

Article

How Religion Shapes Foreign Policy? An Explanatory Model for Non-Western States

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Abstract: Focusing on the role of religion and culture in foreign policy not only addresses the increasing interest in the study of religion as an important element among international relations scholars, but also emphasizes the need for theorizing. While the literature on the role of religion in IR is expanding, it still lacks an overall approach to explain the main role of religion in foreign policy. This study contributes to that literature by focusing on how religion and culture plays a role in both the non-Western and rising countries. Although, the role of religion/culture in politics has a relatively short history in understanding state behavior, particularly in the study of foreign policy of rising states, this article argues that religious and cultural elements produce type of *Strategic Mentality* through which they influence foreign policy decisions both directly and indirectly much more than we think.

Keywords: religion; international relations; foreign policy; *Strategic Mentality*; non-western IR; Turkey; India; South Africa



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1. Introduction

Understanding the invisible but persistent influence of religious and cultural elements in non-Western states is often an ignored one. Why current rising powers, compared to their influence and power, often do act surprisingly below or above the expectation and not in ways predictable by IR theories? This article tries to explain the reasons. In particular, it aims to develop a new theoretical model for categorization and analysis of non-Western states that offers an alternative perspective on state behavior. It is argued that in the non-Western world, states with different religious/cultural backgrounds should be treated differently. Both as regional and international actors, their unique pattern of behavior is mostly determined by persisting historical religious/cultural elements that produced a specific type of *Strategic Mentality* (SM).

Many analysts agree that the foreign policy choices of the abovementioned countries are likely to be a critical determinant of regional and global stability in the 21st century. Their ready classifications as rising powerhouses such as in groupings such as BRICS, G-20, MIST, N-11 or CIVETS¹ etc. usually lead us to the analysis of their grand strategy vis à vis their material capabilities. *Strategic Mentality* offers a new method of analyzing their distinctive behavior by including them in a different category not characterized solely by material capabilities and dominating rising states discourse.

This article begins with a discussion on the role of religion and politics in societies and locates the religious-cultural elements in a broader socio-political context before proceeding to the definition of SM as an explanatory model. It continues focusing on persisting historical and religious/cultural elements and outlines how the concept of SM fills a gap in the current IR literature. The last part describes Turkey, India, and South Africa's different persisting historical religious/cultural legacy to show how SM stems from an emphasis on religious, cultural, and socio-historical elements; it also explains how SM plays out in the specific context of these countries by outlining the existence and influence of SM in their current foreign policy mentality.

2. Religion, Politics and IR Theory

Eva Bellin in her article on the study of religion and international politics in *World Politics* correctly suggests that “why not (...) move beyond the commonsense observation that *religion matters* in international politics, and explore instead the truly challenging theoretical question: *when* does religion matter and *how*?” (Bellin 2008, pp. 341–42, *emphasis in original*). In the IR literature, this call has not found much resonance except Haynes (1997, 2021); yet, there is a growing body of scholarship focusing on religion and politics, strategic studies, and religion and IR theories (Shakman Hurd 2008; Snyder 2011; Toft et al. 2011; Petito and Hatzopoulos 2003; Hanson 2006; Fox and Sandler 2004; Thomas 2005; Norris and Inglehart 2004; Haynes 2007; Berger 1999; Mellon 2002).

Indeed, religious and cultural elements have long been peripheral to the concerns of most political scientists and IR students. Since the advent of constructivism, the role of ideas and identity (and religion) in the international arena has received considerable attention. Because constructivists take ideas and elements that shape ideas very seriously and in fact, they believe that discourse or how we think and talk about the world largely shapes our knowledge and practice (Tickner 1997, p. 622). In other words, for them the ideas are the driving forces of history. They argue that states behave according to the norms and institutions that they created, in turn, such norms and institutions underpin collective security (Ashley 1987, p. 428; Lebow 1994). While this brought a serious academic interest to the theme of religion and culture in IR, there is also a growing literature on the “clash of civilization” since the early 1990s (Huntington 1996; Ahmed 2002; Davutoglu 1994; Sacks 2002; Neumayer and Plumper 2009). After the 9/11 attacks, the “clash of civilization” debate renewed itself and dominated mostly the discourse on analyzing the role of religion in the contemporary world with a special focus on terrorism, violence, and extremism (Hoffman 1995; Fox 2000; Toft 2007; Russell 2009). However, raising the question of why and how the resurgence of religion challenges the traditional understandings about the international system, foreign policy, secularism, state, and society has further reaching implications and importance than only concerning the revolutionary and destructive potential of religion based on terrorism or conflict, as important as these latter issues might be (Barbata and Kratochwil 2008, p. 3).

Scholarship on religion and International Relations has been as methodologically and epistemologically diverse as the field of international relations. A very large body of literature has explored the role played by culture and religion in international politics by focusing on such questions as the role of religion as a source of violent conflict and war (Wellman 2007; McTernan 2003; Juergensmeyer 2003; Stern 2003), the role of religion and religious institutions in conflict resolution (Appleby 2000; Johnston and Sampson 1994; Johnston 2003) and the role of religion as a source of international norms (Witte and van der Vyver 1996; Johnson 1981). Recently, a new genre of academics has initiated to outline a grand theory concerning the role of religion and culture in IR, but they mainly failed to do so not only in their scope but also falling into the trap of “empirically driven puzzle-solving” (Bellin 2008, p. 338). However, their contributions have been very important in two ways. First, they rightly emphasized that religion is “an overlooked element” in IR thus requires more attention (Fox 2001; Fox and Sandler 2004). Second, they have started a new debate among IR scholars about the role of religion at a theoretical level within the IR and motivated newly interested students that it is worth pursuing a line of investigation in this area both for academic and practical purposes.

Among scholars, there is an overall agreement that “religion as a symbolic system and set of collective representation” enriches our understanding of the impact of ideas on the action (Kratochwil 2005, p. 116); although, it is no easy to measure the share of religious and cultural elements in defining politics by the social science categories of today.² They are tightly intertwined and shaped (and constantly re-shaped) by the historical experiences of the related society and state. However, religion in social life has “an undifferentiated presence making itself *felt* rather than apprehended” and “grasped by the analytical categories characteristic of critical reason”. (Kratochwil 2005, p. 119 *emphasis in original*).

Nevertheless, most of those who discuss the influence of religion on human beings argue that at least in some way, it influences how we think, act, and see the world. For example, as [Stark and Bainbridge \(1985, p. 366\)](#) note, sociologists of religion assume that “people almost universally possess a coherent, overarching, and articulated ‘Weltanschauung’, ‘worldview’, ‘perspective’, ‘frame of reference’, ‘value orientation’, or ‘meaning system’ that is often based on religion”. [Spiro \(1966, p. 94\)](#) argues, “every religious system consists [...] of a cognitive system”. [Williams \(1994, pp. 790–91\)](#) in his discussion of fundamentalist social movements describes their belief systems as “frames” that are the “schemata of interpretation” that people use to “give meaning to events, organize experiences, and provide guides for actions”. [Geertz \(1973\)](#) argues that not only do religions include a belief system; most people find religion necessary to interpret the world around them, especially when bad things happen.

Even some of those social scientists who inspired the trend of replacing religion with rationalism acknowledge that religion influences beliefs. [Durkheim \(1964, p. 47\)](#) defines religion as “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them”. Weber also strongly connected religion with beliefs ([Hickey 1984, p. 62](#); [Kalberg 1990, p. 61](#); [Scheepers and Silk 1998, p. 679](#)). Finally, Marx’s famous description of religion as the “opiate of the masses” acknowledges its influence on beliefs and behavior ([McKinnon 2005](#)).

However, disagreement is two-fold, and both are methodological. The first one is about how and in what way religious/cultural elements can (or should) be incorporated into the research of IR and politics. The second one is about which ways religious/cultural elements can influence politics and IR, and how they can be measured and analyzed in an academic context. [Sandal and James \(2011, p. 6\)](#) argue that “religious phenomena should be investigated as an independent (as a cause), intervening (as a link between the cause and the resulting observation) and dependent variables (as the ‘product’ of non-religious causes)”. [Barnett \(2010\)](#) says that international relations scholars “might examine how religious discourse helps to give meaning and significance to the world around them” because “the meanings that actors lend to their activities derive not from private beliefs but rather from society or culture”. He further suggests that in studying religion in international relations, scholars should not “essentialize” any religion; should be “beware of binaries”, such as interests/religious values, rational/religious, and power/values because they undervalue the significance of religion both in a causal and phenomenological sense. Lastly, he argues, scholars should “avoid [of] Variable-centrism”, although a variable-centered world might omit several important features of many good explanations.

[Fox and Sandler \(2004, p. 58\)](#) suggest that there are two potential ways in which religious belief systems can influence international politics. The first is that these belief systems may “influence the outlook and behavior of policymakers”. Weber describes the process by which this happens through a concept called psychological premiums. According to Weber, religion places psychological premiums on actions and behaviors that serve as filters for evaluating how one should act, think and operate ([Kalberg 1990](#)). [Wentz \(1987\)](#) argues that these belief systems are very much essential to our thought process that we are likely to ignore any information that challenges them, and even defend our belief systems from outside challenges at all costs. [Bagge Laustsen and Waever \(2000, p. 719\)](#) similarly suggest that they end up in particularly extreme and intractable responses because “religion deals with the constitution of being as such. Hence, one cannot be pragmatic on concerns challenging this being”. Furthermore, [Carment and James \(1998, p. 68\)](#) note that such threats to basic values may cause even ethnic conflicts. This direct influence of religion and culture might show its impact on foreign policy and decision-making unwittingly and even unconsciously. Because of this, most of the time, it may be difficult for researchers to detect the role of such elements in politics; unless it is stated openly or has resulted in violence or conflict.

The second potential way that religious belief can influence international politics, according to [Fox and Sandler \(2004, p. 59\)](#) is “the constraints placed on policymakers by

widely held beliefs within the population they represent". It is not necessarily difficult, but rather unsustainable in the long term, that policymakers would "make a decision that runs directly counter to some belief, moral, or value that is widely and deeply held by their constituents". This slightly indirect social pressure influence can be seen especially in the case of Arab-Islamic countries' policies toward the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

3. How Religion Shape Foreign Policy: An Explanatory Model

Considering all these literature and achievements in terms of analyzing the role of religion and culture in IR, I agree with Bellin (2008, pp. 339, 341–42 *emphasis in original*) when she argues that in international affairs religion "has been *undertheorized*" and now it is time to move beyond the commonsense argument that religion and culture matter in international politics and explore the very question of "*when* does religion matter and *how*"? This is of course a foundational and deep-seated question as well as requires a multidisciplinary approach—certainly a difficult task that is beyond the reach of one person alone. However, this study considers the cultural and religious elements as the *basis* of the behavior and *thinking* in social and private actions. Because by covering the realm of the culture of foreign policy, ideas, religious values, and orientation inform policy decisions from time to time, if not most of the time (Ramakrishnan 2010). Indeed, as Gramsci has shown, culture (and religion) cannot be separated from political and economic power, as it is a constitutive realm of such power (quoted in Halliday 2000, p. 67). Taking this into account, I put forward *an explanatory model* to analyze the role of culture and religion in the current foreign policy inclinations of Turkey, India, and South Africa and their role perceptions in the international system.

Religious and cultural experiences are formative both in terms of shaping the boundaries of thinking and that of action. They create a *Strategic Mentality* that defines the behaviors, thoughts, and actions thus it is impossible to escape from them. The SM is different from the strategic culture defined in the literature. For example, Booth (1990, pp. 121–28) defines strategic culture as a "nation's traditions, values, attitudes, patterns of behavior, habits, customs, achievement and particular ways of adapting to the environment and solving problems concerning the threat or use of force". By *Strategic Mentality* I mean the way of using and utilizing those cultural elements in foreign policy formulations, not the elements per se. In that sense, SM refers to a deeper element that controls what we see on the surface and re-interpret them for the needs of the time. Most of the time, this deep-seated SM, wittingly or unwittingly, comes to the surface even at times during which those states do not want, and haunt their thinking and actions. Changing SM is not easy in a short time; it needs at least several consecutive generations to modify it. Only by modifications that are done from time to time, it experiences a general and profound change. Similarly, Jones states that cultures—defined as patterns of beliefs, habits, values, ideals, and preferences shared by groups of people—are slow to change but it is still fluid and responsive to economic, political and social forces. It affects economics and politics but then is transformed itself in return (Jones 2006).

Modernization theory, and its corollary the secularization theory, argued that religion would diminish in "importance" both for the individual and the community as economic and political development spread to the broad mass of people. In other words, as the ideas and institutions of modernity became more pronounced, the centrality of religion in human affairs would diminish, and ultimately, disappear. Indeed, secularization theory was the only theory to attain truly paradigmatic status among social scientists and was "intrinsically interwoven with all the theories of the modern world and with the self-understanding of modernity" (Casanova 1994, p. 18). Secularization theory has been very successful in explaining the society but has never been so in the case of explaining the individual. What has appeared in the society was the changing form of religion, maybe the relative decline of its influence in the society, or just sidelining it, but not a complete disappearance. Secularization theory led us to misinterpret this development and what we see today is a clear fallacy of this. The

individual has never become secular. If individuals make decisions, how can we talk about complete secularization?³

Similarly, the conceptualization of religion (and culture) as some form of privately held belief that should be kept in private life has been highly problematic and even “faulty”, even though this type of interpretation has become very common both in literature and the way many politicians tend to see in society (Kratochwil 2005, p. 115). Partly because of this, some tend to call religion a “nuanced variable” in IR and intend to integrate it into IR studies as such (Sandal and James 2011, p. 13). However, once we define it as a “nuanced variable”, we not only underestimate its importance but also do not see the necessity of integrating it into IR theories as a grand issue. As Shakman Hurd (2008, p. 137) argues, religion and politics are not fully and finally differentiable, in Turkey, India, South Africa, or elsewhere. This changes how we approach religion in both theory and practice of international relations.

Secularism was a top-down approach, both in theory-building and implementation in many societies (Ozkan 2015). By seeing the relative decrease in the role of religion at the “societal” level and analyzing this trend in “structural” ways, such as church attendance, it was assumed that individuals will also be secular automatically. However, reality did not turn out as many suggested. My approach here is a bottom-up one that tries to understand the “person” and “individual” first to explain the broader developments in the society that drives state policy eventually. Nevertheless, I do not argue that it explains all developments. However, as Sandal and James (2011, p. 15) put it succinctly, I take religion “as a mental framework, and usually coupled with political theologies, [it] has a determinative effect on what is acceptable and what is not in human interaction, which has been the basis of commerce and politics”.

Students of social science, especially politics and IR, need to consider religion and culture as major study basically for two reasons. First, the commonplace argument that the current political resurgence of religion is a result of some development of economic and social crisis is no longer sustainable. Only taking the case of the Iranian revolution in 1979 is sufficient to argue the contrary as none of the traditional social science theories explained why it took place. The Iranian revolution and subsequent developments were not only the result of social discontent but mainly the growth of the *Shia* discourse as the dominant ideology of the opposition in Iran (Hibbard 2010).

Second, related to the first one, religious resurgence is promoted, supported, and borne out by the rich and well-positioned people in society. Although one cannot claim that it is an elitist process, it is represented by a well-educated and economically well-being group. For example, some of the richest people both in India and Indian diasporas have contributed highly to the Hindu revival and its organization. Similarly, the Gush Emunim in Israel recruits their followers from privileged youth who live a comfortable life, not from the poor and lower-income masses. These facts require a new interpretation of the relations between religion and social life (politics, IR, and even trade). What we see today in that religious revivalism cannot be attributed only to the failure of secularism and secularist policies; rather day-by-day insists on the persistence of cultural elements in shaping our worldview and *Weltanschauung*. It also begs for a new formulation of the way we look at life, see things and act on. As Kratochwil (2005, p. 135) rightly argues, relegating religion to the private domain and treating actors acting out of religious and cultural motives do “not only overlook interesting puzzles but fail to suggest strategies for coping with burning policy problems”.

Strategic Mentality, as defined in this study mostly by religious and cultural elements, may serve as a constraint and as an opportunity for explaining grand strategies of rising states. Because they are not just a historical past; rather they are perceptions, interpretations, and consciences that define the landscape of thinking in foreign policy mentality. Dominant historical discourse mostly shapes how we think, say, act and conceive things, even imagining them. Precisely for that reason, Tickner argues that some basic futures such as culture make looking at IR from a non-Western context fundamentally different

(Tickner 2003, p. 302). In the field of International Relations, a similar argument is made by Inayatullah and Blaney (1996, p. 82): “each culture brings to the interactions (changeable) images of itself and others that are prefigured by myths, texts, and traditions. The study of international relations requires comparative and historical analysis of how cultures conceptualize others”. Thus, again, the question is not “whether political culture matters in international relations but how it matters” (Shakman Hurd 2008, p. 82 *emphasis in original*).

Distinct historical experiences and religious-cultural embeddedness in a state may lead to varying intellectual and political positions on the world that surround it and allows for a more comprehensive and distinct understanding of an issue. The *extreme (or somewhat exaggerated)* preoccupation of Indian politicians and intellectuals about Pakistan cannot be explained without any reference to such embedded elements in the worldview of the Indian elite; nor the activism of Turkey in the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and the Balkans, or the struggle of South Africa to be the leader of Africa.

This study contends that *persisting historical religious/cultural elements*, such as religion and the experience of colonialism, produce a *Strategic Mentality* or set of self-perceptual understanding that influence the broader approach to foreign policy. Religious/cultural heritage coupled with historical legacy shapes the horizons, worldviews, or *Weltanschauung* of the people and states. This usually indirectly shows itself, mostly unspoken and even sometimes unwillingly. The nature of religious-cultural elements is the key factor here in this process. To understand truly the role of culture and religion in shaping the *Weltanschauung*, grasping the *meaning* of those elements for the believers and followers is a must. Only after *understanding* this meaning, one can proceed towards an *explanation* (Bellin 2008, p. 343).

4. Religion in Foreign Policy: Regional, Continental and Imperial

For a better understanding, religious-cultural mentality may be classified into three broader categories: imperial, regional, and continental. Classification of religious-cultural mentality as imperial, regional, and continental is not denying *agency* to them. Contrary, it aims at locating them in a more meaningful and explanatory context to analyze their “agency” in regional and global politics. There can be at least three categorizations of religious-cultural experiences based on historical interaction of society with the outside world and religious creed that is dominant in the society under question: local religions, regional religions, and imperial religions. Local religions are unique to tribal or cultural groups living apart from modern societies. They are not taught through texts, but through storytelling, art, songs, and rituals and considered as “lived experience” (Driessen 2009, p. 282). They are usually “religion as practiced” rather than “religion as prescribed” (Driessen 2009, p. 283). The best description can be found in Christian’s work: “[t]heir religious customs may be similar or different, they may start with an inspiration or arrive by diffusion, but by definition, they all have one thing in common: they are tied to a specific place and historical constituency” (Christian 1981, p. 178). Furthermore, many local religions honor their ancestors as well as gods or nature spirits. They are usually restricted in a certain area and mostly their followers live in that area. They often tend to have a narrowly defined local mentality and worldview.

Regional religions are usually strong attachments to the popular beliefs of the regional environment in which they were born and generally, neither do they have an openly proselytizing mission in its basic teachings nor encourage their followers strongly to do so. Most of the followers are based in a certain region or several states clustered in a region⁴. Imperial religion refers to the universality of religion, not to the exploitation of economic resources. Imperial religions are highly engaged in proselytizing activities, send missionaries all over the world, and usually have a much “broader”, not necessarily better though, understanding of the world.

Indeed, societies with different religious-cultural backgrounds develop a different understanding of the world that, by and large, shape the way they think, imagine and formulate policies. This classification of religious-cultural aspect, in no way, has a normative

judgment or claim that one is better than others; rather it aims to contextualize the *agency* of each cultural-historical experience mostly drawn from religious-cultural experiences.

Based on this classification, it is possible to argue that Islam and Christianity have an imperial outlook (Akhtar 2011)⁵, while Hinduism and Buddhism have regional worldviews. In the context of Africa, there is another category as the product of historical experience in Africa: Afro-Christianity. Afro-Christianity is much bigger than a regional religion but also falls short of being an imperial one. This study classifies Afro-Christianity as a religious-cultural experience that provides, creates, and leads to a *continental outlook*. My argument is that those states and people who have different religious-cultural experiences have a different horizon about self-perception, regional politics, and international relations. They usually tend to have different priorities, approaches, fears, and national role conceptions that determine and delineate their *Weltanschauung*.

To contextualize better the influence of religious elements, Hinduism, Islam, and Afro-Christianity, require a definition beyond considering them *only* a religion. In that sense, Islam and Christianity arguably are *imperial* religions that historically have urged their followers to involve proselytizing activities all over the world. Hinduism, however, has always been a *regional* religion that has only spread in South Asia mostly with the trade relations and immigrations, not directly by the activities of proselytism. Even today, most proselytizing activities of Hinduism are concentrated where Indians live in Africa, Europe, and North America as part of strengthening cultural and religious ties, rather than converting non-Hindus to Hinduism. One can argue that despite India's growing economic power in the international arena, India could not be considered more than having a *regional vision* due to its religiously shaped political vision, which dominates the way India sees and understands the world today. Unless a change in political vision in near future, it is very difficult to imagine India in the future as what we consider today as a global power.

The legacy of Islam in Turkey has been shaped by two elements: Ottoman legacy and Islam. The Ottoman legacy gives Turks a historical psyche that is once they were ruler of the world and to gain a similar status is not at least *impossible* in future, creating high self-confidence. The very nature of Islam in Turkey as an *imperial* religion and not being interpreted-defined in a colonial historical context is still shaping the political and geopolitical vision (Kaya and Mercan 2016; Anaz 2013). Perhaps because of this, what we see today is a highly self-confident and activist Turkey in regional and global politics with a very limited economic and political power—a seemingly contradictory endeavor (Ozkan and Akgun 2010; Ozkan 2011, 2012). Considering this without debating the material sources, Turkey has global *Weltanschauung*, thus could be seen as a *global player* in terms of political vision and its ambitions, not in practical power balance. The imperial status of Christianity as a cultural and religious element was mentioned above however, in the context of South Africa due to historical developments both in theology and interpretations, one can speak of Afro-Christianity as a defining element in African *Weltanschauung*. Afro-Christianity is an underlying element in South African foreign policy *Weltanschauung* and thus South Africa can be defined as a *continental power* from a political vision perspective.

It is also worth noting here that historical experiences and colonialism are other elements to understand how a state's worldview at play in practice. Historical experience deeply affects states and societies the way they think and act in terms of self-confidence, independent thinking, and leadership. Indeed, whether having a historical legacy of colonization (read as a breakthrough historical experience) has the utmost importance in realizing the horizons and *Weltanschauung* that have been shaped by religious-cultural elements. Historical experience can be positive or negative. It can be positive if a society has played an important role in history, such as having a powerful state and left its imprint in history. This might boost its self-confidence, making citizens believe that as once they were the leader in history, they can be so again in the future if they work and utilize opportunities correctly. It usually shows its negative influence through the imprint of colonialism and colonial legacy which usually created a *weak self* or *self-negation* (Biko 1978).

Colonialism as a negative historical experience may develop a sense of inferiority complex and weak self over time. This has become a defining psychological, but unacknowledged, element of the way these countries see the world. The *weak-self* shows itself in foreign policy by a request to be acknowledged, praised, and appreciated by others. This psychologically satisfactory aim may prevent, block, and even misguide foreign policy decisions. To explain this, Miller (2009) offers a model called Post-Imperial Ideology, which refers to a type of strategic ideology in states. She defines this ideology as “the national goals that emerged in the erstwhile colonized countries after the decline of the transformative historical event of imperialism and colonialism. Additionally, it consists of three national goals—the dominant goal is the victimization syndrome or the desire to be internationally acknowledged and empathized with as a victim. The dominant goal of the victimization syndrome drives the two subordinate goals of territorial sovereignty or the desire to maintain traditional boundaries and recover lost territory believed to have been tampered with by colonialism, and status or the desire to gain prestige and lost glory in international society” (Miller 2007, p. 16). By looking at cases, one can argue that the basic imprint of colonialism, the *weak-self*, is persistent in the foreign policy *Weltanschauung* of India and South Africa. For example, India, despite its immense economic influence and power both at regional and global levels, is very restrained at the regional level in terms of political vision.⁶

5. Religion and Foreign Policy in India, Turkey, and South Africa

There are three dimensions of statecraft that define a state’s foreign policy *Weltanschauung* in international relations: ideas and political vision, political capacity, and institutional state capacity. Legro (2005, p. 3, *emphasis is mine*) rightly argues that “international relations are shaped not just by the power states have but the *ideas* the states hold about *how that power should be used*.” I argue that political visions are shaped by both historical legacy (colonialism, imperial background, etc.) and existing religious-cultural elements.

A religious-cultural element in foreign policy can be contextualized in two ways. First, religion or cultural elements may influence the foreign policy outcomes positively and negatively (Ozkan 2014). The negative influence here does not mean automatically to lead to conflict but prevents realizing dreams and aspirations in global politics. Religious and culturally shaped *Weltanschauung* influence how we act, how we see things, and most importantly how we think. In the case of India, Hinduism has a huge *negative* and limiting influence on today’s foreign policy formulations and Indian self-perception. Turkish case can be taken as a positive influence of religion as every Turkish foreign policy action may positively contribute to its other activities in different parts of the world.

Second, religion influences both secular and religious people, in societies, therefore one should not focus too much on religious movements because it obscures the deep influence of religious-cultural elements on society. When religion is turned into an ideology, it becomes secularized and turns to be just another secular ideology like others. Therefore, one should not see religious movements as the *only* representatives of historically existing religious-cultural elements. What they do is to secularize the religion, not the articulation of religion per se. Provocatively, Devare (2009) argues that the father of Hinduism Savarkar has instrumentalized and secularized Hinduism, rather than presenting a truly and all-encompassed Hinduism. In that sense, treatment of the IR students of the secular and religious as opposing categories obscures the underlying elements that shape our worldviews more than explaining the role of religion in contemporary global politics.⁷ Underlying this point, some even claimed that “international relations is a religion, because it is a system of thought (...) what we have in academic IR is, thus, a theology that works to generalize and systematize this religious image into a disciplinary form” (Luoma-Aho 2009, p. 293).

Turkey, India, and South Africa are regarded as part of the non-Western world. Although each of them comes from a different region, their influence on global politics seems more visible. In their respective regional contexts, their roles are indispensable. Each of

them has a different historical legacy, identity, and possibly different expectations from a regional and global order which is shaped, defined, and articulated by their *Weltanschauung*. For example, among them, Turkey has never been colonized historically and is part of the Islamic world at least at the societal level. India was colonized for a long time by Britain and has a deeply rooted Hinduism in its culture and belonging. South Africa was also part of the British colony and Christianity is widespread, however, religiously it underwent a deep transformation with the mix of local religions and cults throughout the historical development. Therefore, belief of many may be called as Afro-Christianity. I think that whether historical legacy, being colonized or not, has any influence on their *Weltanschauung* can be explained in a comparative study through Indian and South African cases. However, whether having a legacy of never-been-colonized makes any change in the *Weltanschauung* would be seen in the Turkish case. In this respect, the Turkish case can be utilized as a control variable.

Historical legacy and civilizational belonging are tightly connected; therefore, the cultural elements, religious understanding, and even the area where they are located can make a difference in their regional and global order perceptions. While its long-aimed membership to the European Union is desired by its leaders and people as part of its Western vocations (Anaz and Ozkan 2016); Turkey has been (and is seen) as part of Islamic civilization. India, though was under the occupation of several powers at different stages, has been able to keep its deep-seated cultural belonging to Hinduism. Colonizers come and go, but Hindu culture experienced little change at least in terms of its foundations. For South Africa, the situation seems a bit different. Both colonizers and colonized ones were Christians with the only difference of color that had a huge influence on South African history and society. Undoubtedly, it has Western civilizational belonging along with its indigenous cultures.

Secularism is an ideology validated by the experiences and achievements of the West. The general assumption that it is an anti-religious or a non-religious ideology has neither a validated experience nor possibility in the non-Western world. If one tends to define secularism as the separation of religion from politics, it would be much less so in the cases of Turkey, South Africa, and India. Neither India's indigenous religious traditions, nor Islam, nor the traditions of Afro-Christianity recognize the sacred-secular dichotomy in the way Western Christianity does so (Madan 1987).

Most IR theories about Turkey, India, and South Africa (along with China, Russia, and Brazil) focus on these states' material capabilities- they are seen as rising powers capable of eventually challenging the status quo. Analyzing the rise of Turkey as "neo-Ottomanism" in the Middle East, India as a counterbalance to the rise of China in Asia, and South Africa as the "voice" of Africa in global politics are widespread. Yet, these countries often do not behave in ways predictable by mainstream IR theories.

One needs to contextualize the present tensions between the religious-cultural elements and secularization-modernization within the foreign policy mentality of Turkey, India, and South Africa by demonstrating the saliency of religious-cultural legacies in their mode of thinking, analyzing, interpreting, and analyzing developments in global politics. By taking a comparative approach in examining the religious-cultural experiences, this study intended to show the boundaries of self-identity and sphere of influence claims of Turkey, India, and South Africa as part of their religious-cultural heritage.

As Asad (2007, p. 97) rightly argues, it is a clear fact that "religion in Western Europe is a weak presence while remaining strong in the third world". Because of this, the role of religion in the Western paradigm becomes less influential while still has a strong defining element in the non-Western societies (Haynes 1994). Religion and culture were said to be the *cause* of differences for different perspectives, thoughts, and policy formulations. Thus, the idea of religion and culture has been the *effect* of a very particular and historically specific political and foreign policy discourse in India, Turkey, and South Africa.

One question can legitimately be asked here: whether Islam gives a global perspective not only to Turkey but also to all Muslim states? Why continental politics are so dominant

in South Africa compared to other African states which arguably have an Afro-Christianity religious-cultural background? Do Indian Muslims think the same way, regional rather than imperial, as their Hindu fellow countrymen? These questions are important and should be investigated further. As Tadjbakhsh (2009, p. 185) argues, “it may be appropriate to talk about Muslim theories of international relations than a single Muslim theory. Alternative vision(s) exist within the Islamic viewpoint that altogether has ‘other’ visions regarding relations between state and society, the individual and community, morality, justice, and emancipation”. This argument can also be extended to Africa and India. Answering the above-mentioned questions lies partly in understanding the self that is shaped by historical experiences, colonialism, and historical psychology. However, different understanding or appearance of globality in perception makes itself more visible in terms of its relations with the world, not with the mind.

6. Concluding Remarks

Political leaders, foreign policy strategies, and international systemic elements come and go but generally deep-seated cultural and historical elements do not change easily. This study argued that there is a need to theorize the role of deep-seated elements in foreign policy thinking, regional and world order perception, and self-confidence; all of which can be roughly called *Weltanschauung*, in Turkey, India, and South Africa. Using colonial or non-colonial historical legacy and religious-cultural identity as units of analysis, this study calls for a greater emphasis on the study of non-Western identity, ideology, and foreign policy within International Relations theory.

This study suggested that religious-cultural elements in Turkey, India, and South Africa produce a certain mentality that governs the current foreign policy inclinations. Contextualizing this is important to analyze the future foreign policy of the states and that of regional and global order. Through primary case studies of Turkey, India, and South Africa, this article demonstrated that rising states have different persisting historical and religious/cultural elements in their self-perceptions that have developed a particular type of approach to regional and global issues, which broadly influences the underpinnings of major foreign policy decisions. This study understands that *Strategic Mentality* is characterized by dominant and subordinate priorities and sensitivities that drive foreign policy decision making. However, the awareness of such a SM, with all its pros and cons, is either not explicit, or rejected explicitly in many cases; although, its influence may be indirect and, in most cases, unconscious and unwitting. I suggest that *Strategic Mentality* accounts for important foreign policy decisions taken by India, Turkey, and South Africa that do not conform to prominent theories in IR.

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Notes

- ¹ The Goldman Sachs Asset Management chairman formulated MIST in 2012 as a new foursome of fast-track countries: Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, and Turkey. N-11 refers to the MIST countries (Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, and Turkey), and includes Bangladesh, Egypt, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, Iran, and Vietnam. The CIVETS (Colombia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Egypt, Turkey, and South Africa) is an acronym for favored emerging markets coined in late 2009 by Robert Ward, Global Forecasting Director for the Economist Intelligence Unit. In addition to this, Citigroup last year introduced CARBS—a designation that stands for Canada, Australia, Russia, Brazil, and South Africa. As a group, these countries supply 25 percent to 50 percent of the world’s commodities. Analysts at BlackRock came up with fiscally strong CASSH economies, as in Canada, Australia, Singapore, Switzerland, and Hong Kong.
- ² For example, Kent (2007) argues that “current research in religion and international relations suffers from a lack of testable theories about causal relationship between religious actors and policy makers”.
- ³ Even there are some people such as Former Director of the Farmington Institute of Oxford, Brenda Watson (2011) calling that “in the name of same values which they profess, secularists should extend a more generous hand to religion as opposed to continuing the suspicions, condescending attitude inherited from the Enlightenment”.

- ⁴ Here, I use the term “regional religion” differently from the mainstream religious studies which usually has a strong reference to “region” rather than the concept, for example, see [Hunt and Hunt \(2000\)](#) and [Goen \(1983\)](#).
- ⁵ [Toft \(2007, p. 103\)](#) calls this as “transnational” inclination.
- ⁶ This point is best illustrated by the focus of the Indian elite on Pakistan. The main preoccupation of India has always been Pakistan at the strategic level. I am not arguing that Pakistan may not be a “problem” for India as of today; rather my point is that the focus on Pakistan too much is automatically limiting *the boundaries of the horizon* in Indian foreign policy thinking. For the examples of such type of thinking see [Mohan \(2003\)](#); [Nayar and Paul \(2003\)](#); for a critical review see [Ahrari \(2004\)](#).
- ⁷ [Hallward \(2008\)](#) makes a similar point in analyzing Middle Eastern politics.

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