the normative worth of particular social conceptions of numinous locations. Even without an in depth empirical investigation into *sacred spaces*, the general form of how a reasonable social understanding of these sites might work is attainable. A just conception of a *sacred space* should match the following formula. We ought to understand a *sacred space* as **Y** (a set of properties P_1 - P_n). **Y** is ideal because it best avoids the causes for conflict over *sacred spaces* found in the properties of traditional (those currently in practice) *sacred space* definitions $X_1 - X_n$. This is the type of essential justificatory logic I claim is missing in Hassner's project concerning *sacred space conflicts*. Additionally, it does not rely on an implicit assumption that the phenomenological definition of *sacred spaces* intrinsically deserves special consideration politically.

We must first establish a generally applicable, de facto definition of *sacred spaces*, so we can move to consider an interpretation that is socio-politically ideal. Such a move permits the elucidation of the harmful components of currently held *sacred space* definitions. From these ostensible failings we can then construct an interpretation more ideally suited to in be harmony with the totality of liberal democratic values. I hold these values are essential for insuring that all interested parties are properly respected and protected from harm. Only then can meaningful prescriptions for the alleviation of *sacred space conflict* be reasonably offered.

I also suspect less emphasis on the supernatural claims made by the religious, regarding these sites, will be afforded politically if my account is held true. This is because it is these types

of claims that cannot be substantiated through empirical appeal often that bring about conflict. As such, we have further support that we ought to be highly exclusivist towards epistemologically dubious justificatory claims in the public sphere. Whether the public sphere, as considered in this work, is taken to be at national or international levels, strikes me as irrelevant. We must instead concern ourselves with facts on the ground, like people dying. Not on how people feel about a site, where these feelings are predicated on beliefs religious agents cannot prove.

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In essence, I am putting forward the case that the religious citizens / institutions as the ultimate arbiters of what constitutes a *sacred space* is folly, contra Hassner (2003; 2009). These specialized actors do not offer greater sensitivity or flexibility into *sacred space conflicts*. Since these conflicts affect all, the public sphere ought to have input in how these sites are conceptualized and subsequently treated politically (publically). Furthermore, I claim that many of the properties religions imbue to numinous locations are what indeed cause conflict (their supernatural claims).

I claim then, in an exclusivist treatment of religion, ideal conceptions of *sacred spaces* and resultant conflict minimizing policies should move to mitigate the authority religions hold in these matters. This is an argument I recognize will require further development. But as I hope is apparent, it is a clear stance against the argument offered by Hassner (2003; 2009). There is also added analytical utility in moving away from the pragmatic problems of Hassner's inclusivist *thick religion* approach. Given my exclusivist position, the door opens up for better analysis of both the power and institutional dynamics involved with *sacred space conflicts*.

Consider the contradictory behavior of the United States with regards to the Middle East peace process. I hold that this set of affairs also illuminates the nexus between domestic and foreign affairs that sacred space conflicts create. On the one hand, the official position of the United States government has been the establishment of a Palestinian state along with the existing state of Israel (US State Department 2014).[8] Yet, from 2000 to 2010, 40-some American non-profit groups have collected 200 million plus dollars in tax-deductible gifts for Jewish settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

This is highly problematic for the peace process because these settlements are considered to be illegal under international law (Rutenberg, McIntire & Bronner 2010). The Palestinian people, not surprisingly, see these Israeli settlements and monetary support for them as hostile acts. So, on the other hand, the US Treasury Department has in effect subsidized a foreign policy position that undermines progress towards a two-state solution.

This last example elucidates two important points. First, domestic charities can and do impact foreign policy. Second, *sacred spaces* appear to have the capacity to encapsulate more than just a solitary location of limited scope. I claim it is this special status, and problematic justifications for it, which has allowed domestic religious beliefs to have adverse international effects. Not only this, but it is more than just citizens beliefs that cause conflict to occur. Here, it is the power or influence they wield, in this instance money.

Returning to the issue of scope, if the conflict (or relevant ideology) is strong enough, a *sacred space* may encapsulate a global (potentially even interstellar) amount of territory. Though one *sacred space conflict* (Temple Mount / Dome of the Rock) may dominate the

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[8] "The United States is committed to realizing the vision of a two state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: an independent, viable and contiguous Palestinian state as the homeland of the Palestinian people, alongside the Jewish State of Israel." *U.S. Department of State* (http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3581.htm)

rhetoric of the Palestine – Israel hostilities, this is not the whole story. For Jews living in "illegal" West Bank settlements, and their US Christian supporters, the entire territory is a part of the Holy Land (Gallagher 2015). The *sacred* space here is the roughly the entire country of Israel. Having a limit to the size or scope of a holy location, as previously discussed, is a desirable attribute for public politics to demand on the part of the religious fueling conflict. Or we could say we must exclude by necessity from public dialogue religious claims, like large territorial conceptions, because citizens do not accept them as a practical matter from the start. So, the problem here would better be described as disputes over sovereignty of actual territory, not an unwillingness to share special conduits to some spiritual realm.

By following the tenets described in Rawls's *idea of public reason*, actors involved with *sacred space conflicts* should be able to respect each other while also sidestepping the confounding aspects of strict religious interpretations of these sites. Rawls says:

"Political liberalism is a liberalism of freedom – in freedom both of liberal and decent peoples and of liberal peoples' free and equal citizens; and it looks to ensure these citizens adequate all-purpose means (primary goods) so that they can make intelligent use of their freedoms. Their spiritual well being, though, in not guaranteed. Political liberalism does not dismiss spiritual questions as unimportant, but to the contrary, because of their importance, it leaves them for each citizen to decide for himself or herself. This not to say that religion is somehow 'privatized'; instead, it is NOT 'politicized' (that is, perverted and diminished for ideological ends)." (Rawls, LP, 127)

I agree with Rawls here on two counts. First, since religion and *sacred spaces* are so difficult to pin down, individuals should determine these meanings for themselves. Second, what has made *sacred space conflicts* so hard to remedy is that they are indeed already highly politicized. Hassner's *thick religion* inclusivist approach preaches politicizing religion even further than it already is, in attempting to solve these conflicts. Specifically, by including more formal religious leaders in the deliberations meant for peace. This seems to be me doomed to fail in the long run, at least if we are concerned with protecting the rights of the individual.

In addition, included in the *idea of public reason* is a requirement for translation. Specifically, when actors are involved in political deliberations with one another, Rawls holds they will sometimes have to translate their political reasons, from their distinct worldviews, for their neighbors. The purpose is to produce public reasons (for some political act) all reasonable citizens could be expected to endorse. Appealing to such Rawlsian logic in an international context, then, will help us achieve two important goals for just conflict resolution.

First, secular or differently religious citizens may now meaningfully contribute to the political deliberations to ameliorate conflict. This is because just public deliberations will have to exclude (via translation) purely religious reasons from the public sphere, as not everyone will be able to accept them. This is an important advantage to my exclusivist view, since anyone can be a victim of the violence associated with sacred space conflicts.

Second, the *idea of public reason* better situates the religious interests involved in a *sacred space conflict*. What I mean here is, the relevant parties must be willing to respect each other as equal interests and be willing to engage in some degree of reciprocity with one another. Rawls says, "The *criterion of reciprocity* requires that when those terms are proposed as the most reasonable terms of fair cooperation, those proposing them must also think it at least reasonable for others to accept them, as free and equal citizens, and not as dominated or manipulated, or under the pressure of an inferior political or social situation" (Rawls 2005 PRR: 446). What would arise out of these restrictions are political reasons that could be shared by all regardless of religious affiliations. People are neighbors (citizens) first and not some illegitimate rival religo-political faction.

Clearly, there is more room for development on this project. But what I hoped to show is that an inclusivist approach to *sacred space conflicts*, as present by Ron Hassner, is not tenable. I

hold it would in actuality only worsen the conflicts we currently observe. I also attempted to demonstrate that we could, at least minimally, derive an analytic framework to better conceptualize a socio-political understanding of *sacred spaces*. Finally, this better conceptual understanding of *sacred spaces* is meant to be commensurate with an exclusivist approach to the public sphere, informed by the Rawlsian *idea of public reason*. This, I hold, should not only yield more practical solutions but also political results that are more just for all parties involved with a particular *sacred space conflict*.

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